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Mobility across the Drava and Mura Rivers in the Context of Ottoman Expansion (15th – 17th Centuries)**

The paper examines mobility across the Drava and Mura Rivers between the 15th and 17th centuries in the context of Ottoman incursions and expansion in Slavonia and Hungary. First, it analyzes the intensified mobility across the mentioned rivers due to *akıncı* incursions into Slavonia in the 14th and 15th centuries, which influenced the migration of civilians across the Drava into Hungary in order to escape the dangers of Ottoman expansion. Second, it examines the decline in mobility across the Mura after 1600, when it became a border river between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires. This decline resulted from efforts by the Zrinski/Zrínyi noble family to protect their land between the Drava and Mura with the construction of watchtowers along the right bank of the Mura and constant guarding of this riverine border. The paper seeks to determine the extent to which this defense system was able to prevent mobility, as sources point to the conclusion that Ottoman raiders, and especially Tatar cavalry, successfully crossed the Mura numerous times during the 17th century.

Keywords: mobility, Drava, Mura, Međimurje, Habsburg-Ottoman frontier, Evliya Çelebi

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Introduction

Throughout history, border rivers have served as both barriers and conduits for mobility: on the one hand, these natural borders stopped undesired crossings, and on the other, facilitated trade and migration. During the 15th and 16th centuries, the degree of mobility across the Drava (Hungarian: Dráva; German: Drau) and Mura (Hungarian: Mura; German: Mur) Rivers was shaped by Ottoman incursions and expansion in Slavonia and Hungary. This period was characterized by intensified mobility across the mentioned rivers due to *akıncı*¹ incursions into Slavonia, where these irregular Ottoman forces continuously attacked civilians, causing devastation that seriously crippled efficient defense by local nobles and royal Hungarian units, which were unable to systematically defend the mentioned areas without logistical support supplied by the local civilian population.² Devastating *akıncı* attacks were the cause of the migration of threatened civilian groups across the Drava and Mura into Hungary and Austrian lands in order to escape the threat of Ottoman attacks. Since there were no permanent bridges on either of these rivers in the analyzed centuries, passage across these waterways was carried out only by ferries, boats, and rafts. The paper focuses on the mobility of people and goods across the sections of the Drava and Mura Rivers that constituted the southern and northern borders of the region of Međimurje (Hungarian: Muraköz; German: Murinsel). This positioning shaped Međimurje into a kind of “island between the Mura and Drava” (*Insula inter Muram et Dravam*, as used in sources from the Middle Ages onwards),³ surrounded by rivers separating it from neighboring provinces (except along its western land border

¹ The *akıncıs* (Ottoman Turkish word *akıncı* can be translated as “attacker” or “raider”) were members of highly mobile Ottoman cavalry units who raided enemy territory and plundered, destroyed, and enslaved the local population. Oliver Jens Schmitt, Mariya Kiprovska, “Ottoman raiders (*akıncıs*) as a driving force of early Ottoman conquest of the Balkans and the slavery-based economy,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 65 (2022), no. 4: 508, 509 and *passim*; Adrian Gheorghe, *The Metamorphoses of Power. Violence, Warlords, Akıncıs and the Early Ottomans (1300–1450)* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2023).

² The Ottoman Empire employed *akıncı* raiders with the aim of destabilizing and weakening enemy states before military conquest, which was usually preceded by many years, most often decades of continuous *akıncı* raids that disrupted everyday life and caused devastation and depopulation. Ferenc Szakály, “The Hungarian-Croatian border defense system and its collapse,” in *From Hunyadi to Rákóczi. War and Society in Late Medieval and Early Modern Hungary*, ed. János M. Bak and Béla K. Király (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1982), 141–158; Ivan Jurković, “Migracije. Raseljenička kriza za osmanske ugroze: ‘U baščini mojoj ne dađu mi priti’” [Migrations. The Displacement Crisis During the Ottoman Threat: ‘They Do Not Allow Me to Enter My Own Patrimony’], in *Vrijeme sazrijevanja, vrijeme razaranja: hrvatske zemlje u kasnome srednjem vijeku* [A Time of Maturation, a Time of Destruction: The Croatian Lands in the Late Middle Ages], ed. Marija Karbić (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 2019), 99–103.

³ Tadija Smičiklas, ed., *Codex Diplomaticus Regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae*, vol. III: *Diplomata annorum 1201–1235 continens = Diplomatički zbornik Kraljevine Hrvatske, Dalmacije i Slavonije*, sv. III: *Listine godine 1201–1235* [Codex Diplomaticus of the Kingdoms of Croatia, Dalmatia,

with Styria). This cross-river mobility was influenced by Ottoman incursions and expansion in Slavonia and Hungary from the 15th to the 17th centuries. In the first period, during the 14th and 15th centuries, mobility across the mentioned rivers increased due to *akıncı* incursions into Slavonia. In the second period, after 1600, mobility across the Mura declined as it became a border river between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires. The aim of the paper is to demonstrate that this decline in mobility was the result of the Zrinski (Hungarian: Zrinyi) noble family's efforts to defend their territory between the Drava and Mura by constructing watchtowers along the right bank of the Mura and maintaining constant surveillance of this riverine border. The paper also aims to determine the extent to which this defense system was able to prevent cross-river mobility, as sources suggest that Ottoman raiders, and especially Tatar cavalry, successfully crossed the Mura numerous times during the 17th century.

Međimurje is the focus of this paper because it provides a case through which this significant transformation in cross-river mobility can be analyzed. To the best of my knowledge, this issue has not yet been addressed within the existing historiography. Ferenc Végő has highlighted the distinct position of Međimurje as a borderland province situated between the Habsburg and Ottoman empires.⁴ However, the impact of Međimurje's rivers on the strategic situation and the transformation of the Mura into a border between the two empires in 1600 has hitherto remained unexplored.

Intensified Mobility across the Drava and Mura during the 15th and 16th Centuries

Ottoman incursions into the territories of the Kingdoms of Croatia and Slavonia began in the late 14th century and intensified throughout the 15th and 16th centuries. Ottoman attacks, often involving swift raids by the mentioned *akıncı* cavalry, caused widespread devastation and displacement of the civilian population. By the early 16th century, large portions of Croatia and Slavonia had been incorporated into the westernmost Ottoman provinces in Southeast Europe. The civilians in the still unconquered Croatian regions fled *en masse* to the west and north in order to escape destruction and enslavement. A smaller number of these refu-

and Slavonia, Vol. III: Diplomas of the Years 1201–1235] (Zagreb: Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, 1905), 35.

⁴ Ferenc Végő, "Osobita pogranična regija. Međimurje u 17. stoljeću" [A Specific Border Region: Međimurje in the 17th Century], in *A horvát-magyar együttélés fordulópontjai. Intézmények, társadalom, gazdaság, kultúra / Prekretnice u suživotu Hrvata i Mađara. Ustanove, društvo, gospodarstvo i kultura*, ed. Pál Fodor and Dinko Šokčević (Budapest; Zagreb: MTA BTK Történettudományi Intézet; Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2015), 582–588.

gees, however, were resettled by their feudal lords in safer regions.⁵ It is necessary to emphasize the distinction between forced and voluntary migrations. Forced migration is the involuntary movement of people caused by war, persecution, or disasters, resulting in refugees or internally displaced persons. On the other hand, voluntary migration is a chosen, proactive move for better opportunities, such as employment. Most of the examples of migratory movements discussed in this paper constitute forced migrations; however, examples of voluntary migration will also be mentioned at a later stage.

As regards the area of Međimurje, during the second half of the 15th century, it was within the reach of Ottoman raiders. However, their attacks were less intense, and Međimurje was largely spared from destruction and plunder, as it was further north from usual Ottoman attack routes through Croatia and Slavonia into more distant provinces, namely Styria, Carniola, Carinthia, Friuli, and southwest Hungary.⁶ Ottoman incursions were frequent and successful because the abovementioned lands were, at that time, involved in two Central European wars: the Bohemian-Hungarian War (1468–1478) and the Austrian-Hungarian War (1477–1488), led by Matthias Corvinus (ruled 1458–1490), King of Hungary and Croatia, with the aim to expand his rule in Central Europe. As a result, Croatian and Hungarian forces could not devote themselves to defending their southern borders from Ottoman incursions, which were particularly frequent between 1468 and 1481 and sometimes repeated from year to year. This situation lasted until the death of the belligerent Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II (ruled 1444–1446 and 1451–1481).⁷

However, some *akıncı* incursions did pass through Međimurje on their way to Austrian provinces north of the Drava. The Ottoman historian Şemseddin Ahmed,

⁵ For more on Ottoman attacks on Croatian lands in the Middle and Early Modern Ages, see: Tade Smičiklas, *Poviest hrvatska* [Croatian History], vol. 1 (Zagreb: K. Albrecht, 1882); Vjekoslav Klaić, *Povijest Hrvata od najstarijih vremena do svršetka XIX. stoljeća* [History of the Croats from the Earliest Times to the End of the 19th Century], vols. IV and V (Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Matice hrvatske, 1981); Milan Kruhek, *Krajiške utvrde i obrana Hrvatskog kraljevstva tijekom 16. stoljeća* [Frontier Fortresses and the Defense of the Croatian Kingdom During the 16th Century] (Zagreb: Institut za suvremenu povijest, 1995); Mirko Valentić, Lovorka Čoralić, eds., *Povijest Hrvata.*, knj. 2: *Od kraja 15. st. do kraja Prvoga svjetskog rata* [History of the Croats, vol. 2: From the End of the 15th Century to the End of the First World War] (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2003); Neven Budak, *Hrvatska i Slavonija u ranome novom vijeku* [Croatia and Slavonia in the Early Modern Period] (Zagreb: Leykam international; Barbat, 2007).

⁶ Schmitt, Kiprovská, "Ottoman raiders (*akıncıs*) as a driving force," 514–517, 545–553.

⁷ Smičiklas, *Poviest hrvatska*, vol. 1, 648–665; Klaić, *Povijest Hrvata*, vol. IV, 95, 97, 99, 100–101, 115–116, 117–119, 130–133, 136, 145–146, 160; Anđelko Vlašić, "Osmanski napadi na Međimurje tijekom 15. i 16. stoljeća u osmanskim narativnim izvorima," [Ottoman Raids on Međimurje During the 15th and 16th Centuries in Ottoman Narrative Sources] in *Vremena kriza u povijesti Međimurja. Zbornik radova*, ed. Zoran Turk and Anđelko Vlašić (Čakovec; Mursko Središće: Ogranak Matice hrvatske u Čakovcu; Centar za istraživanje Međimurja, 2022), 32–33.

better known as Kemalpaşazade or İbn Kemal (1469–1534), in his chronicle *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osmân* (“The History of the Ottoman Dynasty”), described, among other things, the military activities of Ottoman *sancakbeyi* of Bosnia, Koca Davud Pasha, during 1479 and 1480, specifically the raids of his *akıncı* troops into Croatian and Hungarian territories. For instance, in August 1479, several thousand *akıncı* raiders under the command of Koca Davud Pasha crossed the Una, Kupa, Sava, Drava, and Mura Rivers on their raid into southern Hungary and southern Austria. These highly mobile units crossed rivers with ease, demonstrating how insignificant rivers were as obstacles to enemy attacks in this period. Nevertheless, the Ottoman source mentioned above notes that many Ottoman attackers drowned, as passing these rivers was not easy.⁸ Maybe the Ottoman author exaggerated the *akıncı* troubles, because the Italian chronicler Antonio Bonfini (1434–1503) described the same events in 1479, claiming that the rivers were shallow and easily passable that year.⁹

As can be discerned from the aforementioned Ottoman source, the *akıncı* raiders commanded by Koca Davud Pasha crossed the Drava into Hungary, then the Mura into Međimurje, and then the Drava into Styria near the town of Ptuj (German: Pettau) and pillaged there, burning villages, killing livestock, and taking numerous slaves.¹⁰ A few months later, still in 1479, another *akıncı* raid proceeded into Croatia, Slavonia, Carniola, and Styria, and in 1480, the Ottomans again undertook a raid into Slavonia, southern Hungary, and Styria, on their path crossing the Una, Kupa, Sava, Drava, and Mura, and then looting and burning villages along their route.¹¹

Although such *akıncı* incursions into Međimurje probably did not recur after 1481, the region faced the dangers of Ottoman attacks during the military cam-

⁸ Şerafettin Turan, ed., *İbn Kemal. Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman. VII. Defter (Tenkidli Transkripsiyon)* [Ibn Kemal. History of the Ottoman Dynasty. Volume VII (Critical Transcription)] (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1991), 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 480, 481, 482, 483; Dušanka Bojanić, “Dve godine istorije bosanskog krajišta (1479. i 1480) – prema Ibn Kemal” [Deux ans d’histoire de la marche de Bosnie-selon Ibn Kemal], *Prilozi za orijentalnu filologiju* 14–15 (1969): 36.

⁹ Antonio Bonfini, Johannes Sambucus, *Antonii Bonfinii Historia Hungarica: Sive Hungaricarum Rerum Decades IV. Et Dimidia Libris XLV* [The Hungarian History by Antonio Bonfini: or Four and a Half Decades of Hungarian Affairs, in 45 Books] (Köln: Joannis Widenfeldt & Godefridi de Berges, 1690), 441; Bojanić, “Dve godine istorije bosanskog krajišta,” 37.

¹⁰ Turan, *İbn Kemal. Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman*, 473, 475, 476–478; Jakob Unrest, *Österreichische Chronik* [Austrian Chronicle], ed. Karl Grossmann (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1957), 100–101; Bojanić, “Dve godine istorije bosanskog krajišta,” 36–37, 38; Schmitt and Kiprovska, “Ottoman raiders (*akıncıs*) as a driving force,” 555–556; Vlašić, “Osmanski napadi na Međimurje tijekom 15. i 16. stoljeća,” 34–37.

¹¹ Turan, *İbn Kemal. Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman*, 480–484; Unrest, *Österreichische Chronik*, 100–101; Bojanić, “Dve godine istorije bosanskog krajišta,” 39–40; Schmitt and Kiprovska, “Ottoman raiders (*akıncıs*) as a driving force,” 556; Vlašić, “Osmanski napadi na Međimurje tijekom 15. i 16. stoljeća,” 37–39.

paigned by Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (ruled 1520–1566) into central Austrian lands in 1532. The Ottoman army, reportedly numbering more than 100,000 soldiers, after arriving in Osijek (Hungarian: Eszék; German: Esseg) on its way from Istanbul, proceeded from Osijek upstream along the left bank of the Drava, turned to the northwest at Csurgó, and then continued to the fort and town of Kőszeg (German: Güns). From there, the Ottomans withdrew and returned southward instead of continuing towards Vienna as originally planned. On their way back, the Ottoman army crossed the Mura near Graz and the Drava near Maribor. Then it proceeded towards Varaždin, destroying settlements and the local population along the way. The sheer size of the Ottoman army suggests that some Ottoman detachments might have crossed the Drava and raided Medimurje, though sources provide no explicit evidence of this.¹²

As was the case in many of the Southeast European countries conquered by the Ottomans, the decades-long threat of *akıncı* attacks ceased only when the Ottoman Empire decided to move on to the second phase of attack, and this was a full-scale military invasion of the target country. For the Kingdom of Hungary, this was realized in 1526 with Sultan Süleyman's campaign into Hungary and the decisive Ottoman victory at the Battle of Mohács. In the following years, the Kingdoms of Croatia and Slavonia feared imminent attack and conquest by Ottoman forces. As mentioned earlier, this prompted the migration of threatened civilian groups across the Drava and Mura into Hungary and Austrian lands to escape the danger of Ottoman conquest.¹³ One of the obstacles along their way was crossing rivers, which posed major technical challenges: one has to bear in mind that these refugees traveled with entire families, wagons, livestock, and all other possessions.

Some Croatian and Slavonian noble families, whose estates were threatened by Ottoman raids, decided to resettle their serfs to a safer location, to their estates in the still safe areas north of the Drava and Mura. Such relocations are documented between 1524 and the early 1560s.¹⁴ One particularly illustrative case

¹² For more on sultan Süleyman's campaign of 1532, see: István Bariska, "Az 1532. évi török hadjárat történetéhez" [To the history of the Ottoman campaign of 1532], in *Népek együttélése Dél-Pannóniában. Tanulmányok Szita László 70. születésnapjára* [Studies in honour of László Szita on his 70th birthday], ed. István Lengvári and József Vonyó (Pécs: Magyar Történelmi Társulat; Pro Pannonia Kiadói Alapítvány, 2003), 11–44.

¹³ Klaić, *Povijest Hrvata od najstarijih vremena*, 149, 616.

¹⁴ Karl Kaser, *Slobodan seljak i vojnik. Povojačenje agrarnog društva u Hrvatsko-slavonskoj Vojnoj krajini (1535. – 1881.)*, sv. I: *Rana krajiška društva (1545. – 1574.)* [Free Peasant and Soldier. The Militarization of Agrarian Society in the Croat-Slavonian Military Frontier (1535–1881), vol. I: Early Frontier Societies (1545–1574)] (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1997), 38–39; Géza Pálffy, Miljenko Pandžić, Felix Tobler, *Ausgewählte Dokumente zur Migration der Burgenländischen Kroaten im 16. Jahrhundert* [Selected documents concerning the migration of Gradišće Croats in the 16th century] (Eisenstadt: Kroatisches Kultur- und Dokumentationszentrum = Hrvatski kulturni i dokumentarni centar), 1999.

dates to 1537, when two Hungarian-Croatian nobles – János Szalay de Kerecsen, chief magistrate (Hungarian: *főispán*) of Pozsony, and nobleman of Međimurje Caspar Ernuszt de Csáktornya – petitioned Ferdinand I Habsburg (ruled 1526–1564), King of Croatia and Hungary, for permission to establish a ferryboat (in the source: *vadum*) at a shallow ford over the Mura near the settlements of Legrad and Dubrava, between their estates, close to the confluence of the Mura and Drava. The aim of their petition was to facilitate the passage of refugees from the estates of Hungarian-Croatian nobles in Croatia and Slavonia (between the Kupa River and the Adriatic Sea, as well as from the area between the Sava and Drava) to the Batthyány and Nádasdy family estates in southwestern Hungary. The king granted permission in January 1537, because he wanted more refugees to be able to pass from Slavonia across the Mura into Hungary. Accordingly, in the following years, refugees were transported across the Mura at the said location, supposedly using boats and rafts.¹⁵ Thus, Međimurje became a transit zone through which fugitives passed from southern regions threatened by the Ottomans. Some of the refugees, nevertheless, settled permanently in Međimurje.

King Ferdinand I authorized the construction of a ferryboat on the Mura “so that more people may cross the Mura River” (*ut plures pateant in fluvio Mura traiectus*), which implies that at least one ford already existed on the Mura, and there the refugees could cross into Hungary, and that other fords existed on the Drava as well. Vjekoslav Klaić assumed that there must have existed several such fords on the Drava, and that they were used by numerous refugees seeking safety in northern regions, especially in western Hungary, which was still beyond the reach of the Ottoman invaders.¹⁶ Contemporary sources mention a ford near Varaždin on the Drava: at this location, the river was a particularly significant obstacle, and passage required a ferryboat.¹⁷ There was also another ford upstream on the Drava, near the settlement of Zavrč, used by travelers crossing from Slavonia into Styria.¹⁸

¹⁵ Emilij Laszowski, ed., *Monumenta Habsburgica Regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae, Slavoniae = Habsburški spomenici Kraljevine Hrvatske, Dalmacije i Slavonije* [Habsburg Monuments of the Kingdoms of Croatia, Dalmatia, Slavonia], vol. 2 (Zagreb: Tisak Dioničke tiskare, 1916), 324; Klaić, *Povijest Hrvata od najstarijih vremena*, 149, 616, 617; Kruhek, *Krajiške utvrde i obrana Hrvatskog kraljevstva*, 94; 32, Đuro Vidmarović, “Kada je hrvatski ban Toma Nadaždi preselio u zapadnu Ugarsku svoje podložnike iz vlastelinstava Velika i Međurić u današnjoj zapadnoj Slavoniji?” [When did the Croatian ban Thomas Nadaždi resettle his subordinates from his feuds Velika and Međurić in contemporary western Slavonia (Republic of Croatia) into western Hungary?], *Croatica Christiana periodica* 28 (2004), no. 54: 34–35; Valentić, Čoralić, *Povijest Hrvata*, knj. 2, 22.

¹⁶ Klaić, *Povijest Hrvata od najstarijih vremena*, 616.

¹⁷ Hrvoje Kekez, “On the road to safety. The experience of travel of Croatian refugees fleeing the Ottomans, as described in letters of Francis Batthyány (1538–1548),” unpublished manuscript, August 11, 2025. I would like to thank Hrvoje Kekez for kindly allowing me access to his manuscript, which is submitted for publication in the journal *Saeculum Christianum*.

¹⁸ Klaić, *Povijest Hrvata od najstarijih vremena*, 242, 243.

Despite the existence of numerous fords and the official sanctioning of unobstructed refugee crossings by the king and local nobles, crossing the two rivers remained difficult. Although King Ferdinand I had exempted the refugees from Croatia from the usual tolls on river crossings due to their dire circumstances and poverty, guards stationed at the river crossings continued to charge the refugees for passage to the other side. Because of that, the king responded by granting the impoverished refugee's complete exemption from paying tolls along the way. Nevertheless, the river crossing guards continued collecting fees from the refugees.¹⁹ Another difficulty stemmed from the fact that numerous groups of refugees were attractive prey for attackers: in June 1538, an Ottoman army attacked refugees as they were traveling to the ford on the Drava (probably the one near Dubrava), capturing many people and livestock.²⁰

As for the assumptions about the number of refugees fleeing northwards from Croatia and Slavonia, Klaić suggested that people fled in huge numbers, since the Parliament of the Kingdom of Hungary in Pozsony (German: Pressburg) in 1550, "probably at the request of the Croatian envoys", decreed that peasants who had fled from Slavonia to Hungary in previous years and who wished to return to their homes should be allowed to return. Nevertheless, emigration to Hungary intensified in the following decades, and by the end of the 16th century, southwestern Hungary was "full of Croatian emigrants,"²¹ so it is to be assumed that they arrived there by crossing the Drava and Mura at the fords mentioned above.

Another factor promoting cross-river mobility in the area of Međimurje was the development of trade. In 1592, six fords existed on the Mura and four fords on the Drava at the Međimurje sections of these rivers. The fords were primarily used by trade convoys arriving from western Hungary and traveling toward Austrian lands, Slavonia, and Croatia. The fords were evenly distributed in order to prevent smuggling. Thus, at least from the beginning of the 1590s until 1600, trade mobility across the Mura and Drava was intensive,²² and at least from 1537 until 1600, the Mura and Drava fords facilitated intensified refugee mobility, organized by local nobles and sanctioned by royal authority.

¹⁹ Kekez, "On the road to safety," unpublished manuscript, August 11, 2025.

²⁰ Ferdo Šišić, ed., *Acta comitialia Regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae* = *Hrvatski saborski spisi* [Acts of the Parliament of the Kingdoms of Croatia, Dalmatia, and Slavonia], vol. 2 (Zagreb: Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, 1915), 238.

²¹ Klaić, *Povijest Hrvata od najstarijih vremena*, 239, 616.

²² Nataša Štefanec, *Heretik Njegova Veličanstva. Povijest o Jurju IV. Zrinskom i njegovu rodu* [His Majesty's Heretic: A History of Juraj IV Zrinski and His Kin] (Zagreb: Barbat, 2001), 168–169.

Restricted Mobility across the Drava and Mura from 1600 Onwards

In October 1600, Ottoman forces under the command of Tiryaki Hasan Pasha (1530–1611) successfully conquered the Habsburg fortress of Nagykanizsa, located in southwestern Hungary. This victory marked the establishment of the Eyalet of Kanije (i.e., Nagykanizsa), an Ottoman province that became a crucial base for Ottoman raids into Habsburg territory to the south, west, and north of Nagykanizsa, especially into Styria and Međimurje.²³ At that time, the Habsburg-Ottoman border shifted westwards to the Mura, extending along the northeastern edge of Međimurje. After 1600, mobility across this lower section of the Mura, which became a border river between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, consisted almost exclusively of frequent raids by Ottoman cavalry units from the fortress of Nagykanizsa, beginning already in the early 17th century. This occurred within the context of the Long Turkish War (1593–1606) between the Habsburgs and Ottomans. The Crimean Khanate, a Tatar state along the northern Black Sea coast (from the 15th to the 18th centuries), was a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire and regularly sent its cavalry as auxiliary forces to numerous Ottoman military campaigns.²⁴ Gazi II Giray (ruled 1588–1596 and 1597–1607), khan of the Crimean Khanate, led Tatar cavalry in military operations in Hungary during the Long Turkish War,²⁵ and the Tatar raids were used to destabilize the Habsburg territory around Nagykanizsa. During the winters of 1602/1603 and 1604/1605, Gazi II Giray carried out numerous raids with his Tatar cavalry into southern Hungary and made several crossings over the Mura into Međimurje. During those winters, the rivers froze over, so cavalry units crossed them with ease.²⁶ Moreover, the Mura was often covered with ice in winter, and it seems that the water levels of the Drava and Mura were generally low for most of the year, in winter as well as in summer, allowing the Ottoman forces to enter Međimurje at any time.²⁷

²³ Klaić, *Povijest Hrvata od najstarijih vremena*, 544–545.

²⁴ For more on the military cooperation of the Crimean Khanate with the Ottoman Empire, see: Mária Ivanics, “The Military Co-operation of the Crimean Khanate with the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in *The European Tributary States of the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. Gábor Kármán and Lovro Kunčević (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013), 275–299.

²⁵ Elvina Abduvaliyeva Er, “Bora Gazi Giray Han: Hayatı ve Eserleri” [Bora Gazi Giray Han: His Life and Works] (PhD diss., University of Ankara, 2011), 7, 36.

²⁶ Anđelko Vlašić, “Osmanski napadi na Međimurje tijekom 17. stoljeća u osmanskim narativnim izvorima,” [Ottoman attacks on Međimurje during the 17th century in Ottoman narrative sources] *Podravina: časopis za multidisciplinarna istraživanja* 20 (2021), no. 39: 124–125.

²⁷ Ferenc Végh, “Őrházak a Mura mentén – a Muraköz épített védelme a Zrínyiek korában” [Watch-towers along the Mura River: the constructed defense of Međimurje in the time of the Zrinskis], in *Zrínyi Miklós és öröksége* [Miklós Zrínyi and His Legacy], ed. Gábor Hausner (Budapest: Ludovika Egyetemi Kiadó, 2022), 97, 101.

It was clear that the river itself was not a sufficient obstacle to prevent enemy incursions into Međimurje. The general defense of Međimurje was provided by the establishment of the Habsburg frontier captaincies along the border with the Ottoman Empire, and Međimurje constituted a distinct and independent defensive district under the authority of the Zrinski family.²⁸ With the aim of protecting their estate between the Drava and Mura, the Zrinski family undertook the construction of a chain of watchtowers along the right bank of the Mura and manned them with soldiers responsible for continuous surveillance and for reporting enemy movements across the river. The exact date of the construction of this chain of watchtowers is difficult to establish. However, the foundations of this defense system were most probably laid around the turn of the 17th century.²⁹ Sources from the years between 1642 and 1690 mention the watchtowers as being distributed along the right bank of the Mura, opposite the Ottoman territory on the river's left bank. Various maps from the period depict between eleven and twenty-one small forts or watchtowers guarding Međimurje's northern border.³⁰ Ferenc Végh posits that there could have been as many as twenty-four watchtowers and that their number increased over time.³¹ They were manned by the Zrinski family's private military forces, paid from the revenues of their estates. The Mura and the floodplains and marshes along it offered natural protection to the defenders of Međimurje; however, continuous maintenance of its crossings was required day and night. The Zrinski family regularly invested in repairing the watchtowers, often at their own expense when royal funds were delayed or unavailable. The inhabitants of Međimurje were deeply embedded in the defensive system: most probably since 1639, peasants and townspeople were obligated to perform guard duty, maintain fortifications, transport supplies, and provide intelligence on enemy movements. In return, they received limited privileges, such as tax reductions or exemptions from certain labor services. This integration of the civilian pop-

²⁸ For more on the establishment and structure of the Međimurje captaincy, see: Ferenc Végh, "Zrínyi Miklós és Péter, a törökellenes határvédelem szervezői. A Muraköz védelmi rendszere a 17. század közepén [Nicholas and Peter Zrínyi as organizers of the counter-Ottoman border defense. The defense system of Međimurje in the mid-17th century], in *Várostromok és Közép-Európa Zrínyi Miklós (1620–1664) korában* [Sieges and Central Europe in the Age of Miklós Zrínyi (1620–1664)], ed. Györgyi Bujdosné Pap, Ingrid Fejér and Ágota H. Szilasi (Eger: Dobó István Vármúzeum, 2017), 220–227; Ferenc Végh, "'Legradska i međimurska kapetanija' – dodaci vojnoj službi Nikole VII. Zrinskog" ['Captaincy of Legrad and Međimurje' – additions to military service of Nikola VII. Zrinski], *Podravina – časopis za multidisciplinarna istraživanja* 16 (2017), no. 32: 59–70.

²⁹ Végh, "Őrházak a Mura mentén," 98.

³⁰ Vlašić, "Osmanski napadi na Međimurje tijekom 17. stoljeća," 129; Végh, "Őrházak a Mura mentén," 103.

³¹ Végh, "Őrházak a Mura mentén," 104. For a map and a sketch of the watchtower defense line along the Mura, see: Ferenc Végh, "Zrínyi (VII.) Miklós, a határvédelem szervezője" [Nicholas VII Zrínyi, organizer of the border defense], in *Zrínyi Miklós emlékkönyv*, ed. András Bódvai (Budapest: Bethlen Gábor Alapkezelő Zrt., 2022), 59, 66.

ulation into frontier defense blurred the line between military and civilian life, turning Međimurje into a permanently militarized landscape.³²

How effective was this defense system in preventing cross-river mobility? Nikola VII Zrinski (Hungarian: Zrínyi Miklós VII; 1620–1664) in April 1642 in a letter to Ferdinand III Habsburg (ruled 1625–1657), King of Hungary and Croatia, stated that “[a]lthough there are watchtowers along the Mura, due to the great distance between them, control of the terrain is impossible.” In his letter sent in February 1641 to Ádám Batthyány (1610–1659), captain-general of the Transdanubian district of the Kingdom of Hungary, Nikola VII reported that 5000 Ottomans had attacked Međimurje the previous month. Another raid followed in 1642, when Ottoman forces attacked one of the watchtowers, killed several defenders, and took prisoners. Similar attacks took place in March and April of that year: Ottoman attackers terrorized the civilians living along the Mura, killing inhabitants and taking away their livestock, claimed Nikola VII, and also reported Ottoman incursions across the Mura in the spring of 1647.³³ Comparable raids occurred in October and November 1660, when Ottoman raiders crossed the Mura and Drava and plundered in Croatia, Slavonia, Međimurje, and Austrian lands, as is claimed by Ottoman travel writer Evliya Çelebi (1611–after 1685).³⁴

The line of watchtowers was unable to stop Ottoman crossings over the Mura, but every time the Ottomans crossed the river, the Zrinski forces managed to repel them – for example, in March 1642. The same happened during the Habsburg-Ottoman War (or Austro-Turkish War, 1663–1664), when Nikola VII tried to strengthen the guarding of the Mura by leading patrols along the river with 300 horsemen. In November 1663, he defeated Tatar forces attempting to cross the Mura into Međimurje.³⁵ It seems that the watchtowers were efficient in informing the Zrinski forces whenever the enemy was approaching.

³² Végh, “Zrínyi Miklós és Péter”, 227–228, 232–235; Végh, “Örházak a Mura mentén,” 99–100. For more on the appearance and functioning of the watchtowers along the Mura, see: Végh, “Örházak a Mura mentén,” 102–104.

³³ Vladimir Kalšan, *Nikola Zrinski Čakovečki (1620.–1664.)* [Nikola Zrinski of Čakovec (1620–1664)] (Čakovec: Muzej Međimurja Čakovec, 2014), 6–7, 9.

³⁴ Evliya Çelebi, *Seyâhatnâme (V–VI. cilt). İndeksli tipkibasım* [Book of Travels (Volumes V–VI). Indexed Facsimile Edition], ed. Seyit Ali Kahraman (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2013), vol. V, 164a33–164b3; Evliya Çelebi b. Derviş Mehmed Zillî, *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi. Topkapı Sarayı Kütüphanesi Bağdat 307 Numaralı Yazmanın Transkripsiyonu – Dizini* [Book of Travels by Evliya Çelebi. Transcription and Index of the Bağdat No. 307 Manuscript in the Topkapı Palace Library], vol. V, ed. Yücel Dağlı, Seyit Ali Kahraman and İbrahim Sezgin (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2001), 279; Evliya Çelebi, *Putopis. Odlomci o jugoslavenskim zemljama* [Travelogue: Fragments on Yugoslav Lands], transl. and comm. by Hazim Šabanović (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1967), 255.

³⁵ Kalšan, *Nikola Zrinski Čakovečki*, 7, 19–20; Vlašić, “Osmanski napadi na Međimurje tijekom 17. stoljeća,” 129.

How exactly did the system of watchtowers function? In his travel book, Evliya Çelebi described the watchtowers along the Mura in 1664 as “strong towers a cannon shot apart” (*birbirinden birer top menzili ba’id metin kulleler*).³⁶ He also recounted a crossing of Tatar cavalry units across the Mura into Međimurje in June 1664, writing that the Tatars “crossed the Mura River with ease at a smooth crossing” (*nehr-i Morava’yı [sic!] suhûletle bir latîf geçitden geçüp*). The crews of the nearest watchtowers spotted the passing enemy cavalry and opened fire with their cannons. Each watchtower fired one shot, and “the thunder of the cannons shook the entire enemy province, and news of us spread in all directions” (*cemî’i kâfiristânı top sadâsı tutup cihâna haberimiz şâyi’ oldu*). The Tatars ignored the cannon fire, exchanged their tired horses for fresh ones, and continued riding westward day and night without pause (*ol gün ol gece yine cânib-i garba göz açdır-mayup çapdık*). It may be presumed that they advanced westwards into Styria, where they proceeded to plunder.³⁷ It may be that they avoided plundering in the territory of Međimurje because they expected a swift response by the Zrinski forces, already alerted by the cannon fire.

Bearing in mind that the migration of endangered civilians from Croatia and Slavonia, induced by Ottoman expansion, continued until the middle of the 17th century, the Ottoman conquest of Nagykanizsa in 1600 cannot be regarded as a completely decisive turning point in this process, as new migration patterns emerged during this period. Namely, after 1600, the Ottoman military control extended only over the left bank of the lower section of the Mura. Thus, the upper reaches of the river remained under Habsburg control, enabling the unobstructed movement of people and goods from south to north, and vice versa. Population movements across the Drava and Mura persisted throughout the 17th century, although migration routes underwent certain modifications. On the one hand, Ottoman incursions into Međimurje compelled smaller segments of the civilian population of Međimurje to flee southward. On the other hand, the anti-Ottoman defense system organized by the Zrinski family attracted Croats from south of the Drava to settle in the interfluvium, as well as the population from Transdanubia, who were drawn to the region to serve as armed personnel in the service of the Zrinski family. This topic, however, has not yet

³⁶ Evliya Çelebi, *Seyâhatnâme (V–VI. cilt)*, vol. V, 164a30–31; Evliyâ Çelebi, *Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi*, vol. V, 279; Evlija Čelebi, *Putopis*, 255; Vlašić, “Osmanski napadi na Međimurje tijekom 17. stoljeća,” 129–130.

³⁷ Evliya Çelebi, *Seyâhatnâme (V–VI. cilt)*, vol. VI, 184b20–185a10; Evliyâ Çelebi, *Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi*, vol. VI, 317; Evlija Čelebi, *Putopis*, 486–487; Vlašić, “Osmanski napadi na Međimurje tijekom 17. stoljeća,” 130. For more on Evliya Çelebi’s description of the Habsburg–Ottoman conflict in 1664, see: Balázs Sudár, “Evliya Çelebi diárium és az 1664. évi török hadjárat [Evliya Çelebi’s diary and the Ottoman campaign of 1664], in “*Hír a dicső tettek ragyogása*”. *Tanulmányok a Zrínyi család és Szigetvár történetéből* [Fame is the brilliance of glorious deeds. Studies from the history of the Zrínyi family and Szigetvár], ed. Szabolcs Varga (Szigetvár: Szigetvári Várbaráti Kör, 2011), 103–120.

been sufficiently researched and warrants a more detailed and comprehensive investigation of the primary sources.

The situation with cross-river mobility differed entirely on the section of the Drava downstream from its confluence with the Mura. With the Ottoman conquest of Virovitica in 1552 and the subsequent unification of the lower Drava's banks under Ottoman rule, the section of the Drava in this downstream area became an internal border, an "inner river" of the Empire. From that period on, the Drava marked the boundary between several Ottoman *sancaks* north and south of the river: the *sancak* of Požega on its right bank, and the *sancaks* of Mohács, Pécs, and Szigetvár on its left bank. Thus, from the conquest of Slavonia onward, the Ottomans used the Drava regularly for military transport across the river and along the river. Local Ottoman forces on both banks of the Drava frequently crossed the river whenever necessary for military operations, while the local Habsburg (i.e., Croatian and Hungarian) forces did the same in their efforts to destabilize the Ottoman rule north and south of the Drava.³⁸

These two distinct forms of cross-river mobility persisted until 1690 and the Habsburg conquest of the fortress of Nagykanizsa. This Habsburg victory marked the end of Ottoman rule in southwestern Hungary and the return of peace in the area on both banks of the Mura and Drava.

Conclusion

The intensity of mobility across the Drava and Mura Rivers between the 15th and 17th centuries changed considerably, as it was shaped by the pressures of Ottoman incursions and subsequent expansion. Before 1600, the threat of *akıncı* incursions and later full-scale Ottoman campaigns spurred intensive movement of people across these rivers, which caused logistical challenges.

After 1600, the strategic situation changed with the transformation of the Mura into a controlled border between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires. The Zrinski family's chain of watchtowers along the Mura represented an attempt to restrict hostile Ottoman crossings. Yet, as sources attest, Ottoman and especially Tatar cavalry continued to cross the Mura repeatedly, often with ease, demonstrating the limitations of this defense system against highly mobile raiding forces. While the watchtowers could not eliminate incursions, they did facilitate rapid defensive responses, reducing the scale of Ottoman devastation within Međimurje. After all, although Međimurje was on the very border of the Ottoman Empire for 90 years, the Ottomans never conquered it.

³⁸ Klaić, *Povijest Hrvata od najstarijih vremena*, 295, 297, 298, 299, 302, 328–329, 391, 397, 450, 503, 537, 544.

Meanwhile, the Drava downstream of the Mura was under complete Ottoman control and became an internal Ottoman waterway used to move troops and supplies within their territory. The contrast between the Mura as a defended border river between the two empires and the Drava as an Ottoman “inner river” demonstrates the varied geopolitical functions that rivers could play within a relatively small geographic area.^{***}

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*Anđelko Vlašić**

Mobilnost preko Drave i Mure u kontekstu osmanske ekspanzije (15. – 17. stoljeće)

Sažetak

U radu se istražuju obrasci mobilnosti preko Drave i Mure od 15. do 17. stoljeća, s posebnim naglaskom na utjecaju osmanske ekspanzije na prelaženje dviju rijeka. Razmatraju se dvije faze: razdoblje prije 1600. godine, obilježeno pojačanom mobilnošću izbjeglica preko dviju rijeka, te razdoblje nakon 1600., kada Mura postaje granica između Habsburškoga i Osmanskoga Carstva, što ograničava tu mobilnost. U 15. i 16. stoljeću osmanska akindžijska konjica redovito je upadala u Hrvatsku i Slavoniju, potičući velike migracije stanovništva preko Drave i Mure prema Ugarskoj i austrijskim zemljama. Iako nije bilo trajnih mostova, rijeke je bilo moguće preći čamcima ili preko plićaka. Lokalni plemići, uz kraljevsko odobrenje, organizirali su prijelaz izbjeglica preko Drave i Mure.

Situacija se promijenila nakon 1600. godine, kada je osmansko osvajanje utvrde Nagykanizse pomaknulo habsburško-osmansku granicu na Muru. Obitelj Zrinski izgradila je lanac stražarskih kula duž njezine desne obale kako bi nadzirala i sprječavala kretanje neprijatelja. Iako su te kule omogućavale brzo vojno djelovanje, nisu mogle spriječiti osmansku, a osobito tatarsku konjicu da neprestano provaljuje u Međimurje. Donji tok Drave nizvodno od Legrada, koji je nakon 1552. bio potpuno pod osmanskim vlašću, funkcionirao je pak kao unutarnji osmanski plovni put za vojni transport, pri čemu su i osmanske i habsburške snage prelazile rijeku tijekom vojnih pohoda. Godine 1690. habsburško osvajanje Nagykanizse okončalo je osmansku vlast u jugozapadnoj Ugarskoj i vratilo mir na područje obiju rijeka. Kontrast između Mure kao branjene pogranične rijeke između dvaju carstava i Drave kao osmanske „unutarnje rijeke” pokazuje različite geopolitičke funkcije koje su rijeke mogle imati unutar relativno malenog geografskog prostora.

Ključne riječi: mobilnost, Drava, Mura, Međimurje, habsburško-osmanska granica, Evliya Çelebi

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