

# LITERACY IN THE SERVICE OF DIPLOMACY: TRANSYLVANIAN EMISSARIES, TRANSLATORS AND SCRIBES AT THE OTTOMAN PORTE DURING THE REIGN OF MICHAEL APAFI I

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**Abstract:** *The present paper brings forward the delicate mission of Transylvanian emissaries to the Ottoman Porte and their complex relationship with the Turkish administration. Each member of the legation had special training and certain skills that allowed them to act on behalf of the Transylvanian Prince (who, during his 30-year reign never had an official encounter with the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed IV), from mastering of the local conventions, languages (such as Hungarian, Latin, German, and Turkish) and diplomatic practice, as sometimes important and secret missions were entrusted to them. The author will regard pay attention to diplomatic career of some translators and scribes from Prince Apafi's chancery, and their influence on the political issues of the region.*

**Keywords:** emissary, administration, diplomatic practice, Prince Apafi's chancery

The sending of emissaries abroad was a recognized right of a sovereign state and it has been respected internationally since medieval times. The representatives of the host country were bound to receive the delegation and to treat its members with all due respect. The manner of greeting and the level of attention enjoyed by the foreigners depended on the rank of the emissary. The delegates of emperors enjoyed maximum consideration, followed by envoys of governmental institutions, but most commonly found in the royal courts were the permanent or temporal diplomatic agents.

Transylvania opted from the very beginning of the Principality era to strengthen the process of cooperation with other European kingdoms. The documents from those times mention the first emissaries to have been Michael Gyulay to Vienna (1542)<sup>1</sup>, Anton Verancsics to the Ottoman Empire (1543)<sup>2</sup> and Krakow (1548)<sup>3</sup>. The French-Habsburg military conflicts determined the elite of the principality towards a policy of supporting France. In 1558 Cristophor Báthory successfully fulfilled a foreign affairs mission at the court of French King Henry II<sup>4</sup>, followed the next year

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<sup>1</sup> *Erdélyi országgyűlési emlékek történeti bevezetésekkel* (hereinafter named EOE), I, Budapest, 1875, p. 136.

<sup>2</sup> EOE, I, p. 178.

<sup>3</sup> EOE, II, p. 110, in the footnotes.

<sup>4</sup> EOE, II, p. 27.

by the delegations of Mihai Gyulay and Stanislaw Niezowsky<sup>5</sup>. The latter also acted as the emissary of the prince to the Viennese court<sup>6</sup>. The French diplomats were also present in Alba Iulia through the delegations led by Cambray (1557)<sup>7</sup> or Martines (1556, 1558)<sup>8</sup>.

Transylvanian relations with the Ottoman Porte represent a special chapter in the diplomatic history of the two countries. Voivode John Zápolya, during the decline of the Hungarian kingdom, was an ally to Suleiman II, and they had extremely cordial relations, which ultimately led to recognition by the sultan of the country's autonomy<sup>9</sup>. The privileged position enjoyed by the territory inside the Carpathian arc as compared to Wallachia and Moldavia<sup>10</sup> lasted until the reign of George Rákóczi II, a moment when his adventurous desires relating to the accession to the throne of Poland made the decade-long endeavour of the princes of Transylvania to develop good relations with the Ottoman Empire to dissolve quickly. No matter how much Michael Apafi tried to change the attitude of the Ottoman Porte his attempts were met with suspicion and eventually failed. Starting from the second half of the seventeenth century only the economic, political and military interests of the sultan prevailed, and the fate of Transylvania became almost similar to that of Moldavia and Wallachia.

In his three decades of his reigning, Prince Apafi never met with the sultan of Constantinople, however, he had two meetings with the grand vizier in Érsekújvár (1663)<sup>11</sup> and subsequently, in the military camp near Vienna (1683)<sup>12</sup>. There was an extremely favorable opportunity for an official meeting with the Ottoman sovereign in 1675, when Mehmed IV invited him to take part in celebrations organized in the capital of the empire on the occasion of the circumcision of his son and his daughter's wedding<sup>13</sup>, an invitation that was not, however, honoured by the prince. All bilateral

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<sup>5</sup> Szilágyi Sándor, *Erdélyország története tekintettel mivelődésére*, I, Pest, 1866, 342-343.

<sup>6</sup> EOE, II, p. 52.

<sup>7</sup> Szilágyi Sándor, *op. cit.*, p. 338-339.

<sup>8</sup> EOE, II, p. 34.

<sup>9</sup> For the personal relations between John Zápolya and Sultan Suleiman II, see Anton Dörner, *De când datează vasalitatea Transilvaniei față de Poarta Otomană*, in *Teologie și istorie. In honorem Pr. Prof. univ. dr. Alexandru Moraru*, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2014, p. 179-193.

<sup>10</sup> A comparison of the status of the three countries at the Ottoman Porte was done by Biró Vencel, *Erdély és a Porta*, in "Századok", LVII-LVIII, 1923-1924, p. 76-93.

<sup>11</sup> The meeting between the two has been recounted by three memorialistic sources: Czeglédi István (*Új Magyar Múzeum*, X, 2-3, 1860, p. 89-113), Rozsnyai Dávid (*Monumenta Hungariae Historica*, II, Scriptores, VIII, p. 359-385) and an anonymous manuscript transcribed by the historian Egri Fodor Sámuel.

<sup>12</sup> *Történeti emlékek a magyar nép községi és magánéletéből a XVIII. század végéig*, Pest, 1860, p. 7; *Chronicon. Fuchsio-Lupino-Oltardium sive annales Hungarici et Transilvanici*, II, Braşov, 1848, p. 207.

<sup>13</sup> Tóth Ernő, I. és II. *Apafi Mihály erdélyi fejedelmek naplója az 1632-1694. évekről*, in "Erdélyi Múzeum", XVII, Cluj, 1900, p. 155.

issues were settled via emissaries. The high ranking persons designated by the Transylvanian Diet to be sent to the Ottoman Empire and who were nominated in documents in diverse ways (*ablegatus, legatus, residens, orator, internuntius, kapitihá*), were differentiated by their assigned role, capacity and tasks. Envoys Extraordinary (*internuntius*) enjoyed a better reputation and greater attention at the Ottoman Porte. They were part of the Princely Court's aristocratic elite having important tasks in the political and administrative hierarchy. Their main activity focused on delivering the annual tribute, but most of the time they were also assigned secret missions which they had to carry out on their own or via intermediaries. Among the figures who repeatedly fulfilled the role of Head of Delegation may be listed the stewards Ladislau Baló and Stephen Nalácz, the persons responsible for the postal service of the Prince, Ladislaus Székely and Ladislaus Vajda, the Székely Seat Captains John Daczo, Valentin Szilvási, Christopher Paskó and David Rozsnyai, the Turkish language translator of the Chancery. In the same category of emissaries with special powers, but less present in Turkey we can mention the senior princely advisers, Count Francisc Rhédei, Wolfgang Bethlen, Thomas Nagy, George Kapi or John Nemes.

The permanent emissaries were perceived to be on a lower level (*residens, orator, kapitihá*). With some minor exceptions, they had similar tasks to the envoys extraordinary whom they seconded in fulfilling their duties at the Porte; the difference between them was the duration of their mission in Constantinople and Adrianople, which for the permanent emissaries amounted to one year and could be renewed<sup>14</sup>. The persons who fulfilled the present diplomatic mission were generally recruited from the middle or lower social classes of the population in Transylvania. Their primary duty was focused on the uneventful progress of all daily issues stipulated in the instructions received from the prince or Diet at the administrative palace of the Sultan (meetings, hearings, handing out of letters, translation of texts, gathering of various information), the preparation of periodic reports with all the events that happened in the Ottoman Empire, witnessed or heard of, which were then shipped via the specific courier service. They also made the purchases requested by the princely family or any high-ranking noble in the entourage of the management of the Court.

The major problem of Transylvanian-Turkish contacts was constituted by the language of communication. For religious reasons Muslims did not excel in their

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<sup>14</sup> In the spring of 1688, the emissary then at the Porte, Alexander Pál, notified the Prince that soon his term of one year of service was to expire and asks for a replacement to be sent (EOE, XIX, p. 397). Pending the order of recall he sent news via the Hebrew merchants from Alba Iulia in Constantinople in the absence of the official couriers; in the report drafted to the Prince and sent to Iernut via the Wallachian postal service (!) he described his pitiful material state, the major shortages of all kinds: he did not have a translator, cart, horses, they walked barefoot, etc. (EOE, XX, p. 97-98). Since the replacement from Transylvania hadn't arrived two years after his request, in 1690 he flees from there to the country (Biró Vencel, *Erdély követei a Portán*, Cluj, 1921, p. 137).

desire to learn a foreign language; and the number of people in Transylvania willing to study the Turkish idiom was not at all large, which was why they resorted to the Dragomans caste at the Porte. However, resorting to this service presented many risks. The official translators from the Orient, mostly Christian renegades, depended entirely on the sultan, to whom they had to report, in detail, all the information they acquired. Easily corrupted, not infrequently, for certain amounts of money, they served the interests of the emissaries of other countries accredited in the capital of the empire. The case of the dragoman of the Imperial Court, Abdi Panajotus, can be relevant. Of Greek origin, with the financial support of the Habsburg emperor in Vienna, he learned to read and write in Ottoman Turkish at Constantinople<sup>15</sup>. There he ingratiated himself with the Sultan and Grand Vizier and then was rapidly promoted. He was present at all the audiences held at the palace, where he was noticed by the Transylvanian emissaries to whom he was extremely benevolent. In June 1663 he personally met Prince Apafi at his residence in Alba Iulia<sup>16</sup>. He was consistently included on the list of officials who were periodically sent gifts from Transylvania on various occasions<sup>17</sup>. The battle of Szentgotthárd (1664) was viewed by Panajot from a hilltop near the settlement, together with the prince's attaché Ladislaus Baló<sup>18</sup>. The relations between them were close and they often met at the vizier's secretariat. This was how, on this occasion, the Transylvanian emissary found out about a piece of information of a highly confidential nature, referring to the preparations which were made in Constantinople in connection with the overthrowing of Michael Apafi<sup>19</sup>. Immediately upon hearing the news, he forwarded it to the prince who reacted quickly and sent an official delegation led by John Daczó to the Porte to the deputy Grand Vizier in order to request clarifying explanations in this respect. The meeting was also attended by Panajot, who intervened in settling the case not only with advice, but with the important connections he had in the Divan<sup>20</sup>. Gradually, the Transylvanians realized that the Greek's connection with their representatives, and those of other foreign countries on mission in Turkey was not exactly coincidental; certain political interests, and the consistent annual fee received from Emperor Leopold I, compelled the dragoman to report to the Habsburgs all the classified information contained by the documents submitted for translation by the foreign delegations to the Ottoman Chancery, but also those heard as interpreter during official hearings. The first to signal to the prince, as early as November 1661,

<sup>15</sup> Bethlen János, *Erdély története 1629 – 1673*, Budapest, 1993, p. 320.

<sup>16</sup> Tóth Ernő, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>17</sup> In autumn of 1663 the Prince sent a horse as a gift. Panajot did not like the colt, which is why Apafi sent another one, which this time was accepted (*Rozsnyai Dávid, az utolsó török deák, történeti maradványai*, in *Monumenta Hungariae Historica*, II. Scriptorum, VIII, Pesta, 1867, p. 273 (hereinafter named: *Rozsnyai Dávid, az utolsó török deák, történeti maradványai*).

<sup>18</sup> Bethlen János, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 174.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*.

the secret activities of Panajot the Dragoman was the emissary Valentin Szilvási<sup>21</sup>. In order to expose to the palace administration the activities of the Greek translator the Diet suggested that their emissary sent to deliver the annual tribute to submit, according to custom, to the Ottoman Chancery the official letter from the prince for translation, but at the same time, he should have with him another one drafted directly in the Turkish language by the translator David Rozsnyai which was to be handed personally to the secretary of the grand vizier and which to describe, in detail, the plots of the Porte's translator<sup>22</sup>. At any rate, the good personal relations of the Prince and Panajot deteriorated<sup>23</sup>, although he continued to receive the appropriate annual gifts.

In order to protect their own diplomatic secrets, the European states hired their own interpreters with consistent annual remunerations. Michael Apafi also followed this model and hired into his service foreign scribes or interpreters, natives of Partium or Hungary, speakers of Hungarian and with knowledge of the Ottoman or Latin language, such as Csepregi Turkovitz Michael, Stephen Győri, George Brancivici of Ineu or Judah the hebrew. Meanwhile, he searched among young, intellectually-gifted Transylvanians willing to pursue a lengthy political career, who then were to represent him at the Porte. This is how, gradually, the scribes George Literati of Alba Iulia, David Rozsnyai, John Moses of Făgăraș, Stephen Balog or Matthew Borbély<sup>24</sup> were hired in the service of the Prince.

Under the ruling conditions accepted by Michael Apafi it was stipulated that the Transylvanian prince was to remain loyal to the Sultan, to respect old agreements concluded by prior princes and to follow the example of his predecessors in the sending of emissaries to the Ottoman Porte<sup>25</sup>. Within the context of these bilateral relations both the emissaries as well as the translators had to comply with certain procedural steps that had been sanctioned for decades by use and tradition. Thus, the persons designated to be part of the delegation were nominated by the Prince and approved - most often tacitly - by the Diet<sup>26</sup>. Before their journey they received firm

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<sup>21</sup> *Török-magyarkori állam-okmánytár*, Pesta, 1870 (hereinafter named *TMÁO*), IV, p. 9-10. In the postscript of the report of November 28, sent from Constantinople, he informs his sovereign, Michael Apafi, that the dragoman of the Porte was acting very friendly towards him, they got along well together, but caution was necessary "to not inform him of all events, as he is the translator of the emperor [Leopold] and receives, with certainty, from the Roman emperor the annual sum of 1,500 thalers".

<sup>22</sup> *EOE*, XIV, p. 286

<sup>23</sup> *Rozsnyai Dávid, az utolsó török deák, történeti maradványai*, p. 350.

<sup>24</sup> Most of the time, to their first name was added the particle "scribe"; it must be mentioned that not all bearing this denominator in chronicles and documents have knowledge of the Turkish language, but it refers to the fact that the designated person has the knowledge of writing has passed through the school cycle, in some cases also higher education.

<sup>25</sup> *EOE*, XIII, p. 79.

<sup>26</sup> Interesting is the advice given by scribe David Rozsnyai to the appointed emissaries: "If you can avoid this journey do so... I tell you the truth, as far as I know, of the 40 emissaries [at the Porte]

instructions (*instructiones*), drafted in the form of several items regarding the activity they were to perform in the capital of the empire<sup>27</sup>. Not infrequently the written directives were accompanied by other secret indications connected with the mission to be carried out<sup>28</sup>. Depending on the course of events the original text could be later supplemented with new items and then shipped by special courier to the country's representative<sup>29</sup>. If the group of the Transylvanian emissaries had to address issues at different officials at the Porte, each of them received separate oral and written assignments<sup>30</sup>.

After the nomination, the emissary took the Loyalty Oath (*reversalis*), by which he committed himself not to betray the interests of the Prince and Princess, not to keep in touch with the country's enemies, to report in writing all matters of state at the Porte, not to perform any wrongdoing which could prejudice in any way the image of Transylvania, to spend sparingly the money received for the purchases requested by the political elite at the princely Court<sup>31</sup>. Finally, the credentials (*credenciales*)<sup>32</sup> were handed and the documents of free passage/safe conduct through the country and empire (*salvus conductus*)<sup>33</sup>.

none of them was worthy of the mission received, and apart from two, the rest all fell into some fault" (*Rozsnyai Dávid, az utolsó török deák, történeti maradványai*, p. 258).

<sup>27</sup> Such instructions, kept and published in the special literature were those of Stephen Naláczai in 1664 ("Minerva", I, p. 26-27), Stephen Baló in 1667 (*EOE*, XIV, p. 236-238), Sigismund Boér in 1669 (*EOE*, XV, p. 83-84), Stephen Vajda from 1679 (*TMÁO*, VI, p. 50-53) and 1680 (*EOE*, XVII, p. 133-137), Sigismund Kovács from 1682 and 1683 (*EOE*, XVII, p. 317-322; *EOE*, XVIII, p. 71-76), John Sárosy from 1686 and 1687 (*EOE*, XVIII, p. 569-574; *EOE*, XIX, p. 195-199), Baltazar Macskási from 1686 (*Monumenta Hungariae Historica. I. Diplomatarium*, XIV, I, Pesta, 1870, p. 72 - 76), Matthew Baló from 1688 (*EOE*, XIX, p. 335).

<sup>28</sup> *EOE*, XIV, p. 238-241; *EOE*, XVIII, p. 574-577.

<sup>29</sup> One such case - and not the only one - was Stephen Baló's, who received the annexes to the Prince's instructions via a courier of the princely Court in Adrianople, see *EOE*, XIV, p. 243.

<sup>30</sup> *EOE*, XVIII, p. 446-448.

<sup>31</sup> The texts of the oaths of the emissaries are similar, sometimes having identical passages throughout the period of Michael Apafi, see *EOE*, XV, p. 220-221 and p. 303-304; 624; *TMÁO*, V, p. 66-67, *EOE*, XVI, p. 433, 624; *EOE*, XVII, p. 322-323; *EOE*, XVIII, p. 76-77.

<sup>32</sup> An interesting case occurred in 1682. Since the Prince was not present at the Court, the emissary George Gyeröffy went to the Porte without credentials. At the chancery of the Grand Vizier, in the absence of this act, the delegation was refused audience. After a brief discussion, the dragoman proposed that Gyeröffy falsify the missing official act, to which the Transylvanian responded, scared, that he can not imitate the handwriting of the Prince nor has he got his seal; to which the reply was brief: "Do not worry, he wields these documents" (*EOE*, XVII, p. 332). A similar case occurred in 1664 with the Transylvanian emissary, Páskó (*TMÁO*, IV, p. 195).

<sup>33</sup> It also appears in documents in the form of: *salvus passus* (*EOE*, XVII, p. 162) or *passus in Turciam* (*EOE*, XVII, p. 86-87). Normally, documents of this kind, upon returning from a mission were to be handed to the butler of the princely Court (*EOE*, XVII, p. 162), and then burned (*Teleki Mihály levelezése*, Budapest, 1908, following *TML*), IV, p. 477), which happened quite rarely, their holders using them further or lending the official document to others, which created a lot of damage for the country's inhabitants and tax system. The Diet of 1669 tried to resolve the situation by imposing clear

Like the country's official emissary, the translator who accompanied the diplomatic mission was also entrusted with instructions regarding the assignments to be carried out at the Porte<sup>34</sup>. They also took an oath of allegiance to Michael Apafi and the country<sup>35</sup>. Both of their texts bore resemblances to each another in terms of content, with certain distinct additions for the translators, tackling issues deriving from the nature of the specific activity, such as their pledge to translate accurately, without making any additions of their own, not to disclose to anybody the confidential material received for the purpose of translation or the content of the official hearings which they attended, to report all political issues relating to Transylvania which they heard, etc.<sup>36</sup>

The composition and pomposity of the delegation depended on what its designated members were going to do in the capital of the empire. In the case of solving important political issues, and the emissary being led by a courtier with the status of envoy extraordinary of the prince, during the bilateral talks both languages commonly used in the respective countries could be used (Hungarian and Turkish). Such occasions were the handing of the annual tribute, also the cases relating to the settlement of the borders of Transylvania, the audiences that had the purpose of requesting the extradition of fugitives (Nicholas Zólyomi, Paul Béli, Ladislau Csáki, Cristopher Paskó), issues of the Calvinists in Hungary, or requesting the right of succession to the throne of Michael Apafi II. Otherwise, during the common audiences of the sultan and vizier, the permanent Transylvanian envoys had to use the Turkish idiom only.

The activity of the translators began immediately after crossing the country's borders. During the journey, the common members of the delegation, such as the postal couriers, the riding servants, the coachmen, were valuable resources for the official delegation<sup>37</sup>. Sometimes, after repeated journeys to and from Constantinople, they became so well-versed in the Turkish language that they also received from the prince certain concrete tasks as translators<sup>38</sup>.

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specifications, such as the name of the beneficiary, the number of accompanying persons, the destination, etc. (*EOE*, XIV, p. 392).

<sup>34</sup> *TMÁO*, V, p. 336-337.

<sup>35</sup> The oaths of allegiance were different depending on the religion of the person who took them. In the texts of the Catholic interpreters they swore on the cross, God, the Trinity, the Virgin Mary, the Gospels; in the case of Judah the Hebrew, Abraham and the five books of Moses were invoked. Otherwise the oath formulas resemble each other.

<sup>36</sup> The oaths of allegiance of the following Turkish language translators that were sent from Transylvania to the Porte were published in academic literature: Judah the Hebrew and Stephen Boros from 1671 (*TMÁO*, V, p. 68-69, 72-74), George Brancovici from 1675 (*TMÁO*, VII, p. 559-560), John Moses from 1675 (*TMÁO*, V, p. 332-333), 1681 (*TMÁO*, VI, p. 167-168) and 1687 (*EOE*, XIX, p. 160 - 161), Michael Kerekes from 1685 (*EOE*, XVIII, p. 261-263).

<sup>37</sup> *TMÁO*, V, p. 49, 50.

<sup>38</sup> In a letter dating from 1668 sent by the Princess Ana Bornemisza to Michael Teleki, she complains of a coach driver named Boros, also hired as a translator at the Porte, who betrayed the

Upon reaching the destination the emissary was housed in the residence of the permanent emissaries in the imperial capital<sup>39</sup>, and the diplomatic activity began immediately. The first mandatory visits were to the sultan's palace, to the residence of the vizier or Kaymakam, the residences of various other senior officials of the Ottoman administrative bodies<sup>40</sup>. The visits were intended to serve the purposes of delivering the letters of accreditation, as well as presenting the various gifts brought from Transylvania<sup>41</sup>. Choosing suitable gifts to each official in accordance with their rank in the Ottoman hierarchy was a delicate issue to which the Transylvanian elite devoted a prolonged period of time in a year<sup>42</sup>. Frequently, though the transport of these gifts caused significant losses (birds, horses)<sup>43</sup>.

The translators, as direct subjects of the emissary, followed him closely in all his activities: official or private meetings, parties organized at the palace or shopping<sup>44</sup>. In the absence of the translator, the Transylvanian envoys had an extremely difficult time, and for this reason they always requested that the prince make haste in sending substitutes<sup>45</sup>. On several occasions the Transylvanian ruler

country by working for the exiled Nicholas Zólyomi (*TML*, IV, p. 331). She then changed her view, since in 1672 the emissary of Transylvania in Adrianople, in the absence of Turkish language translators, requests Prince Apafi "to send a translator, if there is no other available, even Páládi, because otherwise I am and will be in great difficulty if either Boros or Páládi do not come" (*TMÁO*, V, p. 94). Both of the persons mentioned in the document were in the princely courier service (*EOE*, XV, p. 207).

<sup>39</sup> For more information on the "Transylvanian Residence" at Constantinople, see Biró Vencel, *op. cit.* p. 106-112.

<sup>40</sup> Among the preserved documents of David Rozsnyai there is one that gives some personal advice that was extremely helpful to each and every member of the country's delegation arriving at the Ottoman Porte, see *Rozsnyai Dávid, az utolsó török deák...*, p. 258-261.

<sup>41</sup> The gifts consisting of valuable objects and money were given, necessarily, on the occasion of paying the annual tribute, the following officials being targeted: the Sultan and Grand Vizier (*EOE*, XV, p. 132; *TMÁO*, IV, p. 195; V, p. 40, 528), the deputy grand vizier (*EOE*, XV, p. 90; *TMÁO*, IV, p. 195; V, p. 40) the members of the divan (*TMÁO*, IV, p. 146; *EOE*, XV, p. 132) the Kaymakam (*EOE*, XV, p. 123; *TMÁO*, IV, p. 146), the deputy Kaymakam (*EOE*, XIV, p. 422), the grand mufti (*TMÁO*, IV, p. 147) the muezzin (*EOE*, XV, p. 208), the Sultan's treasurer (*TMÁO*, IV, p. 146), the Chiaus (*TMÁO*, IV, p. 146; V, p. 40-41; *EOE*, XIV, p. 392, 422), Panajot the dragoman (*TMÁO*, IV, p. 235 262; V, p. 40) or his deputy (*EOE*, XV, p. 86). The emissaries also received money to reward the commoners who performed useful services or brought them information (*EOE*, XV, p. 86).

<sup>42</sup> Stephen Baló was late in leaving for the Porte as the suitable gifts for the vizier and the members of the divan had not yet been found (*TML*, V, p. 175).

<sup>43</sup> *TML*, III, p. 493-494.

<sup>44</sup> *TMÁO*, IV, p. 310, 367-368.

<sup>45</sup> The problem of the Transylvanian residents at the Porte in the second half of the seventeenth century was their poor intellectual training. "Here each of the Christian envoys [or] residents are intellectuals, only the Romanians are barbarians, from which our own envoy is not far away either", states the Transylvanian translator at the Porte, Harsányi Nagy Jakab (*Monumenta Hungariae Historica*, I. *Diplomatia*, XXIII, Budapest, 1874, p. 458). The envoy Clement Mikes affirms in 1669 that he wants a good translator because he can not maintain an open discussion in Latin (*TML*, IV, p. 529). The dragoman of the Porte required the Transylvanian resident Andrei Keczeli to translate into Latin an important letter from the Prince to the Vizier "which I translated with great difficulty as my Latin



appointed his own scribes with the rank of extraordinary envoys (David Rozsnyai) or permanent envoys (George Brankovics) to represent the interests of the Principality in the capital of the Ottoman Empire.

During the period of nearly three decades in which Michael Apafi ruled as prince he hired about 10 persons as Turkish language translators. He expected to use some of them within the princely chancery, and the rest of the Turkish speakers to send to the Porte where they would serve the country's interests<sup>46</sup>. His plan was only partially accomplished due to the permanent lack of native translators in addition to the emissaries<sup>47</sup> who were at the sultan's court, when the prince was forced to fill the remaining gap with his Transylvanian scribes<sup>48</sup>. Those who remained in Alba Iulia did not match the level of the ones who had been dispatched, the quality of the texts translated by them was doubtful, and the official documents were translated untrustworthily<sup>49</sup>.

The destinies of some of the Transylvanian scribes versed in the Turkish language during 1661-1688 who were present in the Ottoman Empire can also be traced by documentary sources. With few exceptions, the data on their lives and work is extremely incomplete. About George Literati, Stephen Balog, Matthew Borbély we know only that they have worked as translators at the princely chancery in the ninth decade of the seventeenth century. In their cases only their employment contracts have survived.

Michael Csepregi Turkovitz (aprox.1600-1668), belongs to the category of persons well-versed in the Turkish language who arrived at the princely court from the Hungarian geographical space. "trader with modest material means, cunning, insidious and skilled in weaving intrigues"<sup>50</sup>, otherwise a good and convincing orator, he arrived in Transylvania during the reign of George Rákóczi II. During the crisis of power in 1659-1661, he was involved in the political disputes as a supporter of Acațiu Barcsai, and for this reason he was arrested along with others<sup>51</sup>. Later he became the prisoner of Ali Pasha, and the ransom was paid by the new prince, Michael Apafi<sup>52</sup>, in whose service he entered in the autumn of 1661, and in January 1662 he already took part in the military actions against John Kemény<sup>53</sup>. He took up

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[knowledge] is bad" (*EOE*, XVII, p. 116); he even asked the Prince to send a replacement more proficient in Latin "since there will be things that should be said or letters to be translated into Latin and ignorance of this language might cause difficulty and danger for the country" (*EOE*, XVII, p. 117).

<sup>46</sup> Trócsányi Zsolt, *Erdély központi kormányzata 1540-1690*, Budapest, 1980, p. 205.

<sup>47</sup> The intellectual qualities of the emissaries in the second half of the seventeenth century left much to be desired.

<sup>48</sup> *TML*, IV, p. 285.

<sup>49</sup> *TML*, IV, p. 309.

<sup>50</sup> Bethlen János, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

<sup>51</sup> Georg Kraus, *Cronica Transilvaniei 1608-1665*, Bucharest, 1965, p. 357.

<sup>52</sup> Bethlen János, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

<sup>53</sup> Georg Kraus, *op. cit.*, p. 467.

residence in Cluj<sup>54</sup> and in March 1662 he receives the citizenship from the diet<sup>55</sup>. He accomplished his first diplomatic mission in the spring of the same year, when he took part in the negotiations with Ali Pasha in Timișoara<sup>56</sup>. In November 1662, acting as exceptional envoy, he leads the country's delegation to the Ottoman Porte<sup>57</sup> and he returns from there on December 30<sup>58</sup>. Only two months later, the General Congregation of noblemen, meeting in Saschizd, nominated Csepregi again to deliver several official letters to the sultan and the Grand Vizier<sup>59</sup>. In the absence of Transylvanian speakers of the Turkish language, the prince frequently assigned him tasks to be carried out in the capital of the empire. But his fate suddenly changed in the autumn of 1663 when the diet learned of some slanderous letters about certain high-ranking figures in the entourage of the Prince and of the direct insults aimed at the Prince during his mission as envoy in Banat<sup>60</sup>. After a trial that lasted several years he was imprisoned in the prison of the Gurghiu fortress, and upon his release Csepregi's diplomatic career ended<sup>61</sup>.

On January 1st, 1662 Stephen Baló, envoy of the diet to Timișoara for the discussions with Ali Pasha reported to Michael Apafi that they had not received permission to return to Transylvania, neither he nor his translator, Judah the Hebrew, as both had to be present during the translation of the Prince's documents into Turkish<sup>62</sup>. It is not clear whether this Judah, evoked by the author in the letter is the same person who took the oath of allegiance in Alba Iulia in 1671. Neither his origin nor occupation is known. Instead, the good commercial relationships which Michael Apafi had with the Jewish community in Alba Iulia<sup>63</sup>. Thus, we can make the assumption that this person was a Hebrew merchant known to the noble elite involved in trade with the Ottoman Empire.

Stephen Györi of Győr also belongs to the category of persons who spoke the Turkish language arriving from the borders of the country. In 1664 he was still in Partium<sup>64</sup>, and a year later, during the early strengthening of the princely power, he was employed into the service of the prince where he would remain for a long time.

<sup>54</sup> Georg Kraus, *op.cit.*, p. 500.

<sup>55</sup> *EOE*, XIII, p. 127.

<sup>56</sup> Georg Kraus, *op. cit.*, p. 501. Bethlen the chronicler states that the Prince's advisers had banned the presence of Csepregi among the members of the emissary, however he joined the Transylvanian envoys led by John Daczó (Bethlen János, *op. cit.*, p. 186).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 508.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 513.

<sup>59</sup> *EOE*, XIII, p. 201-204.

<sup>60</sup> Bethlen János, *op. cit.*, p. 187-186.

<sup>61</sup> Bethlen János, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

<sup>62</sup> *EOE*, XIII, p. 92.

<sup>63</sup> Moshe Carmilly –Weinberger, *Istoria evreilor din Transilvania (1623-1944)*, București, 1994, p. 57-58.

<sup>64</sup> *TMÁO*, IV, p. 112.

In 1685 he was still active in the chancery<sup>65</sup>. He is mentioned by only one documentary attestation, along with the Commissioners designated by the diet to regulate the issue of the border of Transylvania with the pashalik of Timișoara, as well as the issue of the Christian refugees<sup>66</sup>. A discreet figure, he only served Apafi, never being sent as an envoy in journeys to Constantinople.

George Brancovici (1640 Ineu - 1705)<sup>67</sup> can be considered as the only speaker of Turkish who achieved a satisfactory level at the Transylvanian chancellery in the first decade of the reign of Michael Apafi<sup>68</sup>. He came from a noble family with Serbian origins and, due to the geographical circumstances in which he grew up he learned Hungarian, Turkish, Romanian and German, to which during the period of his academic instruction were added Latin and Slavonic. His father and two other brothers died untimely due to the plague, while his mother retired to a monastery and he was raised by his older brother, Simeon, a priest in Ineu, who, upon his ordination as Bishop of Transylvania (1656) changed his first name to Sava Brancovici. The good relations between the prince and the bishop propelled him to the princely court at an extremely early age. In September 1662 he had already been sent for the first time on an official mission to Adrianopol<sup>69</sup> where he remained for the improvement of the language<sup>70</sup> - with small periods of interruption - until 1667, fulfilling the position of deputy of the deceased permanent resident<sup>71</sup> or translator for the envoys arriving from Transylvania. He interrupted his diplomatic career in 1667 for a period of time in order to accompany his brother to Moscow. From 1669 he was again serving the prince, being sent to deliver various gifts to the grand vizier who was then in Thessaloniki, Greece<sup>72</sup>. In April 1670 the councillor Dionysius Bánfi proposed that Brancovici be redispached to the Porte<sup>73</sup> where he would then resume

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<sup>65</sup> *TMÁO*, VII, p. 81.

<sup>66</sup> *TMÁO*, V, p. 57.

<sup>67</sup> Bethlen János, *op. cit.*, p. 648; in *Teleki Mihály udvartartási naplója (1673-1681)*, Cluj-Napoca, 2007, p. 485 mentions the years 1641-1711 as chronological limits, while the rest of the sources mention the birth of the chronicler in 1645.

<sup>68</sup> Brancovici did not master the language only at perfectible level and in 1667, when during an audience of the Transylvanian envoy to the kaymakan, where he was a translator, the Turkish senior official repeated the phrase three times and explicitly asked the translator if he had correctly understood his words (*TMÁO*, IV, p. 368).

<sup>69</sup> *TMÁO*, VII, p. 434-435. The text of the report drafted for the Prince seems to suggest that he was there acting as both the permanent envoy sent by the prince and the diet and also as scribe. The allusions to previous informative letters sent via certain Transylvanian couriers lead us to believe that he had been present at the Porte since the summer of the aforementioned year. In the chronological table of the Transylvanian representatives at the Porte published by Biró Vencel, Brancovici's name is not mentioned in 1662.

<sup>70</sup> Rozsnyai Dávid, *az utolsó török deák, történeti maradványai*, p. 319, 322.

<sup>71</sup> *TMÁO*, IV, p.162.

<sup>72</sup> *TML*, IV, p. 64.1

<sup>73</sup> *TMÁO*, IV, p. 476.

his activity<sup>74</sup>. For the diligent work done in the service of the country, Apafi promoted him in 1675 and appointed him for a year as the permanent representative of the country before the sultan (1675-1676)<sup>75</sup>. His adhesion, along with his brother Sava's, the Orthodox Bishop of Transylvania, to the conspiracy of Paul Belda<sup>76</sup>, and also his duplicitous game played with the Austrian representatives in the imperial capital put an end to his activity as Turkish scribe. In July 1680 both were arrested in Iernut. Subsequently, following the pressure from Şerban Cantacuzino, they were released against a great amount of bail, and subsequently found refuge at the court of the Wallachian prince<sup>77</sup>.

Also a discreet figure is the case of the scribe John Moses of Făgăraş. He entered the service of the chancellery in 1675<sup>78</sup> where he was active until 1679<sup>79</sup>. During 1681<sup>80</sup> and 1687<sup>81</sup> he renewed his contract with the prince of Transylvania. The second contract, of 1687, he could not carry out because he fell ill on the way to the Porte, in Novi Sad. From there to the Bulgarian town of Tatar Pazardjik he travelled, sometimes riding, sometimes in the carriage, but he could not withstand the journey, his powers left him and - as the report of the Prince's envoy states - he died there; the translation services were taken over by the postal courier George Rác<sup>82</sup>, a role that he had fulfilled for the envoys in earlier periods<sup>83</sup>.

The longest activity as scribe of the Turkish language at the Transylvanian chancery was undoubtedly that of David Rozsnyai (1641, Târgu Mureş - March 4, 1718, Făgăraş). He benefited from a thorough intellectual training since childhood; he was an early reader of classical literature and correctly devised texts in Latin. The marriage of his sister to the priest Gaspar Veresmarti, who then became in 1660 the Bishop of the Reformed Church in Transylvania facilitated his cultural evolution and contact with the country's political elite<sup>84</sup>. Although at that time he did not yet speak Turkish, the Prince hired him as a Turkish scribe<sup>85</sup> and dispatched him to the delegation led by Gabriel Haller in Timișoara (1662). There Panajot, the Sultan's dragoman could oversee his training<sup>86</sup>. In 1666 he was already in Adrianople, helping

<sup>74</sup> *TMÁO*, V, p. 40-41, 44, 48, 84.

<sup>75</sup> *TMÁO*, IV, p. 559-560.

<sup>76</sup> *TMÁO*, VI, p. 101.

<sup>77</sup> Mioc Damaschin, *Gheorghe Brancovici. Cronica românească*, București, 1987, p. 8.

<sup>78</sup> *TMÁO*, V, p. 332-333.

<sup>79</sup> Trócsányi Zsolt, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

<sup>80</sup> *TMÁO*, VI, p. 167-168.

<sup>81</sup> *EOE*, XIX, p. 160-161.

<sup>82</sup> *TMÁO*, VII, p. 282.

<sup>83</sup> *TMÁO*, VII, p. 44.

<sup>84</sup> *Rozsnyai Dávid, az utolsó török deák, történeti maradványai*, p. 318.

<sup>85</sup> The advice to become a Turkish scribe for the prince had come from Prince Apafi's former translator from the early years of his reign, Michael Csepregi Turkovitz (*Rozsnyai Dávid, az utolsó török deák, történeti maradványai*), p. 317.

<sup>86</sup> *TMÁO*, IV, p. 103.

the envoy John Alsó who had arrived from Transylvania without a translator, to whom he already provided official translations<sup>87</sup>. In the early years of activity, the drafting of texts for the Ottoman Chancery was still done in Latin<sup>88</sup>. Following the failure of the negotiations held in Constantinople by the delegation led by Francis Rhédei in the case of Zolyomi, the refugee, Rozsnyai was suspected, being blamed that he had had secret links with the fugitive traitor<sup>89</sup>. The suspicion was probably not proved, since he remained a translator employed by the administration of the Princely Court<sup>90</sup>, requested donations from the prince<sup>91</sup>, was appointed as translator in the country's delegation sent to the sultan who was leading a military campaign in Poland<sup>92</sup>, and his wedding ceremony was celebrated at the Court<sup>93</sup>. His diplomatic career at the Transylvanian Chancery was affected by his participation in the conspiracy of Paul Béldi, when he was arrested and imprisoned in the fortress of Gurghiu, from whence he was released only in 1681.

In the personal archive of Rozsnyai his testament was also preserved and it contains a passage referring to the future scribes:

“I do not recommend this even to my enemies, and to my family I leave a curse should anyone take a bite of this bread. Better go for two years to polish shoes in the West than travel eastward to glaze a crown for 30 years”<sup>94</sup>.

(translated by Daria Condor)

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<sup>87</sup> *TMÁO*, IV, p. 356.

<sup>88</sup> *TMÁO*, IV, p. 463-466.

<sup>89</sup> *Rozsnyai Dávid, az utolsó török deák, történeti maradványai*, p. 341-342; *TML*, V, p. 428-429, 456.

<sup>90</sup> *TMÁO*, V, p. 113.

<sup>91</sup> *TML*, IV, p. 374-375, 397-398.

<sup>92</sup> Bethlen János, *op. cit.*, p. 457.

<sup>93</sup> *TMÁO*, V, p. 352.

<sup>94</sup> *Rozsnyai Dávid, az utolsó török deák, történeti maradványai*, p. 260.

