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ON THE ROAD TO SAFETY – PART 1. THE ATTITUDE OF SOCIAL ELITES TOWARDS PEASANTS’ MIGRATIONS FROM CROATIA AND SLAVONIA TO THE PRESENT-DAY BURGENLAND IN THE MID-16TH CENTURY ²

**W drodze do bezpieczeństwa – część I
Stosunek elit społecznych do migracji chłopów z Chorwacji i Sławonii
do dzisiejszego Burgenlandu w połowie XVI wieku**

Abstract: The Ottoman raids on Croatian historical areas were documented as early as the beginning of the 15th century, their frequency significantly increased after the Ottomans seized the medieval Bosnian Kingdom in 1463. One significant outcome of the Ottoman incursions was the prevailing sense of insecurity and the subsequent displacement of the indigenous populace to safer regions. In the Burgenland region, the first recorded Croatian refugees emerged in the middle of the second decade of the 16th century, with the peak of immigration to Burgenland transpiring in the mid-16th century. This study is the first part of a two-part study on the experience of Croatian population emigration from Croatia and Slavonia in the mid-16th century due to the growing Ottoman threat, migrating to the territories of southwestern Hungary at the time, i.e., present-day Burgenland. These areas were significantly safer and considerably less threatened by Ottoman raiders. The focus of this study is on the attitude of the social elites of 16th-century Croatia and Slavonia towards the emigration processes, particularly regarding the departure of their subjects from their estates. Additionally, it analyzes the relationship between newly arrived Croatian refugees and the social elites, as well as other groups in southwestern Hungary during that period, in the context of their settlement and integration.

Keywords: Ottoman wars, migration of late medieval refugees, Burgenland, Croatia, Slavonia, social elites, mid-16th century

Abstrakt: Najazdy osmańskie na historyczne ziemie chorwackie były dokumentowane już na początku XV wieku, a ich częstotliwość znacząco wzrosła po zajęciu przez Osmanów średniowiecznego Królestwa Bośni w 1463 roku. Jednym z istotnych skutków najazdów osmańskich było powszechne poczucie

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zagrożenia oraz wynikające z niego przesiedlenia ludności autochtonicznej do bezpieczniejszych regionów. W regionie Burgenland pierwsze udokumentowane przypadki uchodźców chorwackich odnotowano w połowie drugiej dekady XVI wieku, a szczyt imigracji do Burgenlandu przypadł na połowę XVI wieku. Niniejszy artykuł stanowi pierwszą część dwuczęściowego opracowania poświęconego doświadczeniom emigracji ludności chorwackiej z Chorwacji i Sławonii w połowie XVI wieku, spowodowanej narastającym zagrożeniem osmańskim, na tereny południowo-zachodnich Węgier, czyli dzisiejszego Burgenlandu. Obszary te były wówczas znacznie bezpieczniejsze i w mniejszym stopniu narażone na najazdy tureckie. Przedmiotem analizy w niniejszym studium jest przede wszystkim stosunek elit społecznych XVI-wiecznej Chorwacji i Sławonii do procesów emigracyjnych, w szczególności w kontekście opuszczania ich dóbr przez poddanych. Dodatkowo, tekst podejmuje temat relacji pomiędzy nowo przybyłymi uchodźcami chorwackimi a elitami społecznymi oraz innymi grupami w południowo-zachodnich Węgrzech w omawianym okresie, w kontekście ich osiedlania się i integracji.

Słowa kluczowe: wojny osmańskie, migracje uchodźców późnośredniowiecznych, Burgenland, Chorwacja, Sławonia, elity społeczne, połowa XVI wieku

1. Introduction

This study may be introduced by referencing a report recorded in the proceedings of the Croatian Estates' assembly, held in Topusko on September 9, 1535. Among other resolutions, it was decided that it was necessary to warn King Ferdinand of Habsburg that their subjects were fleeing Croatia for other territories. The Estates further noted that messengers were arriving among them, offering assistance and protection with the intent of persuading the population to leave.³

Even from this brief record, it is evident that the Croatian Estates, i.e., the nobility, were deeply dissatisfied with the fact that their subjects were abandoning their estates, particularly those located along the border with the Ottoman Empire. They were especially displeased that the impetus for migration was coming from landowners in safer territories, less threatened by Ottoman incursions – who, as the records suggest, actively sent envoys among the vulnerable population in Croatia and Slavonia, encouraging and even organizing emigration.

Migrations during the Middle Ages and the early modern period in Europe have been the focus of numerous studies, which have analyzed various aspects of these processes.⁴ This also applies to the migration of populations from medieval Croatia and Slavonia to western Hungary – now primarily part of the Austrian federal state of Burgenland (Cro. Gradišće, Hun. Órvidék), as well as to modern-day southern Moravia in the Czech Republic, the area around Bratislava in southern Slovakia, and the westernmost regions of Hungary around the city of Sopron (Ger. Ödenburg; Cro. Šopron) – during the 16th century, driven by the growing Ottoman threat. Broadly speaking, this topic has been explored by historians from Burgenland, particularly members of the local Croatian minority, as well as scholars from

³ *Acta comitalia Regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae. Hrvatski saborski spisi*, ed. F. Šišić, vol. 1, Zagreb 1912, p. 341.

⁴ For example: H. Kleinschmidt, *People on the move: attitudes toward and perceptions of migration in medieval and modern Europe*, London 2003; *Migration & identity*, ed. R. Benmayor, A. Skotnes, Routledge 2017; S.C. Davis-Secord, *Migration in the medieval Mediterranean*, Leeds 2021.

various Austrian, Croatian, Slovakian and/or Hungarian academic institutions.⁵ While previous studies have illuminated many aspects of the Croatian migration to Burgenland during the 16th and 17th centuries, several research questions remain unanswered.

This study primarily examines various aspects of the emigration process itself. Thus, the first part of this two-part study addresses questions regarding the attitude of the social elites of 16th-century Croatia and Slavonia towards emigration, particularly concerning the departure of their subjects from their estates. It also explores the relationship between the social elites and other groups in southwestern Hungary at the time in connection with the settlement of Croatian refugees. Conversely, the second part of the study will focus on questions such as who organized the migration, when, how, and why it occurred, the obstacles the refugees faced on their journey to safer areas, the modes of travel they used, and the social groups to which they belonged in their homeland.

⁵ For example: A. Mohl, *A horvátok bevándorlása 1533-ban*, Budapest 1915; M. Ujević, *Gradišćanski Hrvati*, Zagreb 1934; R. Fuchs, *Die Kroaten-Ansiedlung in Landegg*, "Unsere Heimat", 9/1936, pp. 83-90; A. Turek, *Charvátská kolonizace na Morave*, "Časopis Matice Moravské", 61/1937, pp. 49-70, 195-212, 363-390; K. Keck, *Zur Frage der Kroatensiedlungen im ehemaligen Niederösterreich*, "Unsere Heimat, N.F.", 13/1940, pp. 144-145; E. Biricz, *Geschichte der Einwanderung der burgenländischen Kroaten*, unpublished doctoral thesis, Wien 1949; V. Zimány, *Der Bauernstand der Herrschaft Güssing im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, Eisenstadt 1962; J. Dobrovich, *Volk an der Grenze – Schicksal und Auftrag. Zur Geschichte der burgenländischen Kroaten*, Eisenstadt 1963; M. Valentić, *Gradišćanski Hrvati od XVI. st. do danas*, Zagreb 1970; Z. Črnja, M. Valentić, N. Benčić, *Gradišćanski Hrvati*, Zagreb 1973; J. Breu, *Die Kroatensiedlung im Burgenland und in den anschließenden Gebieten*, Wien 1970; M. Valentić, *Die Burgenländischen Kroaten vom 16. Jahrhundert bis heute. Ausstellungskatalog*, Eisenstadt 1972; K. Kučerová, *Chorvátí a Srbi v střední Evropě*, Bratislava 1976; M. Valentić, *Obilježja povijesnog razvitka Gradišćanskih Hrvata*, "Časopis za suvremenu povijest", 9/1977, no. 1, pp. 95-107; F. Tobler, *Die Migrationen des kroatischen Mittel- und Kleinadels in den österreichisch-ungarischen Grenzraum im 16./17. Jahrhundert und das 'familiales' – Problem*, "Burgenländische Heimatblätter", 40/1978, pp. 16-37; idem, *Die kroatische Kolonisation im Wieselburger Komitat im 16. Jahrhundert*, "Burgenländische Heimatblätter", 45/1983, pp. 119-142; idem, *Die Wanderung und Ansiedlung kroatischer Kolonisten im österreichisch-ungarisch-slowakischen Grenzraum im 16. Jahrhundert – Bedingungen und Kräfte*, "Österreichische Osthefte", 26/1984, pp. 337-349; A. Turek, *Ergänzungen zur Geschichte der kroatischen Kolonisation in Mähren*, "Österreichische Osthefte", 26/1984, pp. 377-390; M. Kruhek, *Die Grenzstreitigkeiten zwischen Erhard von Polhaim und Franz von Batthyány und die Gründung eines neuen 'Dörf mit Crabathen' auf den deutschen Bergen*, in: *Türkenkriege und Kleinlandschaft II, Sozialer und kultureller Wandel einer Region zur Zeit der Türkenkriege*, ed. R. Kropf, Eisenstadt 1986, pp. 41-61; F. Moacanin, *Die Walachen in Kroatien und im Burgenland im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, in: *Türkenkriege und Kleinlandschaft II*, pp. 139-148; M. Kruhek, *Die Auswanderung der Kroaten aus den kroatischen Gebieten aus das Territorium Südwestungarns – in das heute südliche Burgenland (1526-1576)*, in: *Baurentum und Kirche bei den südburgenländischen Kroaten*, Güttenbach-Pinkovac 1990, pp. 5-22; R. Hajtsan, *Gradišćanski Hrvati na vlastelinstvu "Rohunac-Solunak" u 16. stoljeću*, "Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest Filozofskoga fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu", 25/1992, no. 1, pp. 15-25; S. Geosits, *Die burgenländischen Kroaten in Wandel der Zeiten*, Wien 1996; R. Hajtsan, *Die Kroaten in der Herrschaft Güdding*, Wien 1991; idem, *Die Bevölkerung der Herrschaft Rechnitz-Schlaining im 16. Jahrhundert*, Wien 1992; idem, *Die Herrschaft Güns im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert*, Wien 1993; B. Schreiner, *Das Schicksal der Burgenländischen Kroaten durch 450 Jahre. Sudbina Gradišćanskih Hrvatvo kroz 450 ljet*, Eisenstadt 1993; F. Tobler, *Die Kroaten im Bezirk Mattersburg. Hrvati u matrofskom kotaru*, Eisenstadt 1994; D. Pavličević, *Moravski Hrvati. Povijest, život, kultura*, Zagreb 1994; M. Kruhek, *Krajiške utvrde i obrana Hrvatskog Kraljevstva tijekom 16. stoljeća*, Zagreb 1995; K. Kučerová, *Hrvati u srednjoj Europi*, Zagreb 1998; B. Vranješ-Soljan, *Gradišćanski Hrvati između tradicije i suvremenosti*, Zagreb 2005; R. Hajtsan, *Naseljenje južnogradišćanskih Hrvata u XVI. stoljeću u zrcalu urbara i pisama Ferenc Batthyány*, in: *Dani hrvatske knjige i riječi 2021. Dani Balinta Vujkova. Zbornik radova*, ed. K. Celicovic, Subotica 2022, pp. 229-250.

2. Short Historical Context of Ottoman Raids into Croatian Lands

Although Ottoman raids on Croatian historical territories were documented as early as the beginning of the 15th century,⁶ their frequency significantly increased after the Ottomans seized the medieval Kingdom of Bosnia in 1463.⁷ From then on, the region of medieval Bosnia served as a launching pad for Ottoman raiders advancing westward into Croatian historical territories.

The 16th century stands out as one of the most tumultuous periods in Croatian history. During this time, the Kingdom of Croatia was reduced to what was described as the *reliquiae reliquiarum olim inclity regni Croatiae*. Croatia and the Croats were regarded as the *antemurale christianitatis*, a term bestowed upon them by Pope Leo X. In addition to the widespread destruction of cities, villages, and fortresses, and substantial territorial losses, one of the gravest consequences of the Ottoman threat from the late 15th century to the end of the 16th century was the dramatic decline in the indigenous population. This manifested as a substantial emigration, marking an important chapter in the historical narrative of Croatia.⁸

One major outcome of the Ottoman incursions was a prevailing sense of insecurity leading to the subsequent displacement of the indigenous population to safer regions. It is crucial to underscore that during the period from 1463 to 1593, Croatia lost an estimated 60% of its indigenous population due to emigration.⁹ After the Ottomans established bases in conquered Bosnia by the late 15th century, they launched increasingly frequent and systematic raids on the territories of medieval Croatia and Slavonia. As a result, the local population started migrating in two main directions. One group moved toward the eastern Adriatic coast, seeking refuge in towns and islands, and eventually crossed the Adriatic to the Apennine Peninsula, primarily to what is now the Molise region, where their descendants still live today.¹⁰ The other group, particularly from Slavonia, fled to safer areas within the Kingdom of Hungary-Croatia,¹¹ primarily to modern-day Bačka (Hun. Bácska),

⁶ According to preserved written documents, it was in 1402 when for the first time Ottoman raiders plundered estates of Cistercian abbey of Blessed Virgin Mary in Topusko (*Monumenta historica episcopatus Zagradiensis. Povijesni spomenici zagrebačke biskupije*, ed. A. Lukinović, vol. 5, Zagreb 1992, pp. 173-174).

⁷ The fall of the medieval Kingdom of Bosnia – that is, its conquest by the Ottomans – has been the focus of many papers and books ever since the emergence of modern historiography in 19th century. In this context, it is worth highlighting the recently published monography by Emir O. Filipović, in which the author provides a detailed account of the events and circumstances surrounding the Ottoman conquest of Bosnia. Drawing on historical sources and relevant literature, Filipović also offers new interpretations of events (E.O. Filipović, *Bosansko Kraljevstvo i Osmansko Carstvo (1386-1463)*, Sarajevo 2019).

⁸ For information on the Ottoman conquests of Croatian lands and the defensive wars against the Ottomans from the late 15th century through the 16th century see, for example: M. Kruhek, *Krajiške*, pp. 45-96; I. Mažuran, *Hrvati i Osmansko Carstvo*, Zagreb 1998, pp. 34-113

⁹ I. Jurković, *Turska opasnost i hrvatski velikaši – knez Bernardin Frankapan i njegovo doba*, “Zbornik Odsjeka za povijesne znanosti Zavoda za povijesne i društvene znanosti Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti”, 17/1999, p. 39.

¹⁰ For information on the immigration of Croatian refugees to present-day Molise, their integration into local society, and their culture and identity, refer to P. Milanović-Trapo, *Croati molisani: San Felice del Molise – Acquaviva, Collecroce – Montemitro*, Split 2021, along with the cited sources and relevant literature.

¹¹ The term “Kingdom of Hungary-Croatia” (sometimes also “Kingdom of Croatia-Hungary”) is a historiographical term frequently used in South Slavic historiographies, particularly Croatian. It refers to the *Archiregnum Hungaricum*, a complex political formation with an intricate system of political connections centered on the Hungarian kings and their court. For more information on the *Archiregnum Hungaricum*, see: S. de Vajay, *Das ‘Archiregnum*

Banat (Hun. Bánát), and, to a lesser extent, Transylvania (Hun. Erdély; Rom. Transilvania; Ger. Siebenbürgen). These areas remained relatively secure, thanks largely to a defensive system established by King Matthias Corvinus (Cro. Matijaš Korvin, Hun. Hunyadi Mátyás). This included the Banates of Srebrenica and Mačva, located south of the Sava and Danube rivers, which formed a buffer zone against the Ottoman Empire.¹² This defensive system remained relatively effective until the Battle of Mohács in 1526.¹³ The second wave of Croatian emigration began in the second decade of the 16th century, this time directed toward western Hungary (modern-day Burgenland),¹⁴ as well as regions of the Holy Roman Empire, especially the Habsburg hereditary lands of Carniola (Slo. Kranjska, Ger. Krain), Carinthia (Ger. Kärnten, Slo. Koruška), and Styria (Ger. Steiermark, Slo. Štajerska) reaching its peak around the middle of the century.¹⁵

Based on a detailed analysis of preserved written sources, Jurković identified several categories of emigrants who left their homes in Croatia and Slavonia due to the growing Ottoman threat. The first group consists of refugees – those who fled their homeland at the earliest signs of the Ottoman presence. The second group includes exiles, who initially tried to defend their territory but left only when they could no longer hold out and the threat of occupation became imminent. The third group, also classified as exiles, had a different background. Initially, they accepted the Ottoman rule and remained on their property but were later expelled for various reasons, often related to religion, politics, or ethnicity. This group also includes civilians, prisoners of war, and hostages involved in prisoner exchanges. The final category consists of defectors, including Croatian natives who had previously served in Ottoman border forces as well as their Orthodox neighbors, deliberately settled by the Ottoman authorities in newly conquered border regions.¹⁶

Croats migrated to modern-day Burgenland in organized waves, each coinciding with the fall of specific areas of the of medieval Croatia and/or Slavonia to Ottoman control. Notably, each successive wave was larger than its predecessor. For example, in 1532, a substantial

Hungaricum und seine Wapensymbolik in der Ideenwelt des Mittelalters, in: *Überlieferung und Auftrag. Festschrift für Michael de Ferdinandy*, ed. J.G. Farkas, Wiesbaden 1972, pp. 647-667; and M. Ančić, *Od zemlje do kraljevstva: Mjesto Bosne u strukturi Archiregnuma, "Hercegovina"*, 1/2015, pp. 9-88. It is also worth noting that English-language historiography often refers to this medieval political entity as "The Realm of St. Stephen" (see, for example, the influential monograph by P. Engel, *The Realm of St Stephen*, London–New York 2001), which effectively describes this political formation, though not without its limitations.

¹² For further details on this wave of emigration, refer to N. Isailović, *Croatian noble refugees in late 15th and 16th century Banat and Transylvania – preliminary findings*, "Revue des études sud-est européennes", 59/2021, pp. 125-156 and M. Bara, *Autohtonost i migracije: Hrvati u ugarskom Podunavlju*, "Godišnjak za znanstvena istraživanja", 13/2021, pp. 9-71, with the cited sources and relevant literature.

¹³ For information on the Battle of Mohács, including its historical context, progression, and consequences, see, for example: G. Perjes, *The Fall of the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary: Mohacs 1526-Buda 1541*, Boulder–Highland Lakes 1989, and T. Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács. A History of Ottoman-Hungarian Warfare, 1389-1526*, Leiden–Boston 2018, pp. 372-462.

¹⁴ A. Mohl, *A horvátok bevándorlása*, pass; M. Ujević, *Gradišćanski Hrvati*, pp. 3-11; M. Valentić, *Gradišćanski Hrvati*, pp. 18-28; B. Vranješ-Šoljan, *Gradišćanski Hrvati*, pp. 11-29.

¹⁵ For information on the emigration of the Croatian population to territories that were then part of the Holy Roman Empire, specifically to present-day eastern Slovenia – including the regions of Bela Krajina, Kostel, Prekmurje, and Prekija – and their subsequent assimilation into the modern Slovenian nation, see: B. Golec, *Nedovršena kroatizacija dijelova istočne Slovenije između 16. i 19. stoljeća. Tragom hrvatskog lingvonima i etnonima u Beloj krajini, Kostelu, Prekomurju i Prekiji*, Samobor 2018.

¹⁶ I. Jurković, *Klasifikacija hrvatskih raseljenika za trajanja osmanske ugroze (od 1463. do 1593.)*, "Migracijske i etničke teme", 19/2003, no. 2-3, pp. 157-163.

group of refugees arrived in Burgenland from Gacka region in Croatia.¹⁷ This migration of Croats is intimately tied to earlier incursions by Ottoman raiders into the Gacka region, which prompted the Croats to seek refuge in Burgenland in 1532. In August 1530, the Ottomans invaded from Lika, traversing through Gacka to Vinodol. Similarly, by 1532, Ottomans had conquered Slavonia, encompassing present-day eastern Croatia. Faced with this threat, a significant portion of the local population opted to relocate to safer western areas. Given these circumstances, it becomes understandable that a considerable number of Croatian refugees from contemporary Slavonia resettled in modern-day Burgenland in 1533.¹⁸

When examining the fundamental aspects of the Croatian emigration to Burgenland, it must be acknowledged that historical sources providing detailed insights into the migration process are scarce. Nevertheless, it is evident that refugees migrated to Burgenland from extensive regions spanning between the Kupa River and the Adriatic Sea, as well as the area bordered by the Sava and Drava rivers.¹⁹

Several factors expedited the colonization process in Burgenland. Primarily, the persistent state of war with Ottomans in Croatia and Slavonia created the conditions that prompted emigration. Additionally, the prevalence of infectious diseases and several years of low agricultural products in the early 16th century resulted in the depopulation of manors in what is now Burgenland, making them suitable for the influx of new settlers. While spontaneous resettlement due to the Ottoman threat played a role, feudal lords who owned estates in modern-day Burgenland, played a crucial role in these processes. Many of these landlords also possessed land estates in the endangered regions of Croatia and Slavonia. Consequently, they actively encouraged the relocation of Croatian peasants to their Burgenland estates.²⁰

Wealthier peasants, including millers and blacksmiths, who were able to secure their immunity in their new territories, played a vital role in the resettlement from Croatian areas. Additionally, historical sources refer to a group of people known as *locatores*. This term denoted a distinct segment of individuals, typically minor nobles, who orchestrated organized migrations. They undertook these efforts either on behalf of a lord or independently if they possessed an estate along with dependent subjects. In the context of these migration processes, *locatores* functioned as negotiators, particularly when it was necessary to transfer peasants to another landlord's estate. Typically, as a reward for their efforts, they were granted a modest estate in modern-day Burgenland, exempt from feudal obligations.²¹ The Estates of the Kingdom of Croatia were also aware of this practice and opposed it. In an effort to prevent the westward relocation of Croatian settlements – which will be discussed in more detail later – they held an assembly in Topusko on September 9, 1535. There they warned King Ferdinand of Habsburg that their subjects were fleeing Croatia for other lands. They added that messengers were circulating among them, offering assistance and protection, in an effort to persuade them to leave.²²

¹⁷ B. Vranješ-Šoljan, *Gradišćanski Hrvati*, p. 18.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ K. Kučerová, *Hrvati u srednjoj Europi*, pp. 102-104.

²⁰ M. Valentić, *Gradišćanski Hrvati*, p. 19; B. Vranješ-Šoljan, *Gradišćanski Hrvati*, p. 20-21.

²¹ B. Vranješ-Šoljan, *Gradišćanski Hrvati*, p. 18-19.

²² *Acta comitalia*, vol. 1, p. 341.

3. The Attitude of Social Elites Towards Peasant Migrations

It is noteworthy that the Croatian and Slavonian nobility did not view favorably the attempts to relocate the able-bodied population from the threatened areas of Croatia and Slavonia to western lands under rule of Habsburg family with favor. This skepticism stemmed from the loss not only of a valuable workforce but also of potential soldiers crucial for defending the border against the Ottomans. Consequently, the Croatian and Slavonian nobility frequently voiced their dissent by submitting protest notes to King Ferdinand I of Habsburg who ruled at that time. For instance, in May 1533, the Estates of the Kingdom of Croatia sent a letter to King Ferdinand I of Habsburg, requesting, among other things, that he prohibit their subjects, as well as other residents of Croatia, from abandoning their homes and relocating to Carinthia. They emphasized that the Carinthian nobility were promising freedom to these subjects and actively encouraging them to leave the already depopulated areas of Croatia. The officials warned that if this practice continued, parts of the Kingdom of Croatia would quickly become deserted.²³ The following year, the Croatian Ban (viceroy) at the time, Peter Keglević, informed the king in a letter dated April 17th that the subjects remaining in Croatia along the border with the Ottoman Empire were relocating to Carniola and even to Ottoman territory. He added that, as a result, this border region of Croatia would soon become depopulated and desolate.²⁴ In early September of that same year, the king responded to the Estates of the Kingdom of Croatia, assuring them that he would ensure that subjects who had emigrated from Croatia to other Habsburg territories would not be accepted or welcomed, as they were obligated to remain in their homeland.²⁵

It is interesting to note that most objections and protests against the emigration of subjects from Croatian lands threatened by the Ottomans – regularly sent by the Croatian and Slavonian Estates to their king, Ferdinand I of Habsburg – primarily concerned emigration to Carniola and Carniola, territories within the Holy Roman Empire, rather than to south-western Hungary.²⁶ This may be interpreted as a reaction to emigration beyond the borders of the Kingdom of Hungary and Croatia into separate territorial and political entities, despite both regions being ruled by the same sovereign at the time. The emigration of Croatian refugees to what was then western Hungary, now known as Burgenland, was essentially considered internal migration. It is also important to note that some landowners held estates in both Croatia and Slavonia as well as in western Hungary. On the one hand, they were often interested in relocating their subjects from endangered estates in Croatia and Slavonia, as seen in the case of the Batthyány family (discussed later in the second part of this study).²⁷ On the other hand, these landowners were also members of the Croatian and Slavonian Estates who raised objections. Thus, it appears that these protests primarily targeted the emigration of Croatians to lands within the Holy Roman Empire.

²³ Ibidem, p. 310

²⁴ *Ausgewählte Dokumente zur Migration der Burgenländischen Kroaten im 16. Jahrhundert. Odabrani dokumenti o seobi Gradišćanskih Hrvata u 16. stoljeću*, ed. G. Pálffy, M. Pandžić, F. Tobler, Eisenstadt/Željezno 1999, p. 60.

²⁵ *Acta comitalia*, vol. 1, pp. 342-343.

²⁶ B. Golec, *Nedovršena kroatizacija*, pass.

²⁷ H. Kekez, *On the Road to Safety – Part II. The Experience of Travel of Croatian Refugees fleeing the Ottomans, as described in Letters of Francis Batthyány (1538-1548)*, “Saeculum Christianum”, forthcoming.

Despite all objections and appeals to the ruler, the growing Ottoman threat and repeated raids drove subjects in Croatia and Slavonia to continue migrating westward to safer regions under Habsburg rule. Acknowledging this reality, the Estates of Slavonia sought to establish a legal framework for these migrations. At their meeting on January 6th, 1538, in Križevci, they adopted a series of resolutions aimed at regulating the issue. Article 21 declared that the resettlement of subjects was strictly prohibited. However, it emphasized that if resettlement were to occur, it should follow a clearly defined procedure.²⁸

And indeed, in Article 22, adopted during the same session of the Estates of the Kingdom of Slavonia held in Križevci, detailed conditions were set for relocating subjects to safer, more western regions under Habsburg rule. It was stipulated that anyone wishing to transfer a subject to their estate had to appear with the county noble judge before the subject's master or steward and pay a denar as a land tax. Upon completing this transaction, the subject could then be relocated. Afterwards, the subject was required to remain at their former residence for an additional fifteen days, during which time they were to settle any outstanding debts with their lord and others to whom they owed money. If the subject's former master permitted, they could stay longer than the specified fifteen days. Moreover, the article clarified that if the subject's current lord could no longer retain them, the noble judge was to return after fifteen days and transfer the subject, along with all movable property, to the lord or nobleman willing to accept them. The resettled subject could then freely move with all their possessions within the next fifteen days.²⁹

The decisions made on that assembly of Slavonian Estates also addressed the matter of crops on the property from which a subject intended to relocate. Article 23 specified that the subject could retain the crops if they paid the land tax to the landowner. However, if another subject or the landowner caused damage to those crops, the subject had the right to seek compensation for the damage.³⁰

Finally, Article 24 addressed situations in which a landlord or nobleman refused to release a subject who had acquired the right to relocate. In such cases, the local count, deputy count, and noble judges were instructed to impose a fine of twenty-five marks on the uncooperative lord or nobleman, payable to the lord willing to accept the subject, after which the relocation would be facilitated.³¹

Despite these resolutions by the Slavonian Estates, it appears that the resettlement of subjects from threatened estates continued largely without adherence to these provisions. Consequently, during their session held on May 8 of the following year in Dubrava, the Slavonian Estates took a firm stand against such actions in their conclusions. They concluded that, upon locating a runaway subject, the noble judge was required to request that the lord or nobleman on whose property the subject was found return them. If the request was refused, the fugitive subject would be returned to their original master after the prescribed fine was paid.³²

²⁸ ...*Articulus 21. Colonorum migration et eius licentia...*, *Acta comitalia Regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae. Hrvatski saborski spisi*, ed. F. Šišić, vol. 2, Zagreb 1915, p. 145.

²⁹ ...*Articulus 22. Modus accipiendi licentiam colono...*, *Acta comitalia*, vol. 2, pp. 145-146.

³⁰ ...*Articulus 23. Seminatura coloni migrantis...*, *ibidem*, p. 146.

³¹ ...*Articulus 24. Colonom contra ius et aequum detinentis poena...*, *ibidem*, p. 146.

³² *Acta comitalia*, vol. 2, p. 265.

In addition to the Croatian and Slavonian Estates, who were displeased with the resettlement of subjects from Croatian lands to safer areas due to the loss of manpower and potential soldiers needed to defend the border against the Ottomans, the residents of the areas where these subjects were settled also expressed dissatisfaction, sometimes resorting to violence to halt the process. Such tensions are evident in a series of lawsuits led Francis Batthyány (Cro. Franjo Bačani, Hun. Batthyány Ferenc) in the late 1520s and early 1530s against Erhard von Polheim, a nobleman with estates in what is now southern Burgenland, near Batthyány's land estates. On May 19, 1529, Erhard filed a lawsuit against Batthyány before the king's commissioners in Sopron, claiming that Batthyány had settled Croatian refugees on the manors of Neudau, Wörth, and Burgau and had begun collecting income from the area.³³

However, much more about the violence inflicted on the Croatian settlers can be gleaned from the verdict in this case, delivered by the royal commissioners in Sopron a few days later, on May 24, 1529. The verdict reveals that, in September 1528, Erhard and his armed men attacked and looted Batthyány's estates near Güssing, and that in the same year, Erhard forcibly claimed a tenth of the vineyards in the villages of Rohrbrunn, Santalek, and Ollersdorf, despite Batthyány's rightful claim to that income. Furthermore, the verdict states that, on Erhard's orders and with his knowledge, his subordinates assaulted the village judge, Jacob Horváth, in Horváthfalva, seizing his rifle.³⁴ Notably, Horváthfalva translates to "Croatian Village," indicating it was inhabited by Croatian settlers. On that occasion, the village judge Jacob is specifically identified with the attribute "Horváth", meaning "Croat", clearly indicating his ethnic origin and identity.

Despite this verdict, Erhard continued his actions and physical attacks against Croatian settlers in the following years. A few years later, Francis Batthyány once again sued his neighbor, Erhard von Polheim, for violence against his subjects, who were immigrants from Croatia. In his lawsuit dated December 6, 1534, Batthyány claimed, among other things, that Erhard's armed men had attacked his village of Horváthfalva, completely destroyed it, and expelled its inhabitants.³⁵

In addition to the noble property owners in the areas of western Hungary where Croatian refugees had settled, other local inhabitants were also displeased with the situation. For instance, the citizens of Sopron expressed dissatisfaction with the Croatian immigrants, highlighting their inability to adapt to local customs and way of life. In a complaint submitted to the Sopron city council on April 25, 1535, they reported that, following the leasing of a large portion of the Unten-Pusztai land to Croats from the village of Pajngart (Baumgarten), there was a shortage of pastureland, and the road to the watering hole for livestock was obstructed. Additionally, they stated that when the Croats ploughed or worked in the fields, they brought all their cattle, which led to overgrazing of the city's pastures and meadows. To prevent potential disputes and physical conflicts, the citizens requested that the Sopron city council revoke the Croats' right to use this land at the next available opportunity.³⁶

³³ *Ausgewählte Dokumente*, pp. 42-43.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 43-44.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 63. Regarding the dispute between Francis Batthyány and Erhard von Polheim, see also: M. Kruhek, *Die Grenzstreitigkeiten zwischen*, pp. 41-61.

³⁶ *Ausgewählte Dokumente*, p. 64.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated that by the mid-16th century, the Croatian and Slavonian Estates – primarily the great landowners – held an ambivalent stance toward the emigration of Croatian and Slavonian peasants, i.e., their subjects, from estates threatened by the Ottomans to the safer western regions.

Generally speaking, the Croatian and Slavonian nobility did not look favorably upon efforts to relocate the able-bodied population from the endangered areas of Croatia and Slavonia to western territories under Habsburg rule. This skepticism stemmed from concerns over the loss of not only a valuable workforce but also potential soldiers, who were crucial for defending the frontier against Ottoman incursions.

However, surviving written records – particularly the resolutions of the Croatian and Slavonian Estates – suggest that most formal objections and protests against the emigration of subjects from Ottoman-threatened Croatian lands, regularly submitted by the Estates to their king, Ferdinand I of Habsburg, were directed primarily against migration to Carniola and Carinthia, regions within the Holy Roman Empire, rather than to southwestern Hungary. This distinction may be interpreted as a reaction against emigration beyond the territorial and political framework of the Kingdom of Hungary and Croatia, despite both entities being ruled by the same sovereign at the time.

By contrast, the emigration of Croatian refugees to southwestern Hungary was largely perceived as internal migration. It is also noteworthy that certain landowners held estates in both Croatia and Slavonia as well as in western Hungary. On the one hand, they were often inclined to relocate their subjects from endangered holdings in Croatia and Slavonia, as exemplified by the Batthyány family, a case examined in the second part of this study. On the other hand, these same landowners were also members of the Croatian and Slavonian Estates, which protested emigration. This apparent contradiction suggests that their objections were primarily directed against Croatian migration to the territories of the Holy Roman Empire rather than against internal resettlement within Hungarian lands.

Regarding the social elites and other privileged groups residing in or owning estates in southwestern Hungary, particularly around Sopron, it is evident that they, too, did not view the settlement of Croatian refugees in these areas unfavorably. Historical sources indicate that disputes arose over specific land parcels as well as over the challenges of integrating newly arrived groups, who maintained distinct identities and lifestyles, into the local environment. These tensions occasionally escalated into violence and even armed conflicts.

However, it is important to emphasize that such negative attitudes were not shared by all members of the nobility or landowning class in southwestern Hungary. Many landowners, primarily motivated by economic interests, actively encouraged and facilitated the resettlement of Croatian refugees on their estates. This aspect will be further explored in the second part of this study, particularly through the case of the Batthyány family.

In addition to these issues, the second part of this study will also focus on the journey undertaken by Croatian refugees as they sought safety in the southwestern regions of 16th-century Hungary. Through an examination of the activities of the Batthyány family, the study will address key themes such as motivations for emigration, the social composition of refugees, the challenges they faced, the assistance they received along the way, and the organization of refugee travel.

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