

ORIENT AND OCCIDENT – COMMERCIAL TIES AND ECONOMIC INTERESTS

GREEK AND OTHER MERCHANTS FROM THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN THE TRADE OF SIBIU (1614–1623)*

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The paper deals with the presence of merchants from the Ottoman Empire, Greeks and of other ethnic backgrounds, in the trade of Sibiu. Based on the customs registers of the town from the years 1614–1623, the analysis reveals the number of merchants recorded, the number of transports and the values of these transports. Methodology and limitations of the sources are discussed in the first part of the article. Certain merchants can be found in other historical sources as well: a few short case studies discuss the available information and its relevance. The juridical status of Greeks in Transylvania is also examined. The appendix lists in full the data from the Sibiu customs accounts concerning recorded merchants.

Keywords: Sibiu; Greek merchants; foreign merchants; oriental trade; Transylvanian long-distance trade

The present study investigates the commercial activity of merchants engaged in the oriental trade with Sibiu (Hermannstadt, Nagyszeben) between 1614 and 1623. Even though the primary interest of my analysis focuses on the Greek merchants, the available sources do not enable always a clear-cut ethnic identification of individuals, especially when they have names exotic to the Transylvanian ear. Therefore, other traders arriving to Sibiu from the Ottoman Empire, i.e. Turks, Bulgarians, Armenians, Jews, or Serbs shall be included in the argument.

This article continues in many ways my previous research on the Sibiu customs accounts of the sixteenth century. I have extended the investigation of primary sources to the series of five extant customs accounts from the second decade of the seventeenth century, Fund Primăria și magistratul orașului Sibiu, Socoli vama (Town hall and magistrate of Sibiu. Customs accounts), Inventory 197:

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- no. 43: 29 May 1614 – 6 February 1615;
- no. 44: 3 August 1616 – 6 February 1617;
- no. 45: 16 March 1615 – 8 March 1616;
- no. 46: 2 April 1618 – 11 March 1619;
- no. 47: 18 March 1622 – 12 January 1623.

My arguments shall rely primarily but not exclusively on these historical sources. For this period, the customs accounts from Cluj (Klausenburg, Kolozsvár)¹ offer a good overlap with the Sibiu registers and the chance to uncover more information about trade and merchants. Diplomatic sources will also support the discussion about the presence of Greek and other foreign merchants in Transylvania during the seventeenth century.

Extracting the data correctly from these primary sources requires understanding the nature of the customs accounts and the customs system in early modern Transylvania. I shall therefore outline in brief the methodology and source criticism I have applied to this source material.

The 1614–1623 Sibiu customs registers are written in German and partly in Hungarian. They present the same particular features as the sixteenth century customs accounts from Sibiu, namely that they only record in detail merchants trading in oriental goods, coming into Transylvania through the customs point at Turnu Roșu (Rothenturm, Vöröstorony) from the south.² Also, the customs duties were paid by merchants in kind, so the actual volume of their stock can be reconstructed by multiplying the amounts paid as customs duties by 20. Zsolt Simon considers that in 1591 the foreign trade customs duties were lowered from 5% to 3% and that they were raised again to 4.5% in 1632.³ His conjecture highlights one major error in the current understanding of the Transylvanian customs system in the early modern period. The terminology of the contemporary legislation and common usage in Hungarian called the customs stations and customs duties the thirtieth (*harmincad*), i.e. 3.33%. It is known now that the thirtieth as a duty on the foreign trade had been increased by King Matthias Corvinus in 1467 from the thirtieth to the twentieth (5%). The Transylvanian Saxons were the only subjects in the entire kingdom who immediately adjusted the name of the customs duties to reflect their actual value, while in other parts of the

¹ Ferenc Pap, *Kolozsvári harmincadjegyzékek, 1599–1637* (Bucharest: Kriterion, 2000).

² I have explained more elaborately the nature of the Sibiu customs accounts in my book, *Sibiu-Hermannstadt: Oriental Trade in Sixteenth Century Transylvania* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2007), 34–41.

³ Zsolt Simon, “Tarifa tricesimală a Transilvaniei din 1634,” *Anuarul Institutului de Cercetări Socio-Umane “Gheorghe Șincai”* 11 (2008): 227–228.

realm the “thirtieth” remained the generic name for customs.⁴ For a historian accustomed to this peculiarity, such as György Granasztói, the fact that the customs duties of Košice (Kaschau, Kassa) were called thirtieth, but when collected they amounted to 5% did not seem to need further explanation.⁵ To complicate matters further, the “thirtieth” was also the name for the internal customs, where the duties were indeed 3.33%.

To sum up, there is a straightforward distinction between customs duties: regardless of the name, the border customs charged 5% as customs duties (in kind or *ad valorem*),⁶ while internal customs were 3.33%. This dichotomy still holds in the seventeenth century in practice, even though administration and legislation used the “thirtieth” indiscriminately to mean internal and foreign customs duties.⁷

For the Sibiu registers from 1614–1623, their cover titles use the word “die czwanzig” (the twentieth): *Register ueber die Mautt ader czwanzig im jar 1614*; *Czwanzig Register herrn Joannis Schulleri auffs Jar 1616*; or *Jm 1618 Jar folgt das Einkommen so jarlig auf dem zwanzigst Einkommen etc.* All calculations in this article are based on the assumption that the customs collected one item in 20 from merchants’ stock.

The list provided above shows that the numbering of the registers does not follow their chronology; in this analysis I shall naturally disregard their archival sequence and organize the data according to calendar years. The practice of registration and other, unknown to me, administrative reasons produced partial records for the years 1614 and 1616. All registers include the date when the merchants passed through the customs, the amount of goods paid in customs duties and the value of these goods in florins and denars of account.⁸

Mihail Dan and Samuel Goldenberg in their seminal study on the Balkan-Levantine merchants in Transylvania in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries⁹

⁴ Zsigmond Pál Pach, “Hogyan lett a harmincadvából huszad (1436–1457),” *Történelmi Szemle* 37, no. 3 (1995): 257–276; Mária Pakucs, “‘Și nici vămile nu mai sunt cum au fost, ci ați mărit și vămile ...’ Matia Corvin și reforma sa din 1467,” *Studii și materiale de istorie medie* 22 (2004): 217–220.

⁵ “La ville de Kassa dans le commerce hungaro-polonais au XVI^e siècle,” in *La Pologne et la Hongrie aux XVI^e–XVIII^e siècles: Actes du colloque polono-hongrois: Budapest 15–16 octobre 1976* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1978), 58.

⁶ See the examples in Pakucs-Willcocks, “Și nici vămile,” 219–220.

⁷ Zsolt Simon extrapolated a mandate aimed at certain customs points, precisely named in the document, to all the customs stations in Transylvania.

⁸ See for a more detailed methodological approach Pakucs-Willcocks, *Sibiu-Hermannstadt*, 45–50.

⁹ Mihail Dan and Samuel Goldenberg, “Le commerce balkano-levantin de la Transylvanie au cours de la seconde moitié du XVI^e siècle et au début du XVII^e siècle,” *Revue des études sud-est européennes* 5, nos. 1–2 (1967): 87–117.

have used information from these registers and their contribution to this topic shall be dutifully acknowledged where appropriate. My study shall however offer a more structured and detailed presentation of the data from the customs accounts.

Zsolt Trócsányi has discussed the most convincingly the status of Greek and other foreign merchants in the legislation of the Transylvanian principality. He distinguished between legislation which targeted Greeks together with other non-local traders and laws concerning Greeks only.¹⁰ The term “Greek” in Transylvanian sources is manifold: it was used generically to mean Balkan-Levantine merchant of Orthodox faith or merchant dealing in oriental (“Turkish”) products, but it also had a very precise ethnic meaning, opposed to other categories of alien merchants. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Diet (parliament) of Transylvania had produced a corpus of laws regulating the juridical status of the Greeks and other southern merchants. Imposing the staple and depositing places, limitations on their trading activity and movements, or repeated bans on exporting precious metals as coins were the usual concerns of the legislative body.¹¹ Trócsányi has revealed that the balance of powers within the principality, between the three political nations (Hungarian nobility, Szeklers, and Saxons) and the prince, had a direct impact on the attitude and subsequent policy-making toward the Greek and foreign merchants. While the consensus was that a free movement of traders brought in plenty of goods, and abundance in turn kept prices down, the Saxons opposed this fiercely in their efforts to maintain the staple right and depositing places which favored mostly them.¹²

Sibiu especially was very keen on keeping the Greeks at the depositing place: by virtue of their staple right, the local merchants could buy the much sought-after oriental products. Foreign merchants in theory could not enter the town at all, although concessions had been made to allow them to travel to the annual fairs after a mandatory stay in Șelimbăr (Schellenberg) of fourteen days.¹³ The situation changed drastically at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Finding himself in dire need of money, Prince Gabriel Báthori in Transylvania

¹⁰ Zsolt Trócsányi, “Gesetzgebung der fürstlichen Epoche Siebenbürgens und die Rechtsstellung der Balkangriechen in Siebenbürgen,” *Études balkaniques* 7, no. 1 (1971): 95.

¹¹ See also Lidia Demény, “Le régime des douanes et des commerçants grecs en Transylvanie au cours de la période de la principauté autonome (1541–1691),” *Makedonika* 15 (1975): 62–113.

¹² Trócsányi, “Gesetzgebung,” 97–99. For the staple right most recently, see my article, “Dreptul de etapă al Sibiului în secolele XIV–XVII: parcursul secular al unei instituții medievale,” in *Aut viam inveniam aut faciam: Volum omagial Ștefan Andreescu*, ed. Ovidiu Cristea, Gheorghe Lazăr, and Petronel Zahariuc (Iași: Editura Universității Alexandru Ioan Cuza, 2012), 136–153.

¹³ *Ibid.*

occupied Sibiu from December 1610 until 1613. Báthori had deviously taken hold of the town after asking to spend the winter in the city; with the arrival of the new prince, Gabriel Bethlen, the Saxons were asking for safeguards and guarantees that his winter sojourn in Sibiu would not end in occupation and distress. Gabriel Bethlen tried to make amends, reaching an agreement with the Saxon University¹⁴ and particularly with the authorities of Sibiu. The fact that the customs registers from 1614 to 1623 are the first ones from the seventeenth century to survive in the town archives is no coincidence at all. As a rule, customs registers were kept locally only when the town managed to lease the customs revenues and therefore collected the customs duties with its own employees. The year 1614 marks for Sibiu the return to a peaceful, though strained, relationship with the Transylvanian prince, after the city fathers and the inhabitants had returned from their exile.¹⁵

In the text of the agreement presented by the Saxon leaders to Bethlen the question of the Greeks was a priority. A few years previously, in 1609 and 1610, Prince Gabriel Báthori had decided to provide Greek merchants with unhindered access to the Transylvanian market,¹⁶ so the Saxons were interested to have the law reversed as soon as possible. Article 16 out of the total thirty of the *Modi et conditiones quibus hybernatio illustrissimi principis in civitate Cibiniensi conceditur a natione Saxonica* requests that:

Greeks and other traders, coming with their goods from Moldavia, Wallachia and other places, should be obliged to go first to the depositing places, the twentieth and to the customs stations without any delays; they should sell their wares there, and not go to fairs, under the penalty of confiscation of their goods, because this causes great damage to the Transylvanian merchants and to the country. This is evident also from the fact that the good money, ducats and gold, is paid for them, and they [the foreign merchants – MPW] take the good money into foreign countries, causing money shortage in Transylvania.¹⁷ [my translation from Hungarian]

Bethlen gracefully conceded to all the requests from the Saxons. It is clear, though not explicit, that the lease of the customs duties to Sibiu, another long-

¹⁴ Zsuzsanna Cziráki, “Brassó és az erdélyi szászok szerepe Bethlen Gábor fejedelem trónfoglalásában (1611–1613),” *Századok* 145, no. 4 (2011): 847–876.

¹⁵ A recent overview of the political events at Harald Roth, *Hermannstadt* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2007), 95–100; László Makkai and Zoltán Szász, eds., *Erdély története*, vol. 2 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986), 631–634.

¹⁶ Demény, “Régime des douanes,” 92–93; Trócsányi, “Gesetzgebung,” 100.

¹⁷ Demény, “Régime des douanes,” 93; Sándor Szilágyi, ed., *Monumenta comitialia regni Transylvaniae*, vol. 6 (Budapest: MTA Könyvkiadó Hivatala, 1880), 386.

established practice¹⁸ which had been brutally interrupted by Báthori's occupation, was part of the princely favors.

The fact that the Saxon towns on the borders of the principality with Wallachia and Moldavia, namely Sibiu, Braşov (Kronstadt, Brassó), and Bistriţa (Bistritz, Beszterce), had been granted the staple right in previous centuries did not prevent the Greeks and other foreign merchants from entering Transylvania and even settling down there. In November 1591 a decision of the Transylvanian diet in response to the propositions put forward by the prince made a clear distinction between Greek merchants who owned property in the principality and those who did not:

We have decided that the common Greeks, who do not have inheritance and houses in Your Excellency's realm [i.e. Transylvania], should not come further than the depositing places. Those who possess inheritances and houses in your realm should not go beyond the depositing place to buy goods, and should only deal in Turkish wares. Those acting against this should be caught, should have their goods seized and should leave the country altogether by Christmas.¹⁹ [my translation from Hungarian]

This text reveals that Greeks had settled in Transylvania, if not permanently, already by the sixteenth century. The Sibiu customs accounts from this period attest that many of the Greeks declared towns from Wallachia as places of origin/departure. Although direct historical evidence is scarce, research has shown that Greek and Hellenized Vlach merchants and shopkeepers had established themselves in Wallachia in the fifteenth century, after the fall of Constantinople.²⁰ Moldavia too was economically dominated by Greek merchants of various origins in the sixteenth century.²¹ The two Romanian principalities were departure territories for the Greeks into Transylvania.

¹⁸ Samuel Goldenberg, "Despre vama (vigesima) Sibiului în secolul XVI," *Acta Musei Napocensis* 2 (1965): 673–677.

¹⁹ Szilágyi, *Monumenta comitialia*, vol. 3 (Budapest: MTA Könyvkiadó Hivatala, 1877), 391–392; Trócsányi, "Gesetzgebung," 97.

²⁰ Gheorghe Lazăr, *Les marchands en Valachie, XVII^e–XVIII^e siècles* (Bucharest: Institutul Cultural Român, 2006), 106.

²¹ See the excellent studies by Cristian Nicolae Apetrei, "Greek Merchants in the Romanian Principalities in the 16th Century: The case of Nikolaos Domesticos Nevridis," *Istros* 17 (2011): 95–122; Idem, *Una famiglia di mercanti greci di Chio fra i Principati Romeni e la Penisola italiana alla fine del XVI secolo*, in *La storia di un ri-ricognoscimento: I rapporti tra l'Europa Centro-Orientale e la Penisola italiana dal Rinascimento all'Età dei Lumi*, ed. Cristian Luca and Gianluca Masi (Brăila-Udine: Editura Istros-Campanotto Editore, 2012), 149–167.

This introduction set forth the methodological questions and briefly described the political circumstances of Sibiu and its relations with the Transylvanian authorities. Returning to the second decade of the seventeenth century, Greeks wanting to trade in Sibiu, or better said with local merchants from Sibiu, had to pass through the customs station and stop at the depositing place. Although town statutes and even the dietal decisions presented above theoretically forbade them from entering Transylvania, individual merchants could probably negotiate their own terms for traveling further into the principality. The legal statute of foreign merchants and the advantages of local traders created a framework to minimize competition in distributing the oriental products on the local market. The access to luxury or affordable textiles, leather products, spices, dyes and tanning, cheap clothes and footwear was crucial to the Saxon merchants and guildsmen. The Greeks and other Balkan-Levantine merchants were the agents of bringing the important merchandise to the gates of the town, but this is as far as their services were required. However, long experience in the long-distance trade, connections and rolling capital provided these merchants with the right tools to breach the obstacles put up by the Saxons. As I have suggested above, despite momentary set-backs, there was a general favorable attitude to allowing Greeks and other merchants to distribute the oriental goods themselves in Transylvania, in the hope of keeping the prices low.²² The taste for the oriental products had been shaped by decades if not centuries of availability. We have no data regarding consumption of spices and other oriental goods in Transylvania, how much such products had become staples amongst the lower nobility and urban middle classes.²³ While it is certain that not all the products brought to Transylvania were meant for local distribution, but were carried further into Hungary and Poland, the concern of the guilds of Sibiu for access to oriental goods (as expressed in the town statutes from 1597²⁴ and 1631²⁵) shows that there was a certain level of demand in this respect.

²² See for instance decisions of the Diet from 1588 or 1594: Trócsányi, "Gesetzgebung," 96–97.

²³ Prof. Enikő Rűsz-Fogarasi from the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj is conducting such a comprehensive research project on consumption patterns and food in early modern Transylvania. For the Ottoman case for instance see Eminegöl Karababa, "Investigating Early Modern Ottoman Consumer Culture in the Light of Bursa Probate Inventories," *Economic History Review* 65, no. 1 (2012): 194–219.

²⁴ The 1597 "articles" issued by the Greater Council of Sibiu aimed to create rules for offering equal access to the town resources, of which first on the list were the "goods brought by the Greeks." Ernst Wagner, ed., *Quellen zur Geschichte der Siebenbürger Sachsen, 1191–1975* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1976), 148.

²⁵ Friedrich Schuler von Libloy, *Merkwürdige Municipal-Constitutionen der siebenbürger Szekler und Sachsen* (Sibiu: Th. Steinhaufen, 1862), 91.

In the next section of this article I shall present the data from the Sibiu customs accounts. The main emphasis shall be on merchants: their names and declared places of departure or origin, the number of transports and the estimated value of their commercial capital. The full lists of recorded merchants for each year are provided in the appendix.

For the period under discussion here, the information in the Sibiu customs registers is synthesized in Table 1, which shows the time span covered by registers, the number of recorded merchants and transports.

Table 1
Number of merchants and transports in the Sibiu customs accounts
(1614–1623)

Year	Number of merchants	Number of transports	Time span covered by customs accounts
1614 (8 months)	27	31	29 May – 29 December
1615 (12 months)	78	84	1 January – 30 December
1616 (12 months)	50	49	7 January – 29 December
1617 (2 months)	20	19	3 January – 6 February
1618 (9 months)	56	79	10 January – 31 December
1619 (3 months)	49	48	January
1622 (10 months)	96	115	28 March – 28 December
1623 (1 month)	17	17	January

The most salient information from this table is the great number of merchants recorded after 1614, with the figures doubled compared to the sixteenth century.²⁶

It is not within the scope of this article to discuss in greater detail the values of recorded oriental trade; therefore I shall only present briefly the main conclusions of the comparison between the 1614–1623 customs accounts and those of the sixteenth century. Despite the larger number of traders, incomes of the customs did not increase compared to the previous century. Thus, the greater number of merchants have brought smaller, even though more frequent consignments. More individuals became engaged in trading in oriental goods in Sibiu, while the structure of trade underwent changes as well. For instance, the trade in spice had diminished drastically and this was a strong contributing factor

²⁶ Pakucs-Willcocks, *Sibiu-Hermannstadt*, 127, table 24.

to the smaller overall trade values. Further, the florin of account continued its decline compared to the gold denomination,²⁷ while the recorded prices of goods in the customs accounts remained roughly unchanged since 1597. The exchange rate between the gold ducat (florin) and the florin of account during Gabriel Bethlen's reign was 1:2–2.40.²⁸

Taking all these factors into consideration, I have calculated in Table 2 the maximum, average and minimum value of transports. Original numbers and figures from the customs accounts have been devalued and expressed in gold florins.

Table 2
The average, maximum and minimum value of recorded transports in 1614–1622, in gold florins

Year	Average	Maximum	Minimum
1614	84	360	4
1615	166	1623	5
1616	179	558	3
1618	127	830	2
1619	142	501	5
1622	128	1288	1

Table 2 reveals great variations in volume and value of trade even in subsequent years. Jene of Hunedoara (Hunyad) was registered with the largest transport of goods on 10 August 1615, worth 1,623 gold florins. Coming from Wallachia, he carried large amounts of textiles for which he paid a total of 162 florins and 65 denars in customs duties.

Places of departure for merchants, most probably as declared by them, were either the trader's hometown or the town or region from where they arrived to the customs at Turnu Roşu. This becomes clear in the case of János Polgár (Bolgár), who appears in the Sibiu accounts as "vom Clausenburg," i.e. from Cluj, while in the Cluj customs accounts he is listed as bringing his goods from Nikopol.²⁹ I mentioned also the merchant Jene of Hunedoara who is recorded as coming from Wallachia. By nature of the registration, all merchants in the Sibiu customs

²⁷ Tibor-Antal Horváth, "A magyar aranyforint értékváltozása, 1490–1700," *Numizmatikai közlöny* 58–59 (1959–1960): 36–37.

²⁸ Lajos Húszár, *Bethlen Gábor pénzei* (Cluj: Minerva, 1945), 12, n. 25.

²⁹ Pap, *Kolozsvári harmincadjegyzékek, passim*.

accounts came from the way of Wallachia; therefore, for lack of more sources, I work with the assumption that the town recorded with the merchant's name was not always his place of departure but rather his hometown.

The complete lists with the towns of departure/origin can be found in the appendix. For purposes of brevity I shall mention here only the main findings of the data analysis concerning this aspect of merchant life. Towns with most merchants active in the Sibiu trade in 1614–1622 were Târgoviște (Wallachia), Nikopol and Tarnovo (including one merchant from Ermen, a village near the town) in Rumelia and Râmnic (Wallachia). This is a major shift from the previous century, when Wallachian towns featured in the customs accounts as preferred towns of origin/departure for the merchants involved in the oriental trade.³⁰ More remote trading centers such as the imperial capital Constantinople (Czelegrad) or Trebizond feature with merchants in the customs accounts.

Towns of origin/departure are crucial elements in the ethnic identification of merchants, albeit very tentative and approached with caution. In a few instances the ethnonyms are recorded with the name of the merchant, and in certain cases the names are distinctively attributable to a certain nation or ethnicity. Such is the case of Azlan, recorded as “von Kazalbascha,” arriving in Sibiu in June 1614. Here it is obvious that *Kazalbascha* is not a town of origin but a clear ethnic and religious denominator.³¹ *Siffter* (*Seffter*), *Murat*, and *Zoltan* most probably were Turkish, just as *Abraham*, *Scholomo* and *David Ofra* were most likely Jews. This exercise is useful for determining the diversity of merchants, Ottoman subjects, trading in South-Eastern and Central Europe although it should be applied with caution. While some names can be attributed with more certainty, merchants with Christian names are more difficult to distinguish only based on the customs accounts. The scribes of the registers were of German or Hungarian mother tongue and recorded these names idiosyncratically. Towns of departure/origin generally are applicable clues, but they can also add to the uncertainty. For the merchants with Christian names, I shall refer to their ethnicity only when it is explicit from the primary sources, such as in the case of Lazar the Armenian (*Armen*) from Cluj in 1615, Jacob the Armenian (*Armein*) from Târgoviște in 1614, or Pana the Jew (*Jud*) in 1618.

For the last section of this article I shall uncover the activity of some of the merchants, especially of those who are present in other historical sources as well. The first case study focuses on **János Polgár** (John the Burgher) from Cluj. He is

³⁰ Pakucs-Willcocks, *Sibiu-Hermannstadt*, 137.

³¹ Vesselin Bosakov, “Religious and Sociocultural Dimensions of the Kazalbashi Community in Bulgaria,” *Facta Universitatis* (University of Niš) 2, no. 6/2 (1999): 278–279. Dan and Goldenberg, “Commerce balkano-levantin,” 11, stated that Kazalbascha was Kyzylbaša (probably the town in Kazakhstan), but this seems a very unlikely identification.

first present in the Sibiu customs accounts in 1614: he was registered with two transports in this year and two in 1615, and with one transport in 1616 and another one in 1618. He can be traced in the Cluj customs accounts as well, where, under the name of **János Bolgár** (John the Bulgarian), he was recorded for the first time in August 1610.³² What is striking in his case is that in the Cluj registers he is mentioned bringing oriental products from Nikopol or “Turkey” (i.e. the Ottoman Empire) much more frequently than he appears recorded at Turnu Roșu. He traveled alone, or with partners: more often with a certain *Pál Török* (the Turk), who could be a *Paul* of Nikopol (1614) from the Sibiu customs accounts. Other associates of János Polgár are Mihály Horvát and András Tölcséres. On one occasion, in October 1614, the merchant complained that he and his associate had already paid customs duties on their goods in Transylvania. The Cluj customs officer had deliberated that half of the due customs duties were still due but he let this debt go that one time, admonishing the merchants to watch where they traveled and avoid such troubles.³³ János is last recorded at Cluj in 1619, but a certain **Bolgár Jánosné** (the wife of János Bolgár) is mentioned in 1630: her “servant” (*szolga*) had cleared through the customs two transports of Turkish wares.³⁴

Other merchants can be traced in both series of customs records. This is the case of **Lazar the Armenian**: recorded twice at Turnu Roșu in February and August 1615 and three times at Cluj, in January and October 1614 and in February 1615. For both his 1614 transports, Lazar passed through the Cluj customs on the same dates with János Polgár (Bolgár), and he too was allowed to pay only half of the customs duties on the same occasion as János. Even though the records do not mention any closer connection between them, it is clear that at least the two traders traveled together. Another merchant who is recorded individually but seems to have been part of the joint companionship was **Gerge of Alba Iulia** (*Giorgy Feieruari* in the Cluj customs accounts), who is recorded at Sibiu only in 1618, but appears in the Cluj registers on two occasions in October 1614 and February 1615, on the same dates with Lazar the Armenian.³⁵

Another case study of this article deals with, inasmuch as the sources allow, the merchants recorded as coming from Căpreni in Wallachia. Their story is revealed in a study by Violeta Barbu, where she analyzed the merchant network of

³² Pap, *Kolozsvári harmincadjegyzékek*, 148.

³³ *Ibid.*, 214: “ezutan penig ugy jarjanak hogy töbször affele kart ne vallyanak sem ök sem a varos” (From now on they should travel in such way to avoid unnecessary losses to them and to the town – my translation from Hungarian).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 386 and 393. The Cluj customs accounts remarkably bear witness to women’s involvement in trade.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

the Bulgarian *Arbanassi* who eventually settled in Transylvania.³⁶ Căpreni was a station on their migration from their home village near Chervena Voda (Ruse) in Rumelia to their final settlement in Transylvania. In 1624, a group of merchants from Hațeg wrote a testimonial to their grant by the Transylvanian governor Stephen Bethlen, according to which they were allowed to take reprisals against the *Arbanassi* who came to trade in Transylvania. In return, they pledged to make good on any merchants, either in the principality or Greeks trading in the Ottoman Empire, which would suffer any losses because of them.³⁷ In the Sibiu customs registers the merchants from Căpreni are recorded individually, but from the above memoir it is clear that they were associates, some related by family ties. In their own words, “we all owe faith to one another.” The trouble in 1623 arose between the *Arbanassi* who decided to return to their home village after their stay in Wallachia³⁸ and those who decided to go to Transylvania. People from both groups are named in the memoir and some of them can be traced in the Sibiu customs registers, although with a high margin of uncertainty. The appendix contains all information related to this group of people. Their 1624 memoir gives a unique insight into how these Balkan merchants organized their trade. They undertook long journeys to Constantinople to buy goods and then to Sibiu to sell them, traveling together: “in the previous year of 1623, we were bringing back our Turkish goods we bought with our own money in Constantinople (...)”³⁹ [my translation from Hungarian]. Violeta Barbu argued that these *Arbanassi* merchants were part of informal networks based on kinship, religion and association.⁴⁰ We should add that they were also relying on trust-based support and cooperation.⁴¹

The customs accounts naturally cannot provide such details about the merchants. Certain affiliations are mentioned: there are cases when merchants clear goods for other fellow traders, or agents (servants) were recorded in the customs registers. Such was the case for instance of the agent of Christopher Ungleich,

³⁶ Violeta Barbu, “Les Arbanassi: un réseau marchand aux frontières de l’Empire ottoman,” *Études balkaniques*, nos. 1–2 (2010): 206–222.

³⁷ Andrei Veress, *Documente privitoare la istoria Ardealului, Moldovei și Țării Românești*, vol. 9, *Acte și scrisori (1614–1636)* (Bucharest: Imprimeria Națională, 1937), 257–258.

³⁸ Invited there by Prince Michael the Brave in 1595: *ibid.*, 257.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Barbu, “Arbanassi,” 221.

⁴¹ See the same argument advanced for the Armenian merchant networks in Bengal India: Sushil Chaudhury, “Trading Networks in a Traditional Diaspora, 1600–1800” (paper presented at the Session 10, “Diaspora entrepreneurial networks, c. 1000–2000” of the XIIIth International Economic History Congress, Buenos Aires, 22–26 July 2002), http://gpmsdbaweb.com/memoir2/_supportdocs/armenians%20in%20Bengal.pdf (accessed 10 August 2012).

recorded in August 1616. Ungleich, most probably a Saxon merchant, had passed himself through the Turnu Roșu customs during the previous year.

Merchants traveling together are recorded as “associates”; the customs accounts do not record all the merchants in the group when they were more than two. Owing to the long distances travelled and the risk involved, it is natural that merchants wanted to share risks, split transactions costs, and possibly raise higher capitals. According to the evidence of the customs registers, such associations of merchants were a one-time-only affair, since each configuration of traders was registered only once.

As for the Greeks merchants, the 1614–1622 Sibiu customs registers offer little information. While the staple and depositing rights of the Saxon towns and that of Caransebeș (Karansebesch, Karánsebes) were aimed to prevent them from entering Transylvania, we know that in the second half of the seventeenth century significant communities of Greek merchants existed in smaller towns of the principality: Caransebeș, Sebeș (Mühlbach, Szászsebes), Hunedoara (Eisenmarkt, Vajdahunyad), and Orăștie (Broos, Szászváros).⁴² Although not settled with their families,⁴³ these Greeks probably spent a good part of the year in Transylvania. This shows, despite the scarce documentation, that the Greek trading diaspora had struck roots on Transylvanian soil long before authorities offered them official recognition and resident status. The first privilege granted to them as a “nation” came in 1636 from Prince George Rákóczi I, whereby he offered Greeks the right of administration of justice in internal affairs and the right to sell before and after annual fairs. In return, Greeks paid a common tax to the treasury.⁴⁴ However, other charters reveal that Greeks had established themselves in several towns in Transylvania and paid taxes as inhabitants of the realm before this privilege charter. Thus, on 22 October 1627, at the request of Greeks in Alba county, and the towns of Cluj, Târgu Mureș and Hunedoara, Prince Gabriel Bethlen decreed that other Greeks, Wallachians, Moldavians or Turks should only be allowed to sell merchandise brought into Transylvania by them.⁴⁵ Sibiu and the main commercial town of Transylvania, Brașov, remained closed to the Greeks for a while yet. Even

⁴² Dan and Goldenberg, “Commerce balkano-levantin,” 106.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 107, n. 81.

⁴⁴ The text was published by T. Bodogae, “Le privilège commercial accordé en 1636 par G. Rákócz aux marchands grecs de Sibiu,” *Revue roumaine d'histoire* 11, no. 4 (1972): 651–653, with minor typos. A critical edition of a copy of the charter, as recorded in the protocols of the Greek Company in Sibiu at Despoina-Eirini Tsourka-Papastathi, *I Elliniki emporiki kompania tou Sympiou Transylvanias 1636–1848* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1994), 375–378. A digitized version of the copy in the princely protocols, *Libri regii*, available on the DVD *Az erdélyi fejedelmek oklevelei: Erdélyi Királyi Könyvek* (Budapest: Arcanum, 2004).

⁴⁵ *Libri regii*, vol. 27, 162b–164, in *Erdélyi fejedelmek*, DVD.

though the Greek merchants, following the 1636 grant, had set up their own trading guild in Sibiu,⁴⁶ the city fathers of the Saxon towns did not acknowledge its legitimate existence for a long time. Further documentary evidence is needed to support my conjecture, but it is highly likely that Prince Gabriel Bethlen was lenient towards these Transylvanian Greeks, whom he named “faithful subjects of the Greek nation” in the 1627 charter mentioned above. The prince had also previously granted Jews the right to settle in Alba Iulia, the princely residence, in 1622. They were to bring plenty of goods from Constantinople,⁴⁷ which proves again the strong demand for oriental goods in Transylvania.

Apart from Prince Bethlen’s policy of encouraging foreign trade and plenitude of merchandise in the country, which is attributed generally to a mercantilist thinking, it is clear that the Balkan-Levantine merchants fulfilled an important role in the Transylvanian economy. The customs registers as historical sources cannot provide a full picture of the activity of foreign merchants in the principality. While the Greeks and other Balkan-Levantine merchants were expected and later required to deal only with oriental products, they eventually became involved in many other businesses.⁴⁸ Documents reveal credit relations between merchants or with the locals, or even on an international level.⁴⁹

The customs registers as historical sources have their crucial place for research in economic and social history. However, on their own they only give a partial glimpse into the actual reality of trade and commercial traffic. In the case of the Sibiu customs accounts, we only learn about certain merchants involved in a particular kind of trade. Greek and Balkan merchants were also very active in supplying Venice with raw materials from South-Eastern Europe and in importing here Italian and other European manufactured goods. In the seventeenth century already they had established small merchant houses⁵⁰ and long-lived trading associations that facilitated transport of goods, the management of business relations, payments, or procuring intelligence. Recent history writing has uncovered from the archives of Venice and towns on the Adriatic coast rich

⁴⁶ *Companiile grecești din Transilvania și comerțul european în anii 1636–1746* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1981), 23–29.

⁴⁷ Szilágyi, *Monumenta comitialia*, vol. 8 (Budapest: MTA Könyvkiadó Hivatala, 1882), 143–145.

⁴⁸ See Olga Cicanci, *Companiile grecești din Transilvania și comerțul european în anii 1636–1746* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1981), 121 ff.

⁴⁹ I have presented some case studies in “‘Als Kaufleute mit solchen Waren umzugehn ihrer profession ist.’ Negustori greci la Sibiu în 1694,” *Revista istorică* 23, nos. 1–2 (2012) (in press).

⁵⁰ Gheorghe Lazăr, “Pepano: o familie de negustori greci în Țara Românească. Considerații istorice și genealogice,” in *In honorem Paul Cernovodeanu*, ed. Violeta Barbu (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1998), 431–448.

material revealing the diversity of activities and versatility of the “Greek” merchants in the early modern period.⁵¹ Furthermore, a biased view on the predominance of land routes over water routes can emerge by relying exclusively on the Sibiu customs accounts, whereas there is plenty documentary evidence that the Danube and the Black Sea were busy and active trade routes in their own right.⁵² It is clear that Greeks and other Balkan merchants fulfilled a crucial role in the exchange of goods, currency and intelligence in South-Eastern Europe.

APPENDIX

The tables present the merchants in alphabetical order, this being probably a more helpful way of arranging the data from the customs accounts. Identification of towns is generally straightforward, but uncertainties exist as well. I suppose that the town “Rahouicza” refers to the historic town of Ryahovets (today Gorna Oryahovitsa in Bulgaria) near Tarnovo and to the village of Racovița near Sibiu. Also, relying on evidence from the case of the *Arbanassi* merchants, I assume that “Czernavoda” or “Czernowa” was in fact “Chervena Voda” near Ruse, Bulgaria.

⁵¹ Cristian Luca, *Țările române și Veneția în secolul al XVII-lea* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2007), 209–280; Idem, “The Rise of the Greek ‘Conquering Merchant’ in the Trade between the Eastern Mediterranean and the Romanian Principalities in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 19, no. 2 (2010): 311–334; Idem, “The Dynamics of Commercial Activity in the Ottoman Port of Durazzo during the Consulate of Zorzi (Giorgio) Cumano (1699–1702),” in *Small is Beautiful? Interlopers and Smaller Trading Nations in the Pre-industrial Period: Proceedings of the XVth World Economic History Congress in Utrecht (Netherlands) 2009*, *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* Suppl. 213, ed. Markus A. Denzel et al. (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2011), 177–200.

⁵² Anca Popescu, “Portul Constanța în comerțul Mării Negre în secolul al XVI-lea,” in *Izvoare istorice, artă, cultură și societate. În memoria lui Constantin Bălan*, ed. Constantin Rezachevici (Bucharest: Fundația Culturală Gheorghe Marin Speteanu, 2010), 199–209; Cristian Luca, “Greek-Levantine Merchants in the Black Sea Harbors in the Early Eighteenth Century: New Sources,” *Transylvanian Review* 19, no. 4 (2010): 112–120; Marco Moroni, “I rapporti commerciali delle regioni del Basso Danubio con le città dell’Adriatico tra cinque e seicento,” in Luca and Masi, *Storia di un ri-conoscimento*, 169–193.