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**Géza Dávid - Pál Fodor, AFFAIRS OF STATE ARE SUPREME**

*The Orders of the Ottoman Imperial Council Pertaining to Hungary (1544-1545, 1552)*

*Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, 2005.*

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The scholars and local historians interested in the Ottoman era are fortunate since the publication of Géza Dávid, Head of the Turkish Department of ELTE University, and Pál Fodor, Head of the Early Modern Age Department of the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, can be regarded as the most significant sourcebook dealing with this period of the year. Moreover, as the authors mention in the preface, readers can take the most profound publication of the Ottoman documents into their hands after the standard works of Imre Karácson, József Thúry, Antal Velics, Lajos Fekete and Gyula Káldy-Nagy, Nenad Moačanin and Bruce W. McGowan. Thus, this book can take up the central position of the imaginary shelf of any historian managing this era. Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor did not want to do less than publishing the orders of the Ottoman Imperial Council pertaining to Hungary from 1544 to 1545 and 1552 with the strictest scholarly exactitude. Their aim was to reveal the sources both in Hungarian and Turkish languages in order to make them available for researchers, local historians and students alike. Furthermore, it is most joyful that the writers thought about historians from abroad when the annotations of the orders were supplied in English, too. Thus, the authors made them possible to be well up in this thick book.
The work is rightly divided into three parts. The almost 80-page-long introduction first initiates the readers into the history, the significance and the difficulties of dating and understanding the documents called *mühimme defters* in a well-understandable style for the amateurs as well. One can learn from this part that the most important government authority of the Ottoman Empire was the Imperial Council, the *divan* in the 16th century. All the significant or less important matters were discussed here. The decisions of the body were then not only put down and sent to the people concerned but copied in a shorter version, generally without the customary formulae, and stored in different volumes. Originally these were called the inventory of the imperial orders (*abkám-i mírí defeteri*) and were stored in the *divan*. Later historiography started to call them the inventory of the important matters. The value of the copied volumes is further increased by the fact that the sent orders were lost many times. However, their copies are at our disposal nowadays. We know less about the *defters* themselves because there are serious chronological uncertainties in connection with them and these are even more problematic since a great number of orders were lost or lie hidden. By all means, the research history of *mühimme defters* is not in the least closed. The addressee of these orders could be anybody: a ruler, a voivode, a *kadi*, a *sancakbeği* or a *beğlerbeği*. The leaders of the military administration in Hungary received much more imperial orders than those of the internal pacified territories (for instance in the Balkan), where the civil control was dominant. This fact also proves the uncertain borderland character of the area.

In the next part of the introduction the authors - mainly on the basis of the achievements of international scholars and their own research - summarize the main tendencies of the mechanism of making decisions in the empire. Pragmatic and conscious political elite take shape from the text, because in the background of the military decisions there were serious ideological, economic and geopolitical considerations every time. Anyway, one has to get rid of the traditional picture of *Erbfeind*, which was born for propagandistic aims, and understand and write the history of the Ottoman Empire in the framework of power politics and relations in close relationship with the European states and influencing one another. The sources of the book also prove that one might use the achievements of the electronic research of networks since a great power often works as a living organism whose understanding needs a lot of background knowledge. The best example for this is the 1552 campaign well-known from Hungarian history, whose valuation is impossible without taking the parallel confrontations on the borderlands of the empire into consideration.

The introduction is ended with the description of the sources and the publishing principles. It is very important that the Turkish transcriptions of the original order-registrations are also present in the volume. Thus the authors have done the international researchers of Ottoman history a great service because they can also use the book. Naturally, it was not possible to publish all the orders, and it would have been unnecessary as well, but all the texts containing any *Hungarica*-material have been fully published. It is also a pleasure that the authors have considered the historical Hungary during their compilation, therefore the orders regarding Transylvania, Temesköz, Slavonia and Croatia have been placed in the book, too. Moreover, a thorough appendix also belongs to the volume, thus it can be used in
university education as well. For instance, in one of the first footnotes the precise definition of the word *kadi* is found. The only complicating element is the form of references since, contrary to the Hungarian practice, once the title of the study is written in italics, even if it is part of a series, and at another time, when an article has been published in a journal, the title of the journal is written this way (for example in 154th and 155th footnotes). However, it has been mentioned because of my taking the duty of the reviewer seriously, and not as a mistake, but as a modest remark.

The Hungarian and Turkish versions of the Hungary-related sources make up the spine of the volume. In 1545 Suleyman I wanted to lead the campaign to Hungary personally again and the documents issued in these months allow the readers to inspect the preparations. The majority of the sources are about the supply of the mobilised army, which further shades one’s concept of the contemporary reserves conditions. It is obvious from the documents that Péter Petrovics, who controlled Temesköz, was looked on similarly as Kasim *pasha*, who obtained great fame in Baranya and whom we are familiar with because of Géza Dávid’s earlier research. Their only task was to execute the orders of Istanbul entirely. The majority of the imperial orders this year concerned the supply: they had to acquire as much barley and flour as possible and send them to the storehouses of Belgrád, Tolna Szekcső, Szekszárd and Mohács. One also has to emphasize the important role of the then saved Temesköz in the organisation of the reserves. Considerable Southern Slav immigration directed to this area and it served as a larder on the occasion of mobilisations. These sources also shed light, especially in connection with Sriem, on the well-informedness and awareness of the *Porta*. In almost all the cases they directed professional labour force for the reparation of ships and the fortification of castles from this area, which makes it understandable why the imperial supreme command had insisted on this region also in 1528. It served as the starting point of the later conquest. The geographical and geopolitical position, together with its wealth made Sriem key of the country in the discussed decades, but in this case it was significant for the conquerors. The maintenance of the illusion of the smooth change of powers was a question of vital importance for the *Porta*. It is obvious from the documents that the Ottomans took the Hungarian taxation customs into consideration when they introduced their new rules. Probably it was also the cause of the fact that immigrating *vlachs* had to pay their tax called *filori* exactly on Saint George’s day. Although the big campaign was called off because of unclarified reasons, it is obvious from the documents issued during the preparations that the civil and military administration had to act as a well-working ensemble on the occasion of mobilisations.

Abundant document survived in connection with the 1552 campaign that makes the authors possible to analyse this event thoroughly. Historiography has already revealed that originally the sultan wanted to lead his army to Hungary this year to prevent Transylvania from secession and to melt it into the Empire. This area had been invaded by the troops of Ferdinand I but had been regarded as an Ottoman territory in Istanbul since 1541. It is clear from the now published documents, which describe the events well, that finally it was not the ruler who led the campaign and the Ottomans did not manage to accomplish their original goal, either. Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor have found an appealing and reassuring
explanation for this. According to them the different understanding of the Habsburg-Ottoman peace-treaty of 1547 led to the modification of the aim of the campaign. In the sultan’s view he was entitled to the “decent gift” of 30000 forints for the areas firmly held by King Ferdinand. However, this part of the treaty was understood differently in Vienna. They thought they paid the tax also for the yielded territories of Bálint Török and Péter Perényi, who had been eliminated from political life in 1541 and 1542. Thus they believed that the Hungarian soldiers of the border fortresses of Eger and Szolnok rightfully imposed tax on the district regarded as the *liva* of Péter Perényi. The Ottoman supreme command wanted to prevent the further practice of this taxation and was also motivated by the planned occupation of the territories of Northern Hungary which were thought to be fabulously rich. Thus, one can say paradoxically that the escape of Transylvania was due to the remarkably initiative Ali *pasha* in 1552. The other reason for the modification of the Ottoman plans can be the fact that the Ottoman Empire simply overwon itself and, with the view of prestige considerations, it overestimated its own resources and possibilities. The empire wanted to hold on in every front, which was impossible for all the former sparkling and later flourishing great powers as well.

These realisations have to further stimulate the researchers to displace the events of Hungarian history from the national point of view and embed them in a wider context and in the international processes. The original goal of the 1552 campaign was the annexation of Transylvania in the scope of which Tartars would have invaded the territory from the East, the main army would have arrived across Temesköz and Mehmed *beg* of Bosnia should have marched to Esztergom with the soldiers of Bosnia, Požega, Buda and Srijem to prevent the sending of any help. The fourth army corps under the leadership of the *sancak beg* of Herzegovina should have broken through at Zagreb. However, the recapture of Szeged, and the news of the preparations of the armies in Croatia disarranged the plans in February 1552, and they had to be modified. According to the new ideas the troops of Bosnia should only have defended themselves on the spot and the armies of the *sancaks* of Požega, Klis and Herzegovina should have gone to Ali *pasha*. Nevertheless, since the Ottomans on the borderland of Slavonia were really afraid of a possible Christian breakthrough, Ulama achieved to transfer the armies of Klis and Herzegovina to Slavonia. These 4000 people received an order in the summer of 1552 to accomplish an overall attack, whose achievements were summarized in a letter of Mehmed in September 1552. “They occupied Verce (Virovitica) and then they also captured the castles of Grabovcsa (Grebgrend, Grdvac, today Veliki Gdovac), Violjar, Domankos (Domanjkuš), Roviste (Rojcsa Belovár in Körös county, Rovišće) Ivan (Ivanics, today Ivanč grad), Cserkvena (Crkvena), Bosnica (perhaps Velika Pisanica), Brascenicse (possibly Berstyanóc), Gudovac (today Gudovec), Szebovcse (Svobovec South of Bjelovár), Gujnicse (perhaps Kutinac grad South-East of Zadzsasna) Dubra (Dobra), Lonja (Úsztilönya) on the borderlands of Požega and Bosnia. Sometimes the defenders, sometimes the gazis set fire to them. On the borderland of Slavonia there is Zadzsasna (Csázma) close to the farthest Moslavina, near the River Csázma. There were often considerable armies in it. This castle is 5 miles from Zagreb, thus it is the key of the country. They marched there, shelled it for two days and the garrison surrendered on the third day. The castle is very
important, therefore 700 soldiers were placed there. If you want to defend it, there is a need for 300 more people. The Porta accepted Mehmed's advice and it answered his letter: "if it is necessary to defend the castle, then take on 300 new soldiers and if it is still necessary, direct the garrisons of the unimportant castles of Bosnia to the fortress. Do not give high payment to the new soldiers and their leaders should be the ağa of Bosnia who should be the new sancakbeği of Csázma as well." Analysing the events of the 1552 campaign, the Ottoman supreme command could evaluate the success in Slavonia as the only positive action because of the events of the Eastern theatre of war and the failure at Eger. However, these picked examples show clearly that the military actions of the territory called Slavonia in the 16th century, which now belongs to Croatia, cannot be evaluated by themselves (as it has often been done in Croatian historiography) since, as it is evident from the published documents, the main task of the armed forces of this place was to arrest the attention of the Christian troops of the Croatian and Slavonian borderlands and to prevent them from being used in the Transdanubia. Therefore it is salutary, and what is more, almost compulsory for Croatian historiography to become acquainted with the achievements of Hungarian historiography. Of course it is also true "vice versa". The uncertainties of the resolution of the place-names show that there is a great need for the Croatian historians' local knowledge and their works in topographical questions.

Beside the troop movements there are splendid data for the mechanism of the Ottoman building of fortresses, mainly with respect to Osztrovica (Ostrovica) near the River Úna, Gradiska (Gradiška) and Verőce (Virovitica) near the River Sava. Nevertheless, one should disregard this question because of the lack of space.

Apart from the data on political and military history and the description of events, the volume can provide the researchers interested in the history of economy, settlement and population of a certain territory with useful data. In order to show this, here is an example. It has been obvious for a long time that the sultan tried his best to declare the richest areas of the conquered territory *hass* estate to save them from exploitation. It also happened to the market-towns of Drávaszög that had formerly belonged to Kászim beği but it is certain that in August 1544 the sultan benefited from them. Perhaps the fact that the Hungarian ethnicity became more and more dominant during the century in the settlements of Dánóc (Danóc, a destroyed village close to Izsép /Topolje/), Laskó (Lug) and Vörösmarty (Zmajevac) and more and more people chose them as their home from the surroundings was due to this change of owners. It is interesting to notice that the Slav dominance enhanced in the area but the survival of the Hungarian population remained unbroken in these villages.

The book is closed with some indices which have been made in a “user-friendly” way because one can search for both the Hungarian and the Turkish texts. It is also a great help for the researchers not speaking Hungarian.

Finally it can be stated that the thick source book suits the original aims of the authors completely: domestic and international researchers, local historians and people interested in the Ottoman era can use it alike. The precision of the copy editors is shown by the few stylistic mistakes and the lack of spelling mistakes. Perhaps the reviewer has been perfunctory, but it is obvious that the value of the sources published in the volume could
permit any number of mistakes but not the relentless precision of Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor who have composed such a profound collection of documents that its data will hopefully be used in studies dealing with early modern history in the future.

Szabolcs Varga


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