



A LIST OF RANSOM FOR OTTOMAN CAPTIVES IMPRISONED IN CROATIAN CASTLES (1492)

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During the course of the fifteenth century, lists of ransoms must have been made by the hundred, few of them surviving long enough to be cherished as informative historical sources. Most of them disappeared and this is only partly attributable to the Ottoman occupation of the southern areas and to the ensuing demise of medieval cultural treasures including written records. The main reason for that was that such lists, together with private correspondence and financial accounts, were called to life by everyday needs. They were not legal certificates, and unlike the title deeds which were in theory valid for ever (*in perpetuum*), they only had relevance to the original owners, the new generation(s) not being interested in preserving them.

As far as I know, there is a single register at our disposal concerning prisoner trade in Hungarian history before 1526 (the year of the decisive battle with the Ottoman army at Mohács). The 1492 list presented here enumerates the ransoms paid for Ottoman prisoners held captive and capable of redeeming themselves in three fortresses along the river Una: Bihács, Ripács and Szokol.¹ The lucky circumstances of its survival can be easily reconstructed. Namely, the *registrum* got into the Archives of the Hungarian Chamber as part of the Nádasdy family's documents, from where it was incorporated in the collection of medieval Hungarian sources together with the rest of the pre-1526 material at the end of the

¹At that time the three strongholds belonged to the defensive line of fortresses protecting the southern frontier of medieval Hungary. The original of the *registrum* is found in MOL DL under No. 26055. Published in *Alsó-szlavóniai okmánytár. (Dubicza, Orbász és Szana vármegyék) 1244–1710* [Southern Slavonian Documents. Counties of Dubicza, Orbász, and Szana, 1244–1710]. Ed. by Lajos Thallóczy – Sándor Horváth. Budapest, 1912, 342–344. The register is mentioned by András Kubinyi, "Belpolitikai változások 1490–1516 [Changes in Domestic Politics, 1490–1516]," in Pál Engel – Gyula Kristó – András Kubinyi, *Magyarország története 1301–1526* [A History of Hungary 1301–1526]. Budapest, 1998, 348.

last century, when the Diplomatic Archives was formed.² Before reaching its present location, however, it travelled through three family archives. It first moved when László Egervári (*banus* of Dalmatia–Croatia–Slavonia in 1476–1482 and 1489–1493)³ died and his documents, together with his estates, went to György Kanizsai, the second husband of his widow Klára Rozgonyi in 1496. As the family died out on the spear side, it was inherited by Tamás Nádasdy when he received the hands and immense fortune of Orsolya Kanizsai.⁴

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The register is a sheet folded longitudinally and written up densely on all four sides. Its experienced scribe put it down in Bihács about the names and ransoms of 21 Ottoman prisoners. The captives seem to have been carefully sorted out; 7 were kept in each castle: Bihács, Ripács, and Szokol. The date of compiling the list is certainly identical with the date of their liberation (May 10, 1492) as the heading states they are persons who have redeemed themselves. The list does not include the place and date of their capture, but in two-thirds of the cases it notes the original abode of the prisoners. Let us start with the latter.

Places of origin of the prisoners

In fourteen cases are names of settlements entered in the list, most probably indicating their residence. Conspicuously enough, these places are in a relatively small area in today's northern Greece, within 100 km of the mouth of the river Vardar:

²Iván Borsa, "A Magyar Országos Levéltár Mohács előtti gyűjteményei 1882–1982 [The Pre-Mohács Collections of the National Archives of Hungary 1882–1982]," *Levéltári Közlemények* 53 (1982) 4.

³About Egervári's tenure as *banus*: on October 15, 1476 he was already (DL 45666) and on August 21, 1482 he was still (DL 107054) in office, and on November 21, 1489 (DL 25401) he was again and on July 8, 1493 (DL 106867) he was still there.

⁴On the connections between the Egervári, Kanizsai, and Nádasdy families, see Ede Reiszig, "A Kanizsaiak a XV. században [The Kanizsais in the Fifteenth Century]," *Tudul* 55 (1941) 22–31, 71–81 and Erik Fügedi, *A 15. századi magyar arisztokrácia mobilitása* [The Mobility of Fifteenth-Century Hungarian Aristocracy]. Budapest, 1970, 87.

- a. Yanissar = Yenişehir (today Larissa): 3 persons;
- b. Zarygewlly = Sarıgöl (today Ptolemais, 20–30 km west of Servia): 6 people;
- c. Karafferria = Karaferye (Veroia/Veria): 1 person;
- d. Vardar = Yenice-i Vardar (today's Giannitsa some 30 km north of the mouth of the Vardar): 4 people.

These settlements were all centres of Ottoman *kazas* where troops were most probably stationed as well. Since the settlements are close to the Aegean Sea and it cannot be conceived that in the late fifteenth century Hungarian troops raided so deep into the Empire, one is led to presume that the listed prisoners were more affluent members of an incursion led from the northern areas of today's Greece toward Croatia and Slavonia.

This assumption is corroborated, on the one hand, by the sizeable sums noted in the list, and on the other, by the high share of cash (*imprompto*) paid as ransom. Statistically speaking, at least 15 prisoners bailed themselves off for 100 golden florins, one for 120 florins and two for 190 – including fabrics calculated in florins – but the lowest amount was also as high as 80 florins. The price for freedom was indeed very high, especially when one knows that, for example, the estate of 17 Ottoman soldiers who died in the autumn following the occupation of Székesfehérvár in 1543 totalled 5,156 *akçe* or 103 golden florins.⁵ What one may carefully conclude from the Székesfehérvár data somewhat removed in time from the register is that the annual pay of the Ottoman soldiers, hardly in excess of the 24 florins of a Hungarian foot soldier or 36 florins of a *hussar*, could never produce the ransom listed in the register.⁶

⁵The estate of Ottoman soldiers in Székesfehérvár is cited by Klára Hegyi, *Török berendezkedés Magyarországon* [Ottoman Rule in Hungary]. (História könyvtár. Monográfiák, 7.) Budapest, 1995, 178–179.

⁶About the pay of Ottoman soldiers: Hegyi, *op. cit.*, 89, 179. At the same time, some of the most combat-worthy Hungarian troops, the mounted soldiers in the church *banderia*, were given an annual 55–60 florins, but they probably only received full pay at times of mobilisation. For instance, the 100-strong contingent of the Veszprém episcopacy cost the bishop 4,600 florins, 100 barrels of wine, and 1,000 shocks of corn a year: László Kredics – László Solymosi, *A veszprémi püspökség 1542. évi urbáriuma* [The 1542 *urbarium* of the Veszprém Episcopacy]. (Új Történelmi Tár) Budapest, 1993, 90.

Hence the greatest part of the redemption of 2,287 florins paid partly in cash and partly in the practically hoarded precious fabrics must have been derived from earlier successful marauding expeditions.⁷ The reader of the register cannot help wondering today whether the 21 prisoners mentioned without rank yet paying considerable ransom were exceptionally affluent or that wealth was typical of the *akincis* plundering the Hungarian border areas. Since the southern part of medieval Hungary, first of all the Szerémség (Syrmium), was among the richest areas of the kingdom, it would not be surprising to find the latter assumption verifiable.

Even the lowest ransoms in the list equalled the annual census of a major Hungarian market town. In 1520, Csepreg paid 72 florins in tax, the annual land rent of Bazin and Szentgyörgy in the significant vine-growing region in Pozsony county was 75 and 79 florins, respectively.⁸ In 1516–1520 the subsistence of the 20-strong personnel of the castle of Ónod cost no more than 100 florins and the ransom of Erdoğmuş or Eynehan (190 florins both) would have covered the six-month running costs of Sárvár, a significant grandee residence in Transdanubia.⁹

The mention of oriental fabrics and garments in the list is also noteworthy. What lends special importance to the entries is the scribe's thoughtfulness in giving the value of each piece in golden florins – be it a bolt of velvet interlaced with golden thread, a black cloak adorned with purple flowers, or a silk belt.

The process of the liberation of the captives can also be inferred from the list. They resorted to the well-established post-1526 practice of prisoner trade: a few of them went home to collect the ransom with the permission of the captors (and those remaining guaranteeing their return).¹⁰ At home they collected in cash and in expensive fabrics the

⁷The total of 2,342 at the end of the list must be a mistake, but for some "uncertain" entries the 2,287 florins computed by the present author must also be taken as approximate.

⁸Csepreg's total census: DL 26222; those of Bazin and Szentgyörgy: DL 32682.

⁹For the evidence on Ónod, see Béla Iványi, "A tiszaluczi vám bevételei és azok felhasználása 1516–1520-ig. (Bevezetésül a tiszaluczi rév- és vámjog történetébe) [The Income of the Tiszalucz Customs and its Use. (An Introduction to the History of the Customs and Tolls of Tiszalucz).]" *Magyar Gazdaságtörténelmi Szemle* 13 (1906) esp. 26–37. For Sárvár, see the accounts of 1520 in the first place: DL 37327.

¹⁰In detail, see Géza Pálffy's study in the present volume.

required amount for themselves and their fellow prisoners and returned with it. In this case each group of prisoners was allowed to send a “released” person, but we do not know the principle of selection. All that can be deduced is the fact that the persons to be sent home were not the wealthiest. Murad, an elderly Daud and another Murad proved worthy of their companions’ trust.

There is but a single name of the keepers of the prisoners mentioned in the list, a certain Petar Antolović (Petrus Antholowich) of Croatia. He appears to have been in service in the castle of Bihács, 4 of the 7 Ottoman prisoners in the fort enriched his fortune with over half a thousand florins. Who were the owners of the other captives? Most probably *banus* László Egervári. At that time, he was not only the commander of Bihács in his capacity as *banus* but had acquired the fortress sometime between the autumn of 1490 and August 20, 1491 for 12,000 golden florins in pledge.¹¹ Although on February 6, 1493 King Vladislav II made him exchange the castle for two former Rozgonyi estates, Vitány and Csókakö in Fejér county, at the time of the writing of the list he was one of the top dignitaries of the area and the owner of Bihács together with its town and belongings.¹² It is also striking that shortly after the compilation of the list, Egervári himself was at Bihács from where he sent instructions to the chapter of Zagreb.¹³ Why did he turn up in the stronghold along the Una? Upon whose instruction, and why, was the list compiled at all? Remembering that the register went to the archives of the Egervári family, then from that and the details it may be concluded that the *banus* visited Bihács to get his part of the redeeming money and had the list

¹¹According to the explanation in the royal deeds of pledge, László Egervári got the castles of Bihács and Kruppa to recompense him for two years’ arrears in his salary. The precise date of pledging is unknown but the king mentioned it in Várpalota on August 20, 1491 as Egervári’s possessions: DL 19746. For the 12,000 florins in pawn paid for Bihács: DL 19957 and DL 19818.

¹²He returned the two strongholds to Vladislav on February 6, 1493 the latest, and since he consented to a reduction by 3,000 from the pledged amount of 20,000, he received the forts Vitány and Csókakö for 17,000 florins. (Fógel’s remark that Bihács and Kruppa remained in Egervári’s possession is erroneous: József Fógel, *II. Ulászló udvartartása (1490–1516)* [The Household of Vladislav II]. Budapest, 1913, 14.)

¹³DL 33200. What confirms Egervári’s presence is the fact that as against a lot of documents written on behalf of him but signed and stamped by his deputies, the mandate in question was issued with his own seal.

attached to the rest of the local accounts by his local household steward put in the family *conservatorium*.¹⁴

As was noted above, the list does not give the place or date of capturing the prisoners. All one may risk to presume under such circumstances is that the list is perhaps the “side-product” of the Ottoman–Hungarian clash also noted by Antonio Bonfini in his recollection of László Egervári. The humanist historiographer praised the valiance of the baron who died in late 1495: “He was a glorious captain in Silesia and Luzica; later he testified to such gallantry and courage in Dalmatia, Illyricum, and Croatia that he placed a memorable blow on the Ottoman army, killing five thousand of their troops...”¹⁵

LIST OF TURKS REDEEMING THEMSELVES, OF THE AMOUNTS AND
VALUABLE GOODS I RECEIVED FOR THEM ON THE THURSDAY
FOLLOWING THE APPEARANCE OF THE ARCHANGEL MICHAEL IN 1492

First: Eynebeyi paid 100 florins in cash, he was here in Bihács.¹⁶

Also: Two Turks, namely Erdoğmuş and Eynehan, the prisoners of Petar Antolović here in Bihács, paid 290 florins in cash and three bolts of gilded velvet worth 90 florins

Also: Murad, who went to Turkey for the rest of Petar Antolović’s Turkish prisoners, gave three bolts of gilded velvet worth 90 florins.

Also: these three were entreating him¹⁷ [to dispense with] another bolt of velvet worth 30 florins.¹⁸

¹⁴As the handwriting of the list is completely different from the accounts of the castle of Egervár, it is certain that the scribe was not the book-keeper of the family residence. Cf. e.g. DL 26054.

¹⁵Antonius Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum decades...* IV. Ed. by József Fögel – Béla Iványi – László Juhász. Lipsiae, Budapest, 1941, 264 (5. 4. 173). Cf. Antonius Bonfini, *A magyar történelem tizedei* [Decades of Hungarian History]. Translated by Péter Kulcsár. Budapest, 1995, 996 (5.4.170).

¹⁶Bihács (Croatian Bihać): fortress and town along the Una, today in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

¹⁷I.e. with Petar Antolović.

¹⁸That is the possible meaning of the “item”. It is however unsettled who the three “above-said” persons are to whom the demonstrative pronoun (*isti*) refers. Preceding this

Also: Hüseyin, who dispensed boots¹⁹ and was here [in Bihács], gave 80 florins in cash.

Also: Mansur, who was here in Bihács, gave 93 florins in cash as well as a *zakrapach* and a silken belt commonly called *zkender*, worth [a total of ?] 7 florins,²⁰ and a pair of boots.

Those who were in Ripács²¹

First: Ali from Sarigöl gave 44 florins in cash and a bolt of gilded velvet worth 50 florins, and for the promised attire he gave a bolt of red velvet.

Also: Yusuf from Sarigöl gave 68 florins in cash and a bolt of gilded velvet worth 30 florins, as well as a rug worth 2 florins.

Also: Musa from Sarigöl gave 70 florins in cash and a bolt of gilded velvet worth 30 florins.

Also: another Ali, also from Sarigöl, gave 94 florins in cash and a Serbian *kamuka* worth 6 florins.

Also: Turgud from Sarigöl gave 80 florins in cash and a red velvet dress worth 15 florins and two rugs worth a total of 5 florins.

Also: Haydar from Sarigöl gave 77 florins in cash and a dress worth 20 florins, adorned with purple flowers on black background and a rug worth 2 florins.

Also: the old Daud, who went to Turkey on behalf of the rest of the prisoners in Ripács, gave 33 florins in cash and a bolt of gilded velvet, as well as three rugs worth a total of 7 florins.

entry, there are four prisoners listed by name, and peculiarly enough, at the bottom of page 2r an "excess" bolt of velvet given to Petar Antolović is also mentioned. Should the two remarks refer to one and the same case, then Ali from Vardar also contributed to the extra bolt of cloth, but in that case, the reference to the three persons is even vaguer.

¹⁹The clause *qui disponebat chismas* is possibly to be interpreted that Hüseyin, similarly to Mansur following him in the list, partly redeemed himself by giving boots.

²⁰*Zakrapach*: I could not identify this word which is probably of Slavic origin. *Zkender*: probably Iskender, meaning Alexander, which, however, cannot be connected to clothing in modern dictionaries.

²¹Ripács (Croatian Ripač): fortress along the Una, south-east of Bihács, in today's Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Those who were in Szokol²²

First: Alagöz from Yenişehir gave 87 florins in cash and a gilded *kamuka*, and a rug worth 13 florins.

Also: Mehmed from Vardar gave 100 florins in cash.

Also: Süleyman from Vardar gave 100 florins in cash.

Also: Ali from Vardar gave 31 florins in cash and a bolt of gilded velvet, a *zkender* worth 4 florins as well as 15 florins to the bolt [of velvet] the Turks of Petar Antolović gave and remained in debt.²³

Also: Osman from Yenişehir gave 86 florins in cash and a bolt of gilded red velvet worth 14 florins.

Also: Deli Musa from Yenişehir gave 50 florins in cash and two bolts of velvet worth a total of 40 florins, one of them adorned with white flowers, the other with black flowers in a red field, as well as a *zkender* worth 6 florins and two rugs totalling 4 florins.

Also: Murad from Vardar, who went to Turkey on behalf of the rest of the Turks in Szokol, gave 60 florins in cash and a bolt of gilded velvet worth 30 florins and a *zkender* worth 10 florins.

Also: Aramaday from Karaferye, who was Petar Antolović's prisoner here, in Bihács, gave 94 florins in cash and a bolt of gilded velvet worth 26 florins.

The total amount of cash in florins:	1,670 ²⁴
The value of goods in florins:	662 ²⁵

²²Szokol (Croatian Sokol): fortress along the Una, south of Bihács, in today's Bosnia-Herzegovina.

²³That is, he contributed 15 florins to the delivered cloth. The last part of the "item" is somewhat problematic (see note 18). The relative pronoun *qui* of *qui superflue erant* ought to be *que* correctly (for they owed the bolt [*petia*]).

²⁴Correctly: 1,637 florins.

²⁵In theory, the sum would be 650 florins, but on the one hand, the scribe did not note the price of all items taken over, and on the other, it is unsettled whether the 15 florins mentioned with Ali from Vardar is to be included in the value of the velvet noted with Murad in Bihács or not.