929Kobenzl, H.(044)"1578"
355.4(497.5)"1578"
Primljeno: 2. 3. 2026.
Prihvaćeno: 7. 5. 2026
Izvorni znanstveni rad
https://doi.org/10.22586/pp.v45i70.cybrtm85

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The River on Which Depends the Salvation or Destruction of This Land. The 1578 Habsburg Campaign on the River Una in the Reports of Hans Kobenzl[**]

This paper examines the letters sent by Hans Kobenzl, confidential adviser or Archduke Charles II of Austria, to Duke Albert V of Bavaria. Archduke Charles was preparing a large military operation on the Habsburg-Ottoman border in Croatia and the Bavarian duke, as his father-in-law, was interested in receiving news about it, partly because he had secured the funding for the expedition in the Imperial *Reichstag*. The archduke's operation, the so-called Croatian Expedition, was caused by the Ottoman expansion over the river Una in the previous few years, which left many of the Habsburg fortresses along the river in Ottoman hands and critically endangered the largest remaining one, Bihać. It was believed that the fall of Bihać would directly endanger the archduke's domain of Inner Austria. Kobenzl describes the goals of the expedition as primarily supplying Bihać with provender, artillery and reinforcements, and reconquering as many fortresses along the Una as possible without a direct clash with Ottoman forces. His letters to the Bavarian duke offer a detailed description of the course of the expedition.

Keywords: early modern history, military history, diplomacy, Croatian history, Habsburg-Ottoman wars

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[**] This research was carried out as part of the project "Communities, Communication, and Social Networks in the Croatian Middle Ages and Early Modern Times," funded by the European Union – NextGenerationEU program (380-01-02-23-40).

Introduction

The events this paper studies were part of a great military effort which took place in 1578, the purpose of which was to reassert Habsburg power over the river Una and stay the Ottoman advance in Croatia. I will try to explain these events based on information from a previously unstudied source, the letters of Hans Kobenzl of Proseč in Carniola (Prossegg in German) to Duke Albert V of Bavaria. These letters were all sent in the second half of the 16th century and are bound in a single volume which is today preserved in the Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv in Munich.[1] The volume also contains various reports and other material which was attached to Kobenzl's letters. The latter were written in atrocious, but nevertheless legible handwriting by Kobenzl himself. The attachments were written in various hands and are mostly transcripts of original documents. I will offer transcriptions of parts of both of these in the footnotes. Please note that only personal and place names will be capitalized, as the authors of these documents did not consistently capitalize either nouns or pronouns.

The letters in question not only make it possible to reconstruct the events of this expedition, which Kobenzl termed the "Croatian Expedition" (*Crabatish Expedition*),[2] but enable us to see how the contemporaries perceived it in real time, as Kobenzl sent news of the expedition to the duke immediately after he received it. This is limiting, in the sense that only a personal viewpoint of the events is offered, but it opens a very large window into the personal world of 16th century politicians and military planners. From it, we can learn what information was available to them in real time and how they would process it. However, even the limited, personal view of the expedition makes the events concerning it much clearer and presents a very complex, detailed image of it, which can significantly contribute to the history of Habsburg-Ottoman wars in Croatia. As will be shown, based on these sources we can analyze the perception of security concerns, assessment of risks and the evolvement and proposal of strategies. This offers exemplary insight into the "military mind" of the time.

As our source is the aforementioned Hans Kobenzl, let us first see who he was. He is not unfamiliar to historiography. Karlo Horvat discovered some of his letters to the Papal Curia from the 1590s in Rome in early 20th century and published them, together with a short biography of their author.[3] Kobenzl (died in

[1] Germany (hereafter: DE) – Bayerische Hauptstaatsarchiv (hereafter: BayHStA) – Kurbayern Äußeres Archiv (hereafter: KÄA), 4452.

[2] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 21r.

[3] Karlo Horvat, "Kobenzelovi izvještaji (1592.-1594.) kardinalu Cintiju Aldobrandiniju, državnom tajniku pape Klementa VIII" [Kobenzel's Reports (1592 – 1594) to Cardinal Cintio Aldobrandini, Secretary of State to Pope Clement VIII], *Starine* 32 (1907): 131–316, Kobenzel's biography on 131–133. More of his correspondence was published in Johann Rainer, ed., *Grazer Nuntiatur*, vol 3: *Nuntiatur*

1594) was a prominent politician at the Habsburg court. He served the emperors Maximillian II and Rudolf II as a diplomat, and was also a confidential adviser and associate of Archduke Charles II Francis of Austria, his Carniolan liege lord. Among other things, he was sent on a diplomatic mission to Muscovy, was sent several times to Rome to discuss anti-Ottoman actions with the pope, and was made commander of the chapter of the Teutonic Order in Ljubljana. His family was from Štanjel, but its rise began precisely thanks to him. He was made baron of Proseč in 1564 and was endowed with numerous other fiefs, among others the castle of Predjama. As protector of the abbey of Millstatt am See, he commissioned an enormous and richly decorated altar curtain which still exists today.[4]

Kobenzl was well-versed in international diplomacy. It remains to be explained why the Bavarian duke was interested in the Croatian Expedition enough for Kobenzl to send him regular updates regarding it. The answer lies in marital ties. In 1571, Archduke Charles, whose domain was Inner Austria (consisting of Carinthia, Styria, Carniola and Gorica – largely corresponding with today's Slovenia and southern Austria), married Mary of Wittelsbach, daughter of Duke Albert V of Bavaria.[5] Charles was not the first choice for Mary's match, and Duke Albert did not gain much from the marriage, but the previous two choices turned out to be unattainable, as both the king of Spain and the king of France had married Habsburg princesses. Also, Mary's marriage to Charles was endorsed by the pope, as it would have strengthened the position of the Catholic archduke among

des Girolamo Portia und Korrespondenz des Hans Kobenzl, 1592 – 1595 (Vienna: Österreichsiche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2001), Kobenzel's biography on XVI–XVII.

[4] Alessio Stasi, Federico Vidic, "I Cobenzl 1508-1823. Una dinastia goriziana nell'impero degli Asburgo," in *I Cobenzl. Una famiglia europea tra politica, arte e diplomazia (1508-1823),* eds. Federico Vidic and Alessio Stasi (Rome: Gorizia: Lithos editrice – Archivio di Stato di Gorizia, 2022), 15–68 at 25–29; Vojko Pavlin, "Hans in družina Kobenzl – od prebivalcev Štanjela do zemljiških gospodov" [Hans and the Kobenzl Family – From Inhabitants of Štanjel to Peers], in *I Cobenzl. Una famiglia europea tra politica, arte e diplomazia (1508-1823),* eds. Federico Vidic and Alessio Stasi (Rome: Gorizia: Lithos editrice – Archivio di Stato di Gorizia, 2022), 69–96; Claudia Bortolusso, "'Rheno, Tiberi, Tanai, Tago et Danubio': Giovanni [Hans] Cobenzl nell'Europa del secondo Cinquecento," in *I Cobenzl. Una famiglia europea tra politica, arte e diplomazia (1508-1823),* eds. Federico Vidic and Alessio Stasi (Rome: Gorizia: Lithos editrice – Archivio di Stato di Gorizia, 2022), 151–188; Simon Malmenvall, Aleksey Martyniouk, "Hans Cobenzl's Diplomatic Mission to Moscow (1575) and his Predecessors," in *I Cobenzl. Una famiglia europea tra politica, arte e diplomazia (1508-1823),* eds. Federico Vidic and Alessio Stasi (Rome: Gorizia: Lithos editrice – Archivio di Stato di Gorizia, 2022), 129–150; Bernhard Huber, "'Ornamentis animi ingeniique est praeditus.' Hans Kobenzl als Deutschordensritter (um 1530/1566-1594)", in *I Cobenzl. Una famiglia europea tra politica, arte e diplomazia (1508-1823),* eds. Federico Vidic and Alessio Stasi (Rome: Gorizia: Lithos editrice; Archivio di Stato di Gorizia, 2022), 97–128. See also Nataša Štefanec, *Država ili ne. Ustroj Vojne krajine 1578. godine i hrvatsko-slavonski staleži u regionalnoj obrani i politici* [State or Not. Organization of the Military Border in 1578 and Croatian-Slavonian Estates in Regional Defense and Politics] (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2011), 183.

[5] Štefanec, *Država ili ne*, 182.

his mostly Protestant subjects.[6] This made Duke Albert V Archduke Charles's father-in-law, and a firmly Catholic one to boot. Albert firmly believed that Ottoman victories were brought about as punishment for the religious schism within Christianity, and that lenience towards Protestants would eventually cause the Empire's defeat.[7] Ironically, many of the commanders of the Military Frontier in Archduke Charles's employ were Protestants, including the Croatian and Slavonian ban Christoph Ungnad. In fact, Protestantism was spreading rapidly in Croatia and Slavonia at the time.[8] Nevertheless, Duke Albert supported his son-in-law, Archduke Charles, for example during the great peasants' revolt in Slavonia and Inner Austria of 1573. This revolt worried the duke greatly, and he was willing to help Charles suppress it in part because he was concerned the unrest would spread to Bavaria.[9] It is therefore not unusual for him to take interest in his son-in-law's first major anti-Ottoman expedition – the Croatian Expedition of 1578.

In this paper, we will first study the context of the Croatian Expedition, and then attempt to reconstruct its course from Kobenzl's letters. The focus will also be on the rhythm in which Kobenzl was sending his reports, as it reflects both the rate at which information was arriving to Archduke Charles's court and at which it was spread to the Wittelsbach court in Bavaria.

Contested Lands – Ottoman Advances over the River Una

The area between the rivers Una and Kupa was fiercely contested during the second third of the 16th century. The Habsburg side was steadily losing ground and the border shifted towards the north and the west, with the Kupa increasingly taking on the role of a defensive line. The line on the Una was breached as early as 1538, when Dubica was conquered by the bey of Bosnia, and Habsburg commanders struggled with maintaining a successful defense until the late 16th century.[10] The 1570s saw a series of lightning Ottoman offensives. After the accession of Sultan Murad III in 1574, Sanjak-Bey of Bosnia Ferhad-bey Sokolović (the future beylerbey of Bosnia) embarked on a systematic campaign of conquest in the Croatian borderlands. He assaulted Bihać repeatedly, although unsuccessfully, and conquered Bužim, Cazin and other fortifications along the Una in 1576,

[6] Dietmar Heil, *Die Reichspolitik Bayerns unter der Regierung Herzog Albrechts V. (1550-1579)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 452.

[7] Heil, *Die Reichspolitik Bayerns*, 513.

[8] Nataša Štefanec, *Heretik Njegova Veličanstva. Povijest o Jurju IV Zrinskom i njegovu rodu* [Heretic of His Majesty. History on Juraj Zrinski IV and His Kinship] (Zagreb: Barbat, 2001), 205–211.

[9] Heil, *Die Reichspolitik Bayerns*, 510, n. 62.

[10] Milan Kruhek, *Karlovac. Utvrde, granice i ljudi* [Karlovac: Fortresses, Borders, and People] (Karlovac: Matica hrvatska, 1995), 131–149.

Ostrožac and Zrin in 1577, and finally Gvozdansko and Drežnik in 1578. Most of these conquests occurred after a truce between the emperor and sultan was concluded in 1576.[11] According to truces which were periodically prolonged from 1547 on, military expeditions in which less than four to five thousand soldiers participated were not considered breaches of truce.[12] Ferhad-bey was careful to adhere to these limitations.[13] The Imperial ambassador at the Sublime Porte protested against these conquests and demanded that the conquered fortresses be returned, but to no avail. During this period, Bihać was the key fortress that anchored the Habsburg defense of the Una. It was besieged multiple times and Habsburg commanders had no doubt that conquering it was one of the main objectives of Ferhad-bey's efforts.[14]

These losses compelled the Habsburg court to establish a better command structure of the Military Frontier, by dividing it in sectors commanded by members of the imperial family. At the beginning of 1578, Archduke Charles II of Habsburg was given supreme command of the defense of Croatia and Slavonia, which he was supposed to finance with his incomes from Inner Austria. He immediately summoned a diet of his lands in Bruck an der Mur to secure funding for this purpose. He was given authority over all subordinate commanders and military officials, including, most significantly, the Croatian ban himself. Christoph Ungnad was appointed to the latter office and was supposed to work under the archduke's command.[15]

Archduke Charles was, at least outwardly, a hands-on type of commander. Immediately after taking command, he meant to embark on a grand tour of the Croatian and Slavonian frontier. However, this never materialized.[16] Kobenzl reported to Duke Albert on August 11, 1578, at the beginning of the Croatian

[11] Ive Mažuran, *Hrvati i Osmansko Carstvo* [Croats and the Ottoman Empire] (Zagreb: Golden marketing, 1998), 142–147; Milan Kruhek, *Krajiške utvrde i obrana hrvatskog kraljevstva tijekom 16. stoljeća* [Fortresses of the Military Frontier and the Defense of the Croatian Kingdom in the 16th Century] (Zagreb: Institut za suvremenu povijest, 1995), 268–269.

[12] Mirko Valentić, "Hrvati u stogodišnjem ratu" [Croats in the Hundred Years' War], in *Sisačka bitka 1593.* [The Battle of Sisak in 1593], eds. Milan Kruhek and Ivo Goldstein (Zagreb-Sisak: Zavod za hrvatsku povijest Filozofskoga fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 1994), 19–31, at 26; Leopold Toifl, "Das Steirische Proviantwesen und die Windische Grenze bis zum Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts," in *Sisačka bitka 1593.*, eds. Milan Kruhek and Ivo Goldstein (Zagreb; Sisak: Zavod za hrvatsku povijest Filozofskoga fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 1994), 109–124, at 112.

[13] Valentić, "Hrvati u stogodišnjem ratu," 29.

[14] Damir Stanić, *Pograničavanje: Bihać i Bihaćka kapetanija 1527. – 1592.* [Bordering: Bihać and Bihać Captaincy 1527 – 1592] (Zagreb: Hrvatski državni arhiv, 2024), 101–104. See also Mislav Gregl, Neven Kovačev, Nataša Štefanec, "Prilozi za povijest diplomacije i vojnokrajiškog ratovanja u 16. stoljeću" [Contributions to the History of Diplomacy and Warfare in Military Border in the 16th Century], *Historijski zbornik* 63 (2010), no. 1: 169–189.

[15] Mažuran, *Hrvati i Osmansko Carstvo*, 146; Štefanec, *Država ili ne*, 190–191.

[16] Štefanec, *Država ili ne*, 195–196.

Expedition, that the archduke was considering going to Zagreb and staying there for a while, to the great displeasure of his counselors.[17] Luckily for them, this never happened either. Nevertheless, he showed initiative and decided it was time to check Ottoman advances, as the threat was becoming only greater with the passage of time.

In early 1578, Archduke Charles acknowledged that the lack of resistance to Ottoman encroachment presented a threat for the Habsburg domain and that urgent action was required.[18] Kobenzl's report to the duke of Bavaria of August 9, 1578 reflects this sense of immediate threat and urgency, and an emphasis on the belief that the Austrian lands are themselves threatened. According to him, the river Una played a crucial role in the defense of the whole swath of land between the Adriatic and Zagreb, containing Istria, the Karst, Gorica and Slavonia. If the enemy controlled the Una in its entirety, including the fortress of Bihać, all of these lands would have to be abandoned, and the same fate would soon befall Carniola, Styria and Carinthia, and many neighboring lands as well.[19] The map which Kobenzl himself drew and added to this report has Una labeled as "the water on the control of which depends the salvation or destruction of this land and many neighboring domains."[20] The defense of Austrian lands therefore depended on controlling the Una, and by defending Croatia, the archduke was protecting his own lands. That is how Kobenzl presented the issue to the Bavarian duke, probably in the hope that the duke would see the defense of Croatia as being in his own best interest as well.

Due to the strategic situation presented in the previous paragraph, the first great endeavor Archduke Charles embarked on in his capacity as supreme commander was a grand campaign which was supposed to push the Ottomans back across the Una. Denying the Una and its crossings to the Ottomans was not a new idea.[21] However, this time a sense of urgency was driving the Habsburg planners to commit significant resources to it. Preparations were extensive, although

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[17] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 32r-v.

[18] Štefanec, *Država ili ne*, 140–141.

[19] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 22v: *So Ir f. dl. zu solher expedition gezwungen und gedrungen, nachdem der veind die Vna een und herdißhalb bekomen, ausser der vessten Bihitsh und in dem menigelich concurriert. Da Bihitsh auch verlorn, wie man es dan, der profantierung und viller anderer ursachen halben jeczigier weiß, disen herbst hinauß unwidersprechenlich verlassen müssen, das der veind nit allain den ganzen tractum gegen dem Adriatishen Mär und fort das Isterreich (sic!) sambt dem Karsst und halben graffschafft Gorrz, sonder auch das halb Windishland, gegen Hrastouitz und Agram hinab, auch gegen disem lande Steyer, und dan fort gegen Crain ubersich, den Metlinger poden, was zwishen der Save und Kulb gelegen, in continenti, mit der zeit aber, und unlangst, das land Steyer, Crain, Kärndten und andere mer anraichende lande, unlengst mit shlechter müe, bekomen hatte.*

[20] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 26: *an dises wasserstrumens eroberung, ist der n. o. landt und viller anderer anraichender fürstenthumb gnesen oder verderben gelegen.*

[21] Stanić, *Pograničavanje*, 106–107.

the main problem surfaced even in these early stages. It was a known fact that the procurement system was inadequate.[22] A great gathering of troops, such as the one necessary for the Croatian Expedition, was virtually impossible to feed, and the archduke's inspectors advised that desperate measures were to be taken, such as denying fodder to hussar horses.[23] Kobenzl was painfully aware of these difficulties. He wrote to the duke of Bavaria that he would not have believed the enormity of the effort Archduke Charles had to devote to procuring supplies for the army. It seems that even he was not entirely convinced those efforts were sufficient, as he expressed only hope that they would be.[24] However, they were not, as the problem with supplies will keep surfacing throughout the campaign.

Procurement was not the only problem. Maintaining peace with the sultan was one of the main concerns of the Habsburgs. Caution was advised even when repulsing Ottoman assaults.[25] This means that the Croatian Expedition was a risk in itself, but making sure it would not provoke a reaction from the sultan was what hobbled it. Kobenzl noted in his report from August 9 that it was neither advisable nor reasonable to break the truce with the Ottomans, even though they were constantly doing enormous damage, but that the fall of Bihać, and therefore a complete loss of the line on the Una, would be too disastrous to be allowed.[26] It was, then, a risk worth taking. Nevertheless, it remained a concern not to break the truce, and Kobenzl noted in his report from September 12, when the campaign had already stalled, that the emperor was extremely concerned about this matter. This contributed to the cessation of the expedition.[27]

The importance of Bihać was mentioned before. It was considered to be one of the most important fortresses on the Military Frontier, and on the Croatian Frontier in particular. At the diet in Bruck an der Mur, it was decided that a sum of twenty thousand florins would be allotted for the defensive works in Bihać. The only other fortress on the Croatian frontier which deserved special mention on that occasion was Slunj, and that one received a much smaller sum of five thousand florins.[28] According to the royal inspection of the frontier fortresses from 1563,

[22] Štefanec, *Država ili ne*, 196, 212.

[23] Štefanec, *Država ili ne*, 439–440.

[24] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 24v: *Waß Ir f. dl. dan mit der profiant für grosse müeh und arbeit gehaben das kunden E. f. g. nit glauben. Aber Got lob, man hofft, guetter massen darmit aufkomen sein.*

[25] Štefanec, *Država ili ne*, 274–278.

[26] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 24r: *Nachdem uns weder ratlich noch thuenlich den friden mit dem feind zu brechen, ob er (*inserted*: gleich) woll teglich sträfft alles, so er khan, verhört und verderbt, und aber je Bihitsh one merkhliche groß diser und der anraichenden lande verderben nit verlassen werden mögen.*

[27] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 70v: *Weill die kai. mas. stündlich shreiben und ir d. dl. vor namen dem Veind zum fridbrih kain ursach zugeben.*

[28] Kruhek, *Krajiške utvrde*, 284–285.

the strategic importance of Bihać was enormous. Even then it was thought that its loss would bring about a collapse of the entire defensive line on the Una, and therefore endanger the Austrian lands as well as Croatia. Bihać also controlled a ring of smaller fortresses around it. Of these, we will mention only those which are relevant for this paper. The same inspection reported that Brekovica and Ostrožac were stone castles high up on the cliffside above the Una valley. Topličkі Turanj was a watchtower with a relatively weak position. Cazin was assessed to be a well-built fortress which, unlike other ones, required very little repair work.[29] According to the same source, Bužim was also a very well-built fortress.[30] This is in contrast to what Kobenzl had to say about it in 1578 – according to him, Bužim was a very bad fortress.[31] It is not surprising, however, that border fortifications deteriorated over time, because they needed constant repairs, as they were often attacked or otherwise damaged.

The problem with supplying the fortresses that made up the defensive line of the Military Frontier was so great that it strained contemporary abilities. The contemporaries were well aware of that. The office of quartermaster had been created in 1542 to address it.[32] In May 1578, Archduke Charles reformed this service and issued instructions about securing provisions for the Frontier. Hans Franz von Neuhaus was appointed as quartermaster general, who had to work with the estates of Carinthia, Carniola and Styria to handle military procurement.[33] Supplies for the frontier fortresses were transported mostly on covered rafts from Radkersburg to the warehouses downstream on the rivers Mura and Drava.[34] Indeed, Kobenzl reported that the Archduke Charles had sent six vessels from Radkersburg with supplies for the Croatian Expedition, and that no one was allowed to take anything from them except for that express purpose – which reveals that pilfering supplies was not unheard of.[35]

Bringing these supplies to frontier fortresses was a Gordian knot, as great military forces were needed to safely bring them in, and trying to get those forces through was enough to provoke the Ottomans. It is not that Ottoman commanders did not know that. Lack of provisions in the frontier fortresses was part of the reason why Ferhad-bey's campaigns in 1576–1578 were so successful. According

[29] Kruhek, *Krajiške utvrde*, 209–214.

[30] Kruhek, *Krajiške utvrde*, 215.

[31] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 25r: *Bussin, wiewoll dises ain seer woses hauß ist...*

[32] Leopold Toifl, "Das Steirische Proviantwesen," 110.

[33] Leopold Toifl, "Das Steirische Proviantwesen," 113. On the attempts to reform this office in the late 1570s, see Štefanec, *Država ili ne*, 239–243.

[34] Leopold Toifl, "Das Steirische Proviantwesen," 119–120.

[35] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 24v: *So habe Ir f. dl. 6. prukhen schiff mit aller zuegeher von Rakhers-purg 4 meill von danen, hinein geshikht dan ausser derselben man nit woll was außrichten oder fortkomen mögen*.

to one report, garrisons of some of the border outposts resembled beggars more than soldiers.[36] Some of the fortresses fell because their garrisons were unpaid and undersupplied, due to mutiny or treason.[37] It was apparently not difficult for the Ottomans to persuade a garrison to surrender, incite a mutiny or suborn traitors. A good example is the great castle of Zrin, which had surrendered to Ferhad-bey.[38] It was a genuine concern that Bihać would suffer the same fate, and that was not to be allowed.

Hauling supplies from abroad was necessary because in Croatia itself resources were scarce. This was compounded by the fact that in the Croatian lands themselves, prices of supplies were not regulated when it came to military procurement, and local nobles would take advantage of that to turn a profit.[39] It should also not be disregarded that large armies on the move would force the local population to flee, and that the border area itself was severely depopulated to begin with, which made foraging difficult or impossible. When approaching the front lines, an army would have to march over a barren and unpeopled terrain. Juraj Rattkay noted in his mid-17th-century account of the Croatian Expedition that the area which the Habsburg army had to traverse was difficult, mountainous and desolate.[40] He was correct. Inspectors who examined the terrain through which the Croatian Expedition was to pass in 1578 determined that most of it is impassable to wagons and that beasts of burden were to be used instead. Storage facilities were virtually non-existent and the army would have to carry all the supplies with it, both for its own needs and for provisioning the frontier fortresses.[41]

The question of paying for the supplies and the army which was to use them was equally great and the duke of Bavaria had a reason to be concerned over it, as much of the funding for this purpose was voted on in the *Reichstag* of the Holy Roman Empire. This was a necessary, although begrudgingly so, source of funds

[36] Gunther Erich Rothenberg, *Austrijska vojna granica u Hrvatskoj*, vol. 1: *1522-1747* [*The Austrian Military Border in Croatia: 1522-1747*], trans. Gojko Mišković (Zagreb: Srpsko kulturno društvo Prosvjeta, 2022), 57. Soldiers' wages were almost always in arrears and even officers were underpaid. Some turned to brigandry, such as the infamous captain of Koprivnica Hans Globizer. See Danijela Cofek, Nataša Štefanec, "Vojnokrajiške institucije u praksi: Slavonska krajina 1578. godine" [Military Border in Practice: Slavonian Border in 1578], *Podravina* 10 (2011), no. 19: 5–44.

[37] Stanić, *Pograničavanje*, 103–104.

[38] The commander of Zrin was struggling to come up with excuses for the surrender of the fortress, including laying the blame on his superiors who did not send him the reinforcements he requested. See Hrvoje Kekez, Krešimir Regan, *Zrin – Srednjovjekovno sijelo knezova Babonića i Zrinskih. Tvrdi grad, urbana aglomeracija i posjed* [Zrin – The Medieval See of the Babonić and Zrinski Dukes. The Castle, Urban Settlement and Domain] (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2020), 80–82.

[39] Štefanec, *Država ili ne*, 176 and 341.

[40] Juraj Rattkay, *Spomen na kraljeve i banove kraljevstava Dalmacije, Hrvatske i Slavonije* [*Memoria regum et banorum regnorum Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Sclavoniae*], trans. Zrinka Blažević et al. (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2001), 224.

[41] Štefanec, *Država ili ne*, 436–437.

for the defense of Croatia and the rest of the Military Frontier. The estates of Inner Austrian lands, and Archduke Charles himself, did not wish to rely on aid from the Empire.[42] Besides, they way in which it was spent was a source of dispute. For example, Styrian Estates complained about most of the funds from the Empire being sent to Croatia, due to Ottoman conquests along the Una, while it was in their interest to focus on the defense of Slavonia.[43] Nevertheless, Imperial funds made up a significant percentage of the Habsburg military budget. In 1576, the Imperial estates pledged at the *Reichstag* of Regensburg to send eight hundred thousand guilders per year, for the next ten years, to finance the defense from the Ottomans; of this yearly sum, Archduke Charles received 135,000 guilders.[44] Kobenzl refers to this aid in his letter to Duke Albert of Bavaria of August 9, and its role in financing the Croatian Expedition, referring to the duke's personal involvement in the matter.[45]

Bavaria was indeed instrumental in securing as much aid as possible from the Empire, although not in the volume which the Habsburgs would have preferred. At the *Reichstag* of Speyer in 1570, Bavarian representatives tried to secure a hefty yearly sum for the defense from the Ottomans, but had to be careful not to antagonize the Imperial estates, especially the Protestants, and, besides, had to consider the sorry state of the duke's own treasury.[46] The same pattern repeated itself in Regensburg, where Bavaria refused the emperor's suggestion of universal taxation, but supported continuing with the usual way of gathering monetary aid.[47] Kobenzl pleaded with the Bavarian duke to continue aiding the defense of the Military Frontier after the Croatian Expedition ended, claiming that the fate of Carniola and half of Styria depended on the preservation of Bihać and the newly reconquered fortresses. This would require an enormous effort but, as Kobenzl emphasized pointedly, hopefully the duke and their other neighbors would not desert them. After all, as he wrote, they would be helping themselves by helping to keep the Ottomans at bay.[48]

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[42] Štefanec, *Država ili ne*, 158.

[43] Štefanec, *Država ili ne*, 228.

[44] Štefanec, *Država ili ne*, 350–351.

[45] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 24v: *Man versucht sich aber auß dem Reich der hilflichen hand. Darunder dan E. f. dl. nit das wenigiste erheben werden kunden.*

[46] Heil, *Die Reichspolitik Bayerns*, 469–473.

[47] Heil, *Die Reichspolitik Bayerns*, 525–528.

[48] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 82v: *Aber wir wir hoffen zu Gott das e. f. g. und die andere negste benachbarte, ir dl. und uns nit verlassten, sonder jenes steiff helten werden. Res tua agitur paries cum proximus ardet.*

The Army and its Commanders

Now that the circumstances in which the Croatian Expedition took place are explained, let us turn to the campaign itself and see how it was organized. As with much of the matters concerning the Habsburg state in the 16th century, its organization required many factors to work in concert, which was rarely accomplished. Securing the support and approval of many of the local governing bodies was an achievement in itself. In one of his letters to the Bavarian duke, Kobenzl bitterly remarked on the reluctance of Austrian estates to focus on defensive matters, saying that it looks as if they did not want to listen to the advice of the knowledgeable and the wise.[49] Similar bickering took place at the Inner Austrian diet in Bruck on the Mur in early 1578, where religious matters took center stage instead of defensive concerns.[50]

In Croatia, things were not very different. Croatia and Slavonia were countries separate from Austria and were nominally kingdoms within the Kingdom of Hungary. Securing their support for the Croatian Expedition was therefore also necessary, even though their contribution to it turned out to be minimal. Veit von Hallegg, the commander-in-chief of the Slavonian Frontier, was sent to the Croatian-Slavonian Diet in Zagreb in July 1578 to secure the support of the estates both for the upcoming expedition and for defensive works on the Frontier. His efforts were met with difficulty and were not entirely successful.[51] The Croatian and Slavonian estates obstinately refused to accept the supreme command of the field commander appointed by the archduke and declared that their troops would march only with their ban, who would not take orders from anyone else.[52] This means that the command structure of the army was compromised even before the expedition started. Judging by what Kobenzl had to say about the behavior of the ban during and after the expedition, which will be mentioned below, the latter took full advantage of his position and barely participated in the campaign.

The field commander (*Feldobrist*) of the expedition was the archduke's majordomo and *Landeshauptmann* of Carinthia Georg von Khevenhüller, one of his closest counselors.[53] His appointment was more of a disappointment, judging by Kobenzl's opinion of it. Ideally, the expedition would have been led by the archduke himself but, failing that, a person with enough authority for all other participants to defer to it had to be appointed to lead them. The choice fell on Khevenhüller, although he was not very experienced in military matters. Nevertheless, he had

[49] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 43r: *Es hatt das ansehen alls wen sy scientes ac prudentes verderben wolten*.

[50] Štefanec, *Država ili ne*, 165–168.

[51] Štefanec, *Država ili ne*, 178–179.

[52] Kruhek, *Krajiške utvde*, 279.

[53] Štefanec, *Država ili ne*, 183.

by his side many experienced warriors, chiefly Hans Fernberger. Kobenzl hoped that would be enough.[54]

With sixty-seven years of age and a lifetime of military service, Fernberger was evidently an experienced man. Nevertheless, he had been commander of the Croatian Frontier for only a brief while in 1578 and 1579.[55] Kobenzl wrote that soon after the Croatian Expedition, there was word about some bad blood between Fernberger and certain unnamed Carniolans and Croats, and that it was uncertain whether he would remain in the archduke's service.[56] It seems that Fernberger did not leave a good impression during his short tenure.

As for the army itself, in his letter to the duke of Bavaria from August 9, 1578, Kobenzl provided a detailed description of the troops Archduke Charles had mustered for the Croatian Expedition.[57] This is as follows:

- at least 4,000 troops, cavalry and infantry, under the command of the Croatian and Slavonian ban Christoph Ungnad
- 100 mounted arquebusiers and 200 haramias (light infantry) from the troops of the Slavonian Frontier, which would be provided by its commander Veit von Hallegg (without his personal participation)
- 124 cavalrymen and 600 arquebusiers on foot (*Hakenschütze*) from the district of Celje
- 400 cavalrymen hired by Khevenhüller in his capacity as *Landeshauptmann* of Carinthia, to which "many" *Hofjunker*s were joined
- 350 cavalrymen from Carniola, also under Khevenhüller's direct command
- ten infantry companies (*Fendlein*) from Tyrol, Carinthia and Carniola, also under Khevenhüller's direct command
- 100 cavalrymen under the command of the Field Marshal Ludwig Ungnad (Christoph's brother)

[54] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 22r: *...ab woll der herr Khevenhiller, dem kriegswösen nit vill beygewont. Jedoch, weill bey jeczigen beshwerlichen leisten und zeiten, die emulation ubershwengelich ist, so haben Ir f. dl. in Irem abwösen, dem werth ain solhe person preficiern müssen, deren jederman primas deferierte, wie es dan gegen ime herrn Khevenhiller beshiecht. Sonsten hette man die precedenz ains und das andere disstintiert, und besorgenlich der massen, wie vor es segen, gehaufft, und darumber so haben Ir f. dl. auf ire geshlossen, und wir hofen zu Gott, das er das sache allenthalben rechts thuen, und sy fruchtberlich verrichten würdet, zumall weill er den Fernberger und vill andere kriegserfarne bey sich hatt, die sich aufs wosen woll verseen und hofenlich neben ime nichts ubersehen werden.*

[55] Štefanec, *Država ili ne*, 210.

[56] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 109r: *Sonder ist von irer f. dl. erfodert worden, damit sy selbs mündlich mit ime handlen mögen, auf das er lenger im dienst pleibe will es shrifftlich bey ime nit zuerhalten gewest und, und wendet fürnemblich dise ursachen für, das ime etliche Crainer und Crabaten, ab und miß gönstig sein.*

[57] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 23v–24r.

- 600 hussars, newly raised by Achaz von Thurn
- 1500 haramias, newly raised by Hans Khissl
- 600 arquebusiers on foot from Gorica[58]
- 300 mounted arquebusiers and 600 light cavalrymen, together with "at least" (*aufs wenigist*) 2,000 Croatian and German infantrymen, under the command of Hans Fernberger.

This gives a total of 11,474, plus ten infantry companies of unspecified size from Tyrol, Carinthia and Carniola, and an unspecified, but probably small number of *Hofjunker*s. Of the total, at least 2,574 were mounted, plus an untold number of cavalrymen under the command of the ban. This is in accordance with earlier assessments of the size of the army gathered for the Croatian Expedition. According to the data brought by Damir Stanić, Khevenhüller's army consisted of over 10,000 infantry and cavalry, five hundred draught horses for hauling artillery, about five hundred pioneers, and eighteen cannons.[59]

The prevalence of troops armed with firearms in the army is noticeable. This was not unusual for Habsburg armies in the second half of the sixteenth century, which consisted of mercenaries skilled in the use of firearms.[60] This extended to the cavalry as well. Mounted arquebusiers carried wheel-lock guns, which were introduced in the mid-sixteenth century and did not require a lit fuse to be fired.[61] Even hussars were armed with pistols. Haramias were drawn from the local populace and fought under the command of their voivode; they were rarely armored, but usually carried long-barreled guns.[62]

Kobenzl specified that the troops under Khevenhüller's command gathered by Ljubljana on August 4, and those under the ban by Jastrebarsko on August 6, while other troops presumably gathered in other locations. It is not clear whether Achaz von Thurn and Hans Khissl personally participated in the campaign. Achaz von Thurn was one of the members of Duke Charles's brand-new Court War Council, nominated by the Carniolan estates as one of the most experienced

[58] This was added in the postscript of the letter; it is not specified under whose command this troop was. DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 27r.

[59] Stanić, *Pograničavanje*, 108.

[60] Kenneth Warren Chase, *Firearms: A Global History to 1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 91–92.

[61] Chase, *Firearms*, 69–70; Józef Kelenik, "The Military Revolution in Hungary," in *Ottomans, Hungarians and Habsburgs in Central Europe. The Military Confines in the Era of Ottoman Conquest*, eds. Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor (Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, 2000), 117–159 at 131–132.

[62] Nataša Štefanec, *Slavonska i petrinjska krajina (1577. – 1678.). Registri vojske kao izvor za vojnu i demografsku povijest središnje Hrvatske* [Military Border of Slavonia and Petrinja (1577 – 1678). Muster Rolls as Sources for Military and Demographic History of Central Croatia] (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2025), 14–16.

candidates.[63] However, it is possible that he only raised the troops that were listed as his. It is important to note that only 750 cavalrymen and the aforementioned ten companies of infantry were under Khevenhüller's direct command. Other troops had their own commanders, which were in theory supposed to defer to the commander-in-chief. However, it is obvious that the backbone of the army consisted of Fernberger's and Christoph Ungnad's troops. That was its main weakness, as neither of these men presented themselves in a particularly favorable light during the campaign.

Kobenzl also gave a detailed list of the army's ordnance. It consisted of two "singing ladies" (*Singerinen*), two "cartanes," four full and two half-falconets, some small cannons (*Scharffentinleins*), and a "goodly number" of wall guns (double hook-guns, *Doppelhaken*) together with ammunition and draught horses. Kobenzl noted that these were difficult to come by and were obtained at great cost.[64] Indeed, an artillery train required great numbers of draught animals,[65] not to mention animal handlers, and a huge amount of food and fodder for them all. As many as 378 horses and 73 carriages were used for transporting artillery from Carniola during the Croatian Expedition.[66] Each of the two "singing ladies", which were taken from the Varaždin armory, was hauled by a team of thirty horses, and a stunning total of 276 horses was required for the transport of only these two cannons, their ammunition, undercarriages and other equipment.[67] The artillery train alone, therefore, had more than 650 draught animals, and their total number was certainly much higher. It should also be kept in mind that animals die, go lame and get sick. Those that did would have had to be replaced by buying new ones. All of this means that hauling all that ordnance without it being delivered to the assigned place would have been an enormous waste, and it ultimately turned out to be just that.

Double hook-guns are counted as artillery here and should be understood as portable wall guns, while falconets were light cannons.[68] Both categories of firearms had similar penetrative power and could not be fired without a rest; the

[63] Štefanec, *Država ili ne*, 217–218.

[64] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 24r: *Von geshütz fart man zwo singerin, zwo cartanen, vier gantze und zwei halbe falconeten, etliche scharffentindlein und ain guette anzall topplhäggen mit notwendigen munition und was darzue geferd*.

[65] Chase, *Firearms*, 70.

[66] Nataša Štefanec, "Arms Race on the Habsburg-Ottoman Border in the 16th Century: Arsenals, Small Firearms, Artillery and Ammunition on the Croatian and Slavonian Military Border," in *Life on the Ottoman Border: Essays in Honour of Nenad Moačanin*, ed. Vjeran Kursar (Zagreb: University of Zagreb, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences – FF press, 2022), 323–362 at 331.

[67] Štefanec, "Arms Race," 362.

[68] Chase, *Firearms*, 92.

hooks on wall guns were used to fix them to a rest, such as those on a wall.[69] The captain of Ostrožac described the cannons which the Ottomans were firing at his fortress in October 1578 as falconets shooting lead balls about the size of chicken eggs,[70] which means that Habsburg falconets were about the same. *Scharffentinleins* were very light cannons, with barrels about seven feet long, which fired half-pound balls. Cartanes were larger artillery pieces, 25- or 50-pounders, depending on the period. Judging by the arms register of the Military Frontier from 1577, they were of the heavier sort then. "Singing ladies" were very large, usually 50-pound cannons from the basilisk family, also called "nightingales." They could be monstrously large, with two of them recorded in the Slavonian Frontier which fired 250-pound iron balls.[71] Khevenhüller's artillery train therefore consisted of four heavy, six light and "some" small cannons, and a "goodly number" of wall guns. This would have considerably increased the amount of artillery in the Croatian Frontier and strengthened the position of Bihać. In 1577, in the Croatian Frontier there were only four large and about forty smaller cannons, and less than four hundred wall guns, many of which were damaged.[72] Indeed, heavy cannons, capable of counter-battery fire, were rare in the Military Frontier in general and were reserved for strategically important fortresses.[73] Transporting more of such cannons to Bihać emphasized the importance it had in Habsburg military plans.

When considering the size of the Habsburg army, we should bear in mind that the number of the ban's troops, which Kobenzl listed as at least four thousand, is uncertain. Kobenzl was not sure of their size or composition and gave only an estimate of the total number. Although this was nominally the army of the Kingdoms of Croatia and Slavonia, there were problems with maintaining it since the beginning of the 16th century, and it consistently dwindled until by 1576 it numbered three hundred cavalry and three hundred infantry.[74] In his last report to the Duke of Bavaria, Kobenzl noted that he believed that it numbered even less, two hundred cavalry and the same number of infantry, although this number likely swelled temporarily, due to the call to arms issued by the estates. However,

[69] Kelenik, "The Military Revolution," 124–125.

[70] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 97r: *…mit falchkhoneten pleyen khugeln aines hüenner ay groß...*

[71] Wilhelm Dilich, *Kriegsbuch, darin die Alte und Neue Militaria eigentlich beschrieben* (Kassel, 1607), 87 and 229. See also W. Kurrelmeyer, "Kartaune, Kartauwe," *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 35 (1920), no. 1: 63–75. Note that the size and caliber of these cannons could vary. Nataša Štefanec explains the size and number of various cannons in the Croatian and Slavonian Frontier in Štefanec, "Arms race," 336–340. Note that Kobenzl lists the pieces of ordnance supplied for the Croatian Expedition from the heaviest to the lightest, which would make the "singing ladies" the largest cannons in its artillery train.

[72] Kruhek, *Krajiške utvrde*, 274.

[73] Kelenik, "The Military Revolution," 137.

[74] Štefanec, *Država ili ne*, 254.

the ban was mostly absent, and he stayed with the army of the Croatian Expedition for only three weeks.[75]

The ban himself, Christoph Ungnad, had been expected to take his office in 1576, but he arrived in Croatia only in February 1578. He was very disappointed with the diminished role and prestige of his title. Although it cannot be denied that he was one of the "experienced men" mentioned by Kobenzl, with decades' worth of military service, he was also a very proud and quarrelsome person, reluctant to take orders from the archduke.[76] It is therefore not surprising that Kobenzl wryly noted that no one knows what the ban actually did on the Croatian Frontier and that he absconded to his wife's estates in Hungary after abandoning Khevenhüller's army, "taking a leave."[77]

There is also another hint at strife within the army, which might have contributed to the failure of the campaign. The report of Hans Wallner, commander of Ostrožac, from October 1578, which Kobenzl had forwarded to the duke of Bavaria, stated that the fortress had been garrisoned by sixteen German and forty-two Croatian soldiers. After the Ottomans besieged the fortress, the Croatian soldiers mutinied and took the key to the gate from the commander by force, surrendering themselves and Ostrožac to the Ottomans in exchange for safe conduct to Tržac, another fortress further to the west which was still in Habsburg hands.[78] It should be borne in mind that the army mustered for the expedition consisted of various types of troops, from different regions and with vastly different wages.

Habsburg commanders preferred hiring German soldiers for service in Croatia, because they were better equipped (and, consequently, better paid) than their local counterparts.[79] However, it seems that they were also more trustworthy. We have seen that Ostrožac fell due to mutiny. This was probably the case with Cazin as well. Commander of Cazin, Philip Volpracht, wrote to the captain of Bihać that the Croats under his command kept deserting and asked the captain to send him more men, be they Germans or Croats, because his garrison was already at less than half of its original strength and because he could not trust the remaining Croats. Their voivode was apparently an honest man, but the rest

[75] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 109v: *Sonder e. f. g. mögen nur sicherlich woll glauben, ab ime alls ban im Windishland ir. kr. mas. gleichwoll in die 200 pfard und sovil (*written in*: fueßknecht) (*deleted*: kriegsvolkh) underhalten. So hatt man doch dieselben in vill jaren, weniger ine gesehen, ausser was er am negsten, im augusto, zu unserm feldobristen, mit den Windishen stenden gestossen, und etwo ain drey wochen bey im pliben.*

[76] Štefanec, *Država ili ne*, 266–272.

[77] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 109v: *Darnach ist er sambt den seinigen vershwunden, und seidher dinen nit gesehen worden, sonder zeucht etwo daussen in Hungern bey seines weibs güetern umb und wie man sagen will, so nemb er urlaub, und werde nimer herein komen.*

[78] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 96r–97r.

[79] Štefanec, *Država ili ne*, 381.

were insubordinate and had already threatened to mutiny. This letter also got into Kobenzl's hands and a copy of it was sent to Duke Albert.[80] Interestingly, in his own letters Kobenzl made no mention of Croatian soldiers being thought of as untrustworthy. Others perhaps did see them as such, as it seems that fortresses on the Slavonian Frontier, at least, were garrisoned mostly by German troops.[81]

The Army Goes Forth

Assessments of the Croatian Expedition were almost uniformly negative among Croatian historians. Juraj Rattkay is an exception, but he was obviously wrong when he claimed that it was a roaring success, which brought all the fortresses along the Una back under Habsburg command.[82] Vjekoslav Klaić was far more critical of the campaign, calling it an utter failure. However, Klaić assumed that its goal was to engage in open war with Ferhad-bey.[83] As we will see, that was not so. Ive Mažuran hews close to Klaić's words and follows him in his judgment of the campaign,[84] and other Croatian historians also called it a failure.[85]

It seems that most of the negative opinions of this expedition stems from the incomplete understanding of its goals. Klaić had insufficient data at his disposal and therefore envisioned it as a grand military campaign which was supposed to crush Ferhad-bey's forces.[86] Among modern Croatian historians, Milan Kruhek

[80] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 91v–92r: *…sy wellen mir auf das eiste volkh es sey Teüshen oder Crabaten shikhen, zu besseren erhaltung der vesstung, dan dennen Crabaten die ich do habe ist gewislich nit vill zu trauen, den der weywoda wol redlich ist, aber die anderen ist gewalting zubesorgen.*

[81] Filip Šimunjak, "Slavonska vojna krajina 1577. godine – prilog demografskom istraživanju krajiške vojske na prostoru Slavonije – Unutarnje i vanjske migracije, imenska struktura i širenje hrvatskog identiteta" [The Slavonian Military Frontier in 1577 – A Contribution to the Demographic Study of Slavonian Military Units (Migrations, Etymology, Croatian Identity)], *Podravina* 20 (2021), no. 40: 35–63 at 42–43.

[82] Rattkay, *Spomen na kraljeve i banove*, 224.

[83] Vjekoslav Klaić, *Povijest Hrvata od najstarijih vremena do svršetka XIX stoljeća*, vol. 5: *Četvrto doba: Vladanje kraljeva iz porodice Habsburga (1527–1740)* [The History of Croats from the Oldest Time to the End of the 19th Century, vol. 5: The Fourth Age: The Reign of Kings from the Habsburg Family (1527–1740)], ed. Trpimir Macan (Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Matice hrvatske, 1988), 423–424.

[84] Mažuran, *Hrvati i Osmansko Carstvo*, 148.

[85] For example, Štefanac, *Heretik njegova veličanstva*, 111.

[86] Although Klaić does not reveal his sources, one of his followers, Rudolf Horvat, does. In Rudolf Horvat, *Povijest Hrvatske*, vol. 1: *Od najstarijeg doba do g. 1657* [*History of Croatia*, vol. 1: *From the Oldest Time to 1657*] (Zagreb: Tiskara "Merkur", 1924), 265–266. Klaić's account of the Croatian Expedition is repeated almost verbatim, but the sources for it are also listed. Those are a document from 1582 listing various damages inflicted by the Ottomans to Habsburg subjects published in Radoslav Lopašić, *Spomenici hrvatske Krajine*, vol. 1: *1479 – 1610* [Sources on the Croatian Frontier, vol. 1: 1479–1610] (Zagreb: Knjižara L. Hartmana (Kugli i Deutsch), 1884), doc. 16, p. 26 and excerpts and regesta published in Radoslav Lopašić, "Prilozi za poviest Hrvatske XVI. i XVII. vieka iz štajerskoga

correctly assessed that the purpose of the Croatian Expedition was to break the Ottoman encirclement of Bihać and connect it to the rest of the defensive belt of the Military Frontier.[87] Due to this encirclement, bringing supplies to Bihać was perilous and the fortress was in constant danger of running out of them.[88] Damir Stanić, who brings a quite detailed reconstruction of the Croatian Expedition, also correctly states that the main objective of the Croatian Expedition was to relieve Bihać. However, his assessment of the plan for taking control of the Una differs significantly from that reported by Kobenzl. According to Stanić's data, besides Ostrožac and other strongholds on the left bank of the river, the fortresses on the right bank were also to be taken, including Kostajnica. It was apparently thought that this would cause the Ottomans to surrender the whole line of fortifications along the Una, including Cazin, Bužim and Gvozdansko. A wide sweep through the Ottoman-held lands in Lika was also planned. If this plan failed, the contingency plan was to use the army to build defensive blockhouses along the front line.[89]

Kobenzl allows us to make a more nuanced assessment of the Croatian Expedition, as he provides a first-hand account of how the contemporaries understood it. He lists the goals of the expedition clearly in his letter to the duke of Bavaria from August 9, 1578. The main goal was to supply Bihać with artillery and ammunition and, most importantly, with food, to repair its damaged fortifications and to reinforce its garrison. The secondary goal was to advance on the enemy's fortifications and to recover as many of them as possible, but only if the opportunity to do so presented itself. Possible objectives were Drežnik, Ostrožac, Cazin, Bužim, Gvozdansko and Zrin. That would bring the Una back under Habsburg control and the lands beyond it would be, as Kobenzl says, safer than they had been in the last fifty, or even a hundred years.[90]

It is clear that the plan did not include serious sieges and that enemy strongholds were to be seized only if doing so was convenient. According to Kobenzl,

zemaljskoga arhiva u Gradcu" [Contributions to the History of Croatia in the 16th and 17th Century from the Styrian State Archive in Graz], *Starine* 19 (1887): 1–80 at 43.

87 Kruhek, *Krajiške utvrde*, 291–292.

88 Kruhek, *Krajiške utvrde*, 256.

89 Stanić, *Pograničavanje*, 107–108.

90 DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 24v–25r: *So ist bey Irer dl. geshlossen aufs sterkhist so moglich, hinein zu ziehen, die jüngst durch das wetter profligierte mawer und andere von der zeit her fliessende mengl, tumultuaris, pro posse, zu instaruiern. Den flekhen mit geshütz und munition merers sonderlich aber mit den profiant, auf ain halbs jar, zum wenigisten, zuersehen. Die Besazung etwas zu sterkhen, und dan in Gots namen wider herauß zu ziehen. Auch darunder unuermerkhter sachen occasionem zu captieren, gegen dem veind was fürzunemen auch im selben fall, wo moglich, das schloß Dreßnikh, Ostrossaz, Zäsin, Bussin, wiewoll dises ain seer woses hauß ist, und dan Goßdanßko sambt Serin, zu recuperieren. Damit hette man die Vna wider, und säß so warm oder sicher in disen landen, alls man vor 50 oder gar hunderten gessessen.*

the archduke had received intelligence that the Ottoman forces had deployed on the left bank of the Una, armed with artillery, with the purpose of preventing the Habsburg army from crossing it. This proved to have been correct. However, the Habsburg army was never given permission to cross the Una. Kobenzl also said that those who were inclined towards optimism claimed that the size of the Habsburg army would intimidate enemy garrisons into surrender and that at least Drežnik, Ostrožac and Cazin could be obtained in this manner. He was, however, not convinced of it. Some of the informants apparently claimed that the Ottomans had already sent their sick, their wives and children deep into Bosnia, and that even Banja Luka and Kamengrad could be conquered.[91] Kobenzl, however, stressed that even if that were the case, Archduke Charles would not risk provoking a war with the sultan and that the campaign was therefore limited to those fortresses which the Ottomans had taken in peacetime.[92] In short, the Croatian Expedition was planned as a large show of force, which was not allowed to risk open engagement. Only as an afterthought, Kobenzl added in the postscript that the field commander was also ordered to build a residence for the commander-in-chief of the Croatian Frontier, and that this residence was supposed to be located in Dubovac or Steničnjak.[93]

It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the building of this new residence, but it should be at least explained what came of these plans. The new residence was ultimately built close to Dubovac, against the wishes of the Croatian and Slavonian estates, which suggested for it to be built at Steničnjak.[94] The land for the new fortress, which was to serve as the commander-in-chief's residence, was bought in 1579, although there was still some bickering regarding its location.[95] It was ultimately named after Archduke Charles, receiving the name of Karlovac (Karlstadt in German). It is possible that precisely the failure of the 1578 campaign influenced the decision to build the new fortress at Dubovac.[96] Placing it there would have

[91] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 26v–27r: *Ir dl. haben erst gestern zeitungen gehaben das sich die veind enhalb der Vna nach dem ganzen tractum herab legern, geshütz und allerlay bey sich haben, und allain der intention sein sollen, den unseren den transitum zumerwehren. So sein leith verhenden, die vill verweten wollten, das die veind Dressnik, Ostrosaz und Zasin, aufs wenigist, wo nit die anderen heiser auch, so bald sy die unseren nahend wissen, verlassen werden. Das gibt aber die zeit zumerkhenen. Nit von bericht Ir. f. dl. sonsten auch de bona karte, das sy die veind, ir bösses, weib und khind, geen (precrtano: Bania) Kamengrad und noch weiter geflehent, auch beuolh haben solhen, allain dahin bedacht zu sein. Damit sy denselben flekhen Kamengrad und Banialuka erhallten mögen, das dan woll zuerheben.*

[92] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 27r: *Das Ir dl. nit bedacht sich umb flekhen anzunemen, die im ofnen krieg verloren worden, sonder nun umb die jenigen, die sy uns ferten und vorferten im fridlihe anstand abgedrungen.*

[93] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 27r: *Item so hatt herr feldobrister in omnem eventum beuolh, Dobouaz oder Stanisniak dem leitinambt zur residenz zuerpawen.*

[94] Mažuran, *Hrvati i Osmansko Carstvo*, 149.

[95] Kruhek, *Karlovac*, 103, 147–147.

[96] Kruhek, *Karlovac*, 88.

protected Inner Austria in case the Una line collapsed. Also, Kruhek assumes that the decision to build the new fortress of Karlovac was made before the end of the Croatian Expedition.[97] But let us now return to the campaign itself.

As with its goals, earlier opinions regarding the course of the expedition depended on the sources at the historians' disposal. According to Klaić, the Habsburg army set out sometime in August, but Fernberger had by then apparently conquered Cazin and Ostrožac by himself on August 1. However, the army soon ran out of supplies and disease broke out in it, so it started to withdraw on September 4, and by October both Cazin and Ostrožac were again in Ottoman hands – Cazin on October 1 and Ostrožac on October 3.[98] Mažuran adds to this that the army arrived in Drežnik on August 21 and continued on to Bihać from there. [99] Stanić reconstructs the movements of the army in the following manner. The troops gathered in Metlika, and on August 21 encamped on the Mrežnica. On August 27 the army arrived in Slunj, and a detachment was sent to take Drežnik. After this succeeded, the main force continued to Topličkі Turanj (apparently without taking it). Then, on September 1 it took Cazin, where a great cache of munition and provender was captured, and on September 3 it took Ostrožac, which was found abandoned. After a failure to take Bužim, the army started retreating on September 13 due to hunger and disease. In the end, Stanić assesses that the lack of supplies was crucial for the failure of the expedition.[100]

Kobenzl provides abundant details on the expedition in his letters to the duke of Bavaria. In the letter from August 9, which was often mentioned above, he even included a self-made map on which he sketched the planned route the army would take.[101] However, by the day when he wrote, the army had not even set out from Ljubljana. Apparently Khevenhüller was supposed to march out from Ljubljana on that day or the next and go to Črnomelj. After that he was to join forces with the ban, Fernberger, the mercenaries from Inner Austria and the forces sent from Slavonia, and to proceed directly to Bihać. The whole route from Ljubljana to Bihać was stated to be twenty-six miles long.[102] This was probably in accordance with contemporary knowledge of the local terrain, roads and opposing forces. By the 1570s, the Habsburgs and their military planners had developed a network

[97] Kruhek, *Krajiške utvrde*, 293–294.

[98] Klaić, *Povijest Hrvata* 5, 423–424.

[99] Mažuran, *Hrvati i Osmansko Carstvo*, 148.

[100] Stanić, *Pograničavanje*, 108–109.

[101] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 26.

[102] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 21v–22r: *Heut oder morgen solle der herr feldobrist, Irer dl. hofmaister herr Jorg Khevenhiller daselbst zu Laibach aufbrechen, und erstlich faren auf Tshernomel, 12 meill wegs ziehen. Sich daselbsten mit dem ban im Bindischland, dem aufpotfolkh auß disem landt, und dem kriegsvolkh so im der leitinambt auf der Crabatishen Gränizen, der von Hälegg auß Irer dl. beuelh zueshikhn, samblen, (precrtano: und) dan strakhs nach Bihitsh ziehen.*

of informants and were well informed about the state of the Ottoman troops in Bosnia, particularly about the size of the fortresses' garrisons.[103] A series of maps of the border areas was also produced in the 1560s, improving the knowledge of distances and the terrain armies would have to traverse.[104] Therefore, the expedition had the necessary prerequisites to be relatively well-planned and the course the army would have taken could have been plotted before it set out.

However, problems started almost immediately. On August 16, Kobenzl wrote to the duke that Khevenhüller had not even set out for Bihać, but that he hopes to do so soon.[105] On August 19, he still had no information whether the field commander had departed, which apparently caused some distress at the archduke's court, as Kobenzl wrote to the duke of Bavaria that they were expecting news regarding that any hour now. The duke was apparently also anxious to receive news regarding the expedition, as Kobenzl promised to forward them to him immediately.[106] Nevertheless, days passed and no news arrived. On August 23 the duke received similar excuses.[107] The first significant piece of news was dispatched to him on September 2 and Kobenzl made a point of stressing that he wrote the letter early in the morning because the news had arrived late in the night. He was excited to report that on August 29 Drežnik had fallen to Habsburg troops. The Ottoman garrison surrendered and was allowed to leave with their possessions.[108]

[103] Nataša Štefanec, "Osmanski zapovjednici i struktura osmanske i habsburške vojske na hrvatskom dijelu krajišta (prema špijunskim izvještajima iz 1570-ih)" [Ottoman military commanders and the structure of the Ottoman and Habsburg military forces on the Croatian Military Border (on the basis of spy reports from 1570s)], in *Ascendere Historiam. Zbornik u čast Milana Kruheka*, eds. Marija Karbić et al. (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2014), 209–227; and Nataša Štefanec, "Osmanska vojska u sandžacima Siget, Pečuh, Požega i Pakrac prema habsburškim obavještajnim podacima iz 1577." [Ottoman Military Forces in Sanjaks of Sziget, Pécs, Požega and Pakrac Based on Habsburg Intelligence Reports from 1577], *Scrinia Slavonica* 22 (2022): 43–76. See also Andrej Hozjan, "*Gute Botschaft ist Halbe Victori*. Špijonaža in kontraobveščevalno delovanje na slavonski Vojni krajini v 16. stoletju" [Gute Botschaft ist Halbe Victori. Espionage and Counterintelligence Operations in the Slavonian Military Frontier in the 16th Century], in *Vojna krajina u suvremenoj historiografiji – Zbornik radova s međunarodnim sudjelovanjem*, eds. Drago Roksandić and Vedran Muić (Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2021), 125–154.

[104] Géza Pálffy, "Obrana Habsburške Monarhije od Turaka u Ugarskoj te Hrvatskoj i Slavoniji u 16. stoljeću" [The Defence of the Habsburg Monarchy against the Turks in Hungary, Croatia, and Slavonia in the Sixteenth Century], in *Vojna krajina u suvremenoj historiografiji – Zbornik radova s međunarodnim sudjelovanjem*, eds. Drago Roksandić and Vedran Muić (Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2021), 95–123 at 112–115.

[105] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 37r: *…das er entlich hoffe, biß Montag in Gots namen nach Bihitsh zurukhen und der expedition ain anfang zu machen.*

[106] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 17r: *Wir warten stündlich berichte vom unserem feldobristen ob und wan er nach Bihitsh auß gezogen. Shreibe E. f. g. die erst stund weiter zue.*

[107] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 44v.

[108] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 48r: *Also haben wir nächten umb 9 zeitungen, Gott lob, bekomen, das unser hör den 29 vershines für Dreßnikh komen, und es inner einer stund recuperiert, die Türkhen aber mit iren weeren abziehen lassen. Was weiter erfollgt, das laß E. f. g. ich hinach außwüssen.*

This outburst of optimism did not last long. On September 7, Kobenzl wrote that Ostrožac was also recovered on September 3, because the Ottoman garrison had abandoned it. In that fortress the Habsburg army had found many wall guns and a large amount of gunpowder, but – which was crucial – very little food. Due to the shortage of food, Khevenhüller reported that he had ordered a retreat to the Korana River, to rest his troops and decide how to proceed. He was of a mind to continue towards Bužim, while the archduke ordered him to march on Gvozdansko and Zrin, and to take Bužim on the way if possible.[109]

This was the turning point of the campaign. It seems obvious that Khevenhüller had hoped to feed his army by pillaging Ottoman supplies. This worked until Ostrožac turned out not to hold enough provisions to support a march farther into enemy territory. There was no option but to return to friendly territory to resupply. However, the momentum was permanently lost. The army had relied on shock and awe, which had by then dissipated. Ferhad-bey knew the enemy was there and responded accordingly. It is also notable that Bihać was not reached at all on that occasion, because the Ottoman army – which would withdraw only in early October, as we will see – barred the way. The Habsburg army probably decided to take the fortresses north of Bihać because their main objective was blocked.

The Army Retreats

On September 12, Kobenzl wrote to the duke that Khevenhüller had reported to the archduke on September 7 that his main concern from then on was to bring his ordnance to safety and to build a residence for the commander-in-chief of the Military Frontier. He would also leave garrisons and supplies in the newly conquered fortresses. After that, however, he would retreat. The reasons he gave for these decisions was bad weather, enormous costs of keeping the army in the field and the emperor's worries that his actions would be considered a breach of truce.[110] This meant that the expedition had failed to achieve its main objective. The artillery meant for Bihać did not reach its destination and Khevenhüller was now worried for its safety. From a copy of the archduke's letter to Khevenhüller, which Kobenzl had also forwarded to the duke of Bavaria, we see that he had

[109] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 56r: *E. f. g. wollen wissen das unser kriegsvolkh den 3 diß das schloß Ostrosatz Gott lob auh bekomen haben. Dan es die Türkhen auh verlassten und etwas zimlichs von topplhaggen und pulver darinen. Aber wenig profiant. Der herr feldobrist hatt lusst gehabt under Bushin zuziehen. Aber aus mogen der profiant hatt er sich gegen der Corana herauß begeben muessen. Da will er roß und man erquikhen, was weiter zuthuen beratschlagen, und es dan mit hilff des Allmachtigen auh fürnemen.*

[110] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 70r–v: *Unser feldobrister in Crabaten shreibt vom 7. diß. das er vor allem die geshütz in die gewarsamb under bringen und dan dem feldobristen sein residents erpawen. Auh eisseristen vleiß fürwenden wolle Bihitsh und die eingenomnen flekhen woll zubesetzen, zuverwaren und zu profantiern. Darnach so werd er abziehen müessen.*

brought the artillery to Budački.[111] This was a major setback, as there was, as was mentioned previously, very little artillery on the Croatian Frontier and bringing the cannons to Bihać was a part of the main goal of the expedition.[112]

The expedition was, however, not over, at least not officially. Archduke Charles was not ready to accept its failure and had ordered the army to remain in the field. As Kobenzl wrote to the duke of Bavaria on September 22, the archduke ordered Khevenhüller to make a feint toward Kostajnica to draw the Ottoman troops toward it, and then to march on Gvozdansko and Zrin. He was to resupply Bihać and the other fortresses at the first opportunity.[113] We should take note of the fact that this happened about two weeks after Khevenhüller had decided to retreat. It seems that serious calculations were being done behind the scene, both in the field commander's camp and at the archduke's court. It is not unlikely that much time was wasted on waiting for dispatches to arrive.

After that, there was no news from Croatia for a long time. We do not have the letters the duke of Bavaria had sent to Kobenzl, but from the latter's side of the correspondence it is obvious that the duke was not happy with this. Kobenzl was full of excuses. On October 1, he wrote that Archduke Charles would have liked to inform the duke about the events regarding the Croatian Expedition, but that no news at all had come from Croatia for over a week, perhaps due to heavy rain.[114] Only on October 6 did Kobenzl send some actual news, together with new excuses: he would have gladly sent to the duke something new from Croatia every day, but only today did something new actually arrive. What arrived were letters from Khevenhüller, which Kobenzl promptly forwarded to the duke.[115] These letters contain the field commander's account of the final days of the Croatian Expedition, but the order in which they arrived is unclear. Kobenzl sent copies of several of Khevenhüller's letters to the duke, but they were bound haphazardly and it is unclear to which of Kobenzl's letters they were attached. We will therefore treat them later, as a whole.

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[111] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 75r.

[112] Arming the fortresses of the Croatian Frontier with artillery became a priority only in the 1570s. There were no armories in Croatia and cannons were supplied to its fortresses from Ljubljana. Heavier cannons were only borrowed and had to be returned to the Ljubljana armory. See Štefanac, "Arms Race," 323–362, at 328–330. A list of equipment shipped out from Ljubljana for the Croatian Expedition can be found in Štefanac, "Arms Race," 353.

[113] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 73r.

[114] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 82r: *Aber er khumbt fallt irer fr. dl. meinem gnedgisten herrn nihts ein darumben so khan oder waiß e. f. g. ich auh nihts zue zushreiben. Auß Crabaten ist uns vom 23. diß nihts einkomen. Villeicht des grossen regens halben, so dinen und hie gewest*.

[115] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 80r: *Ich bezeuge mit der warheit das e. f. g. ich teglich gern was newes auß Crabaten shrib. Aber es khumbt hallt wenig oder shier nichts herauß. Ausser was mir der feldobrist dise tag geshriben. Das e. f. g. ich hiemit originaliter einshluß*. This could be the letter from September 28 (see below).

Based on Kobenzl's letters, we can divide the understanding of the Croatian Expedition at Archduke Charles's court into three parts. The first part is the hopeful beginning, which ended with the field commander's decision to retreat. After that, a month of very little news or no news at all ensued. This period of uncertainty ended in the second week of October. That is when the bad news started pouring in. Kobenzl wrote to the duke of Bavaria on October 8 that the Habsburg army had to retreat towards Carniola due to the lack of supplies, which reinforces the aforementioned thought that the army counted on plundering Ottoman supplies in order to sustain itself. After this retreat, the Ottomans came in great numbers, besieged Cazin and took it on September 27, after allowing its garrison to leave. After the surrender of Cazin, Kobenzl wrote, the Ottoman army probably moved on to Ostrožac, but he had no information on what happened next.[116] Surprisingly, Kobenzl had not previously sent any reports regarding Cazin to the duke, so from his letters we learn only of its fall.

On the same day, October 8, Kobenzl sent a second letter to the duke, as a letter from Khevenhüller had arrived later in the day and he felt compelled to immediately forward the news from it. And what sorry news it was, exclaimed he.[117] Kobenzl transcribed the field commander's letter personally and immediately sent the transcript to the duke. This letter was sent from the encampment by the River Mrežnica on October 5.[118] Klaić also knew of it and cited it.[119] It was a panicky report on the strength of the Ottoman army, supposedly about forty thousand strong, and the weakness of Khevenhüller's position. Despite this, the field commander sent supplies to Bihać with a small escort, hoping that the night would hide them from the enemy. Khevenhüller would regain his composure a few days later, but it was clear that the Habsburg army would make no further gains.

On October 12, Kobenzl sent more bad news to the duke. After Cazin, Ostrožac had fallen as well, and Kobenzl attached the report of the fortress's captain on its fall to the letter. Despite this success, Ferhad-bey did not attempt to take Bihać, but sent his infantry and artillery back across the Una and remained in the field with a cavalry force of 15,000, with a mind to raid Carniola. However, the Habsburg army was poised to stop him, lying in wait by Hojsić-kaštel between

[116] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 98r: *Nachdem die unsern in Crabaten der profiant und anderen ursachen halben zu rukh gegen Crain sich begeben müessen, ist der veind seer starkh her fürkomen und hatt Zäsin den 27 7bris dahin gezwungen, das es sich ergeben müessen, dem kriegsvolkh hatt er für ire personen sicher abziehen lassen. Denselben nach sollen sy weiter gegen Ostrosatz gezogen sein. Was aber verner erfolgt, das wissen wir noch nit.*

[117] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. *Waß unß in diser stund für laidige zeitungen aus Crabaten kamen.*

[118] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 101r.

[119] Klaić, *Povijest Hrvata* 5, 423–424.

the rivers Dobra and Mrežnica.[120] This Ferhad-bey's force of "many thousands" riders, if its size was correctly assessed, were undoubtedly not regular Ottoman troops, but unpaid irregulars from Bosnia. According to a Habsburg intelligence report from 1577, Ottoman commanders could call to arms many thousands of such militiamen at short notice.[121] These were not destitute peasants, but often *sipahi*s or servants of Ottoman officials who sought to become *sipahi*s themselves.[122] In the aforementioned report of the captain of Ostrožac, the number of forty thousand Ottoman troops is also suggested, but the captain rejected it, saying that he did not believe there were that many, assessing their number at 15,000, mostly mounted and well-dressed. Besides these, there were three or four hundred foot soldiers in brown caps armed with long-barreled guns, which he thought could have been janissaries, and six artillery pieces with their crews.[123] It is not unlikely that there really were janissaries in the Ottoman army, even though janissary corps had their own commanders and were subordinated directly to the sultan. Small companies of them were present in the borderlands.[124] However, Ferhad-bey sent them back across the Una, preferring to keep only mounted troops with him.

We should bear in mind that this is the information Kobenzl and, by extension, Archduke Charles's court had at their disposal. It is also obvious that it took a while for news to reach the court, as Khevenhüller had in the time between when he wrote this letter and when Kobenzl forwarded the news from it to the duke, dispatched another letter to the archduke's court, bearing better news. However, instead of pursuing the campaign further, he decided not to tempt fate, disbanded his army and left Croatia, to which his letters attest.

We have previously mentioned these letters and this is where we will examine them. Khevenhüller sent them from Novo Mesto and Metlika, after he had al-

[120] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 93r: *E. f. g. laß ich underthenigist wissen, alls der veind Zäsin erobert und für Ostrosatz gerukht, dasselb auh bekomen. Wie e. f. g. ab beyligendem relation zuernemen. Das er dem geshütz und fueßfolkh nider uber die Una geshikht und allain zu roß etwo in die 15000 starkh herdißhalb verpliben, in mainung ain renen gegen Crain in geen zu lassen. Nachdem aber unser kriegsvolkh zwishen der Dobra und Mresniza bey Haisitshcastel in gueter gwarsams auf ine lawert. Hoffen wir zu Gott das er auh abziehen und uns also Bihitsh sambt Dresnik pleiben würdet, des sein gotliche güette geben wölle amen.*

[121] Štefanec, "Osmanski zapovjednici," 217.

[122] See Pál Fodor, "Making a Living on the Frontiers. Volunteers in the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Army," in *Ottomans, Hungarians and Habsburgs in Central Europe. The Military Confines in the Era of Ottoman Conquest*, eds. Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor (Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, 2000), 229–263.

[123] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 97r: *…ir hör biß in 40m mann zue roß und fueß sein solle, welches er aber nit glauben khündte. Sonnder vermaint, es mähte sich khaumb auf 15m erstereckhen, jedoch der merer thaill pfärdt und woll gepuzt auch bey drey oder vier hundert fueß knechten, mit praunen khapfen und gar langen handt rören, so elbo janitshären sein möchten, des geshüz seyen 6 stuckh darbey under anderen zwey gar fürtröffliche püchssenmaister sein sollen…*

[124] Štefanec, "Osmanska vojska," 50–51.

ready abandoned the expedition and reached Carniola on his way back. Apparently, the rain which was mentioned earlier proved to be disastrous. In a letter sent to Kobenzl (originally intended for the president of the Court War Council Franz von Poppendorf, judging by the heading) from Metlika, Khevenhüller said that the rivers had flooded, because in that area the terrain was such that the rivers were known to flood after just one day's worth of rainfall. For that reason, the provisioning of Bihać had to be postponed day after day. By then, the fortress of Cazin was already besieged by the Ottomans.[125] These events occurred during the period of uncertainty after the Habsburg army had retreated and encamped by the Mrežnica River. It is now clear that Khevenhüller was encamped in Croatia for so long because he was waiting for an opportunity to reach Bihać. The march to the northeast, ordered by the archduke, which was supposed to draw the Ottoman army away from Bihać, obviously never took place.

Despite numerous setbacks, Khevenhüller did complete his mission, although only in part. Even as Kobenzl was still reporting disturbing news to the duke of Bavaria, the field commander had become more optimistic and had some better tidings to report. In a letter sent to Archduke Charles from Metlika on October 11 (which was also forwarded to the duke of Bavaria), he recounted how the captain of Bihać had sent him a rider with the following information. Ferhad-bey had learned of the Habsburg's army's location by Hojsić-kaštel from some haramias he had captured near Budački. He then transferred his artillery across the bridges he had built over the Una and left the area around Bihać with his army. This throws a different light on the aforementioned relocation of Ferhad-bey's army, as it is apparent that he felt his position was threatened. Ferhad-bey also left garrisons of thirty men each in the newly recaptured fortresses of Cazin and Ostrožac and had Brekovica and Toplički Turanj torched and abandoned.[126] Upon

[125] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 89r: *Hieumb ist ain soliche lantts ortt da es nur ainen tag rögnet ist der wog mer verdorbt alls anderer orttn in villen tagen. Wiert also die profantierung auch andere fursehung pro Wihitsh und merer ortt aus gedrungner nott auf ettlich tag vershoben muessen worden.* The siege of Cazin is mentioned on the verso page. The date of the letter is somewhat unclear; the date on the page says September 28, but that would mean that Khevenhüller had travelled back and forth from Mrežnica to Metlika, and in this letter he mentioned the letter to the archduke which he had *previously* sent from Novo Mesto, and that one is dated October 14 (see below). Perhaps October 28 was meant. The full date says: *Datum Möttling im windt und rogen und ubln wötter, darbey ainem zeitt und weill lang, den 28 septembris 78.* (DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 90r.

[126] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 86r: *Seith e. fur. dur. ich vom sibenden dits wegen des haus Ostershäz beshechnen verlussts gehorsambist zuegeshriben, ist mir vom haubtman zur Wichitsh bey aignem ime hievor zuegeshribhten reittennden potten sovil berichts unnd erinderung einkumen: wie der feindt nach abprenn und verlassung bayder thürmen oder castel Brekhowiz unnd Töplizer Thürns, alls er durch etliche bey Wuddätchky gefanngne zuegen darunder zween des herrn Khüßls unndergebne harämia, sovil khundshafft bekhumen, das ich mit meinem unnderhabenden khriegsvolckh bey Hoysitsh Castel in versamblung unnd anzug sein solle, ungeacht er die gelegenhait umb Wichitsh am fuerth märsh mit etlichen pfördten besichtigt auch gar an die lanng pruggen bauen lassen, sein bey sich habennde geshüz alspald zue ruekh gewendet, unnd uber die Unna geshickht, sich auch selbs sambt seinen gannzen hör*

receiving this intelligence, and as the weather had improved somewhat, Khevenhüller had decided to risk sending a supply train to Bihać, escorted by a small detachment of about 250 hussars and uskoks, together with the haramias from Hans Khissl's company. He would have liked to advance with his entire army, he claimed, but that was impossible because there were not enough animals left to transport the supplies for both the army and the fortress.[127] Kobenzl also sent to the duke the list of supplies sent to Bihać on that occasion. There were 1041 beasts of burden carrying provender (mostly grain and flour), a quantity of gunpowder and shot, and a small herd of oxen.[128]

The field commander had therefore abandoned all hope of transporting the artillery to Bihać and relied on speed and stealth to get at least some of the supplies across. He considered this a success. On October 14, he sent a letter to the archduke joyfully reporting that the supplies had successfully reached Bihać and that this fortress is now significantly reinforced, both by these supplies and by the escorting troops. From there, Drežnik and Tržac would also be supplied. Bihać was safe for the time being, especially as the enemy had by then withdrawn and dispersed.[129]

The rest of Kobenzl's correspondence with Duke Albert V resembled keeping an empty engine running. There was nothing left to report, the expedition was over, and it was far from an illustrious affair. Nevertheless, it was not a complete failure either. On October 15, he wrote to the duke that Khevenhüller was expected to arrive at the archduke's court in Graz within four days. Besides complaining about the quality of that year's vintage, he had nothing else to report.[130] On October 18, he merely forwarded the letter from Khevenhüller the court had received two days before. Kobenzl was glad to report that the supplies had reached Bihać, and that Tržac and Drežnik were also supplied. Catastrophe was therefore avert-

hinnach erhöbt, unnd also die anndern zwey eroberten heüser Zäsin unnd Ostroshaz, jedes mit sache und dreyssig personen besezter gelassen.

[127] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 86v: *Hab ich doch fürs aller fürträglichist befunden, dieselb profianndt mit ainer anzall geringen khriegsvolckh, alle nämblich in drithalbhundert hussarishen pfärdten unnd den ordinarii gränitz uskoggen, sambt allen obbnmelts herrn Khüßls undtergebnen haramia, wie es dann von dreyen tagn beshechen, hinein beglaitten zulassen. In sonderen ertrögung, da ich mit dem höllen hauffen dahin ziehen wöllen, das man wie unnderweegs mit der fuer mennshen unnd vieh bedürffigen profiannt, sonderlich mangel der sämb roß halben, nit woll aufkhumen noch gevolgen mügten.*

[128] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 84r–v.

[129] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 88r: *und e. für. dur. zuegeshribnen khundtshafften nach, seinen abzug über die Unna nun allen genomen, unnd sich aich voneinander gelassen haben werde, derwegen sich auf dizmall mit Wichitsh, zumall will es mit ainer solchen profiannt versehen.*

[130] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 102r: *Gnedgister herr. E. f. g. habe hieneben zuvernomen, wie jetzo das Crabatishen kriegswösen geshafft. Gott lob, das es die weg erraicht hatt. Ich hoff der hofmeister werde inner vier tagen hie sein...*

ed, at least for a while.[131] These two letters are the only ones to which we have the duke's answer as well. Apparently, he received them both together, and only at the end of October, which also speaks of the speed at which missives were traveling at that time. In his reply, the duke acknowledged that Bihać and the other two fortresses were supplied, which was, together with the taking of Drežnik, the greatest success of the Croatian Expedition.[132]

After this, Kobenzl sent only two more letters to the duke regarding the Croatian Expedition, which both deal with its aftermath. There was really not much to write about. On October 28 Kobenzl sent an apology for not writing for almost two weeks, explaining that he had nothing to report, because the archduke had not received any news from the frontier.[133] If we take this statement at face value, and I do not see a reason why we should not, considering how candid and open Kobenzl had been with the duke thus far, it seems that he was not concealing any information and that the archduke's court was in the dark about the current comings and goings in the Military Frontier.

The last letter in our volume was sent on November 12. In it, Kobenzl again apologized for not writing for so long, but once again explained that Archduke Charles had not received any news from the Military Frontier.[134] Due to the lack of actual news, he offered the duke court gossip, which is useful for assessing the atmosphere at the archduke's court after the Croatian Expedition. Apparently, the commanders were trying their best to assign blame to each other for its failure. Fernberger had recently arrived at the court. As was mentioned earlier, the archduke offered to treat with him, but refused to issue him any written documents which would confirm him as commander-in-chief of the Croatian Frontier. His poor conduct during the expedition contributed to this. Also, we mentioned earlier that the Croatian and Slavonian ban, Christoph Ungnad, did not leave a good impression either. Kobenzl acerbically described his lack of enthusiasm for military service. Surprisingly, but perhaps connected to this, Christoph's

[131] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 104r: *Was wir angestern auß Crain von unsrem feldobristen, empfangen, das haben e. f. g. hieneben zu vernemen, und ist nemmblich Bihitsh, Dreßnikh und Tersatz, Got lob, profantiert worden.*

[132] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 108r–v. It should be noted that the duke had been traveling around his duchy since August and was receiving Kobenzel's letters in various places, such as München (as with this one), Starnberg, Landau, Braunau am Inn, Pfaffenhofen an der Ilm and others. The time and place of the letter's arrival was noted on their address pages by the duke's scribes.

[133] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 106r: *E. f. g. hab ich ain zeit her darumben nihts zuegeshriben, das in der warheit, lenger alls in 14 tagen von der Gränizen, irer f. dl. meinem auch gnedigisten herrn nihts ein komen.*

[134] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 109r: *Ich bin fürtpar in sorgen das e. f. g. mich unfleiß oder nachlessigkeit verdenkhen werden, umb das ich nun ain guette zeits e. f. g. von der Gränizen sachen nihts zuegeshriben. Aber e. f. g. geruechen mir gnedgist zuglauben, das irer f. dl. meinem auh gnedgisten herrn nihts durchaus einkomen ist.*

brother Ludwig was apparently also blamed for the failure of the expedition – namely, that it was his fault that the Ottomans were not defeated at Cazin.[135] Ludwig was one of the commanders of the expedition, as was mentioned earlier, and he was governor of the district of Celje, as Kobenzl says. It was possible that the Habsburg army had the opportunity to confront Ferhad-bey when his forces started taking back the recently occupied fortresses, starting with Cazin, and that Ludwig was blamed for not pursuing it.

Conclusion

Now that we have all the information from Kobenzl's letters about the Croatian Expedition, I will try to reconstruct the course of events based on it, as well as to explain the reasons for its failure and partial success. Assigning blame was part of the court politics and we should not ponder too much over it. Still, it seems from Kobenzl's writing that Khevenhüller avoided it, perhaps because he arrived at the archduke's court in Graz first and could influence his opinion on the matter. Fernberger probably took the brunt of it, considering the archduke's cool stance toward him and the fact that he was soon dismissed from his post as commander-in-chief of the Croatian Frontier.[136] Disagreements between commanders, which were mentioned earlier, probably contributed to the failure of the expedition. Nevertheless, Khevenhüller's incompetence, which Kobenzl feared, probably also contributed to it, not least because he could not, after all, force the various commanders to defer to his authority and cooperate.

However, the Ottoman response to the Habsburg army's advance was probably what prevented it from completing its main objective within the planned timeframe. We have seen that the army was circling Bihać and turning northwards, to Cazin and Ostrožac, because Ottoman forces, as Kobenzl wrote before the start of the expedition, were deployed on the Una. It was probably hoped that the size of the Habsburg army would intimidate them into withdrawing, but that failed to happen. Later we learn that Ferhad-bey's army was encamped by Bihać – he abandoned that position only in early October – and Khevenhüller was instructed against engaging him in open battle. The Habsburg army was essentially de-

[135] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 109v: *Sein brueder, herr Ludwig Ungnad, ist irer f. dl. haubtman und vitzdomb zu Cilli auh jüngst obrister feldmarshalkh gewest. Der ist jetzt hie, und würfft böse karten auß, umb das er vernumbt wie man ime die shuld zuemesst, das man den Türkhen vor Zäsin nit geshlagen*. Ludwig and Christoph were both sons of Hans Ungnad, who was a distinguished commander of the Military Frontier in the mid-15th century and a champion of Protestantism in Croatia. See Kruhek, *Krajiške utvrde*, 158; and the Ungnad family tree in Horvat, *Povijest Hrvatske* 1, 261.

[136] Štefanec, *Država ili ne*, 201; and Radoslav Lopašić, *Spomenici hrvatske krajine*, vol. 3: *Od godine 1693 do 1780 i u dodatku od g. 1531 do 1730* [Sources on the Croatian Frontier. Vol. 3: From the Year 1693 to 1780 and an Appendix from 1531 to 1730] (Zagreb: Knjižara L. Hartmana (Kugli i Deutsch), 1889), 466.

clawed by the emperor's and the archduke's fear that the sultan would interpret their actions as a breach of truce. Therefore, the only option Khevenhüller had was to draw the Ottoman forces away from Bihać, and he did so by attempting to achieve the secondary objective before the primary one, which meant taking some of the fortresses along the Una. The opinion Kobenzl presented, but did not agree with, that Drežnik, Ostrožac and Cazin could be taken by intimidation alone, had proven to have been completely correct. After taking these, Khevenhüller was instructed to continue northwards, to Gvozdansko and Zrin, but did not have the means to do so as the army had run out of provender. His only option was to withdraw, which he did.

Despite the apparent weakness of the Habsburg position, it cannot be disregarded that Ottoman troops did not have access to infinite resources. For example, according to an intelligence report from 1580, in that year there was a great shortage of food and fodder in Bosnia, which hindered the local military commander's plans.[137] Ferhad-bey was similarly not able to keep his troops in the field for a long time without great difficulty, especially in the border area which was already stripped of supplies. However, he could not disband his army, nor could he maintain a siege of Bihać (the fortress was on an island in the Una, which would split the Ottoman forces in half), as he had learned from captives that Khevenhüller was still encamped on the Mrežnica. A raid of the enemy's hinterland, or at least a promise of it, would have been a good way of keeping his men under arms. He therefore torched Brekovica and Topličkі Turanj, abandoned the positions around Bihać and sent his infantry and artillery back across the Una, remaining in the field with his cavalry. It is very likely that the report which Kobenzl mentioned to the Bavarian duke was correct and that the Ottoman army was planning to raid Carniola, especially if the troops Ferhad-bey had kept with him were unpaid militiamen, who depended on plunder for their upkeep. This created an opening for Khevenhüller's supply train to reach Bihać, although without any artillery, and this made any further Ottoman attempts to besiege it futile. Also, as the Habsburg army was still in the field, the Ottomans could not carry out a raid without being cut off, so they withdrew and dispersed. This, in turn, enabled Khevenhüller to disband his army and put an end to the Croatian Expedition. That is what we can conclude from the information presented in Kobenzl's letters.

In the end, the Croatian Expedition was not a complete failure due to the partial breaking of the Ottoman encirclement of Bihać. In the years that followed,

[137] Josip Žontar, *Obveščevalna služba in diplomacija avstrijskih Habsburžanov v boju proti Turkom v 16. stoletju* [The Intelligence Service and Diplomacy of the Austrian Habsburgs in the Struggle against the Turks in the Sixteenth Century] (Ljubljana: Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, 1973), 173.

Brekovica and Toplički Turanj were in Habsburg hands.[138] Ostrožac also did not permanently remain under Ottoman control, as in 1585 the captain of Bihać conquered it with a small force and had it razed with gunpowder.[139] Drežnik was also one of the fortresses conquered during the Croatian Expedition that remained in Habsburg hands after it.[140] In one of the letters sent by Khevenhüller to Archduke Charles from Metlika, in early October 1578, after he had already abandoned the Croatian Expedition, he seemed optimistic regarding the future provisioning of Bihać, as he claimed that the passage to it was now secured by the conquest of Drežnik.[141] However, in Khevenhüller's letter addressed to Kobenzl, the commander expressed serious worries regarding the same issue, claiming that enormous forces would be required to hold the forts along the Una, including Bihać, as they were basically within enemy territory.[142]

Indeed, supplying Bihać became more and more difficult over time, and supply trains required enormous escorts. Kobenzl went on to suggest, in 1582, that Bihać should be ceded to another Habsburg ruler, Philip II of Spain, together with the port city of Senj. According to him, this would have helped solve the seemingly insoluble paradox: maintaining the defense of Bihać was impossible, but the strategically crucial fortress could not be abandoned because the consequences would have been catastrophic.[143]

So far, certain aspects of the sources used in this paper were considered, but here we should also assess them as a whole. In this paper, we have seen the Croatian Expedition from the viewpoint of Duke Albert V of Bavaria. We have to bear in mind that the information presented here was filtered through several sieves. First, the archduke Charles and his court received information from the Military Frontier rarely and piecemeal. Second, Hans Kobenzl doubtlessly did not have complete insight into this information. And third, he could choose which details to present to the duke. Nevertheless, we have seen that he was candid and delivered both good and bad news.

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[138] Kruhek, *Krajiške utvrde*, 324–325.

[139] Nedim Zahirović, "Crtica iz ratovanja na Krajini: napad zapovjednika Bihaća Franza Hornera na Ostrožac 31. svibnja 1585. godine" [Pictures from the war in Military Border: attack of commander of Bihać Franz Horner on Ostrožac, 31 May 1585], *Historijski zbornik* 67 (2014), no. 1: 83–92.

[140] Kruhek, *Krajiške utvrde*, 324.

[141] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 87r: *Willen, durch aufhalltung Dräßnickh der paaß auf Wichitsh dennoch guetermassen geraumbt, nit vill zuerhallten…*

[142] DE-BayHStA-KÄA, 4452, fol. 89v: *Das man die Unam bekhomen daraber gantz Crabaten und nach plus ultra, in den shantz shlahen mueste dann nit muglich* (written on the margin*: Wichitsh*) *so woll die anderen ortt, so zu rechnen in des feindts landt und gesichtn ligen jederzeit zu versehen, und mit solichem gwalt zu profantiern, das ist semel pro semper aller guettherzigen mainung.*

[143] Stanić, *Pograničavanje*, 117–119.

We can also conclude that information about events going on in real time was traveling very slowly and that even the archduke could not influence events significantly once they were underway. This put enormous pressure on the commanders in the field. A campaign could depend on a single decision, which had to be brought quickly, based on insufficient data.

Lastly, we should conclude that the Croatian Expedition obviously interested a wide circle of people in 16th century Europe. Not only Archduke Charles and his court, but also the duke of Bavaria expected to be delivered information about it, and was obviously hoping for its success. Kobenzl's letters offer an insight into both what information about it was available to him and his contemporaries, and a personal, human perception of it, revealing what was perceived as important and how he and others reacted to it.

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Tomislav Matić *

Rijeka o kojoj ovisi spas ili propast ove zemlje. Habsburški pohod na rijeci Uni 1578. godine u izvješćima Hansa Kobenzla

Sažetak

Ovaj radi bavi se pismima koja je Hans Kobenzl, tajni savjetnik nadvojvode Karla II. Austrijskog, slao vojvodi Albertu V. Bavarskom. Povod za ovu prepisku bila je velika vojna kampanja koju je nadvojvoda Karlo pripremao na habsburško-osmanskoj granici. Bavarski je vojvoda, koji je bio Karlov tast, bio je zainteresiran za vijesti o toj kampanji, djelomice zato što je sâm osigurao sredstva za nju u *Reichstagu* Svetog Rimskog Carstva. Nadvojvodina je kampanja, takozvana Hrvatska ekspedicija, bila uzrokovana osmanskim prodorom preko rijeko Une tijekom prethodnih nekoliko godina, zbog kojeg su mnoge habsbušrke utvrde uz tu rijeku pale u osmanske ruke, što je kritično ugrozilo najveće preostalo habsburško uporište na tom prostoru – Bihać. Vjerovalo se da bi pad Bihaća izravno ugrozio nadvojvodinu domenu u Unutrašnjoj Austriji. Kobenzl u svojim pismima opisuje ciljeve ekspedicije. Prema njemu, to je prvenstveno opskrba Bihaća provijantom, artiljerijom i ljudstvom, a sekundarno ponovno osvajanje što je više moguće utvrda uz Unu, ali bez ulaženja u izravni sukob s osmanskim snagama. Njegova pisma bavarskom vojvodi daju detaljan opis tijeka ekspedicije. Ona je počela tek krajem kolovoza, mnogo kasnije nego što je bilo planirano, a zapovjednici trupa koje su sudjelovale u njoj međusobno se nisu slagali. Habsburška je vojska uspjela osvojiti Drežnik, Ostrožac i Cazin demonstracijom sile, ali nije uspjela dospjeti do Bihaća jer su joj na putu stajale osmanske trupe. Kako joj je ponestalo zaliha, morala se povući na prijateljski teritorij, a istovremeno ju je napustio njezin najveći kontingent, onaj kojim je zapovijedao hrvatski ban. Ipak je njezina preostala snaga bila dovoljna da bude prijetnja za osmanske čete oko Bihaća, te su one zato napustile opsadu mjesta. To je omogućilo habsburškim snagama da pošalju živež u bihaćku utvrdu, ali artiljeriju nisu uspjeli dopremiti na odredište. Osmanlije su ubrzo ponovno osvojili Ostrožac i Cazin, jer su se hrvatski vojnici u posadama tih utvrda pobunili ili dezertirali. Kobenzl daje detaljne opise i tih događaja.

Ključne riječi: ranonovovjekovna povijest, vojna povijest, diplomacija, hrvatska povijest, habsburško-osmanski ratovi

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