

THE INSTITUTION OF BANAT IN THE BANAT OF LUGOJ AND CARANSEBES IN THE XVIth-XVIIth CENTURIES

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ABSTRACT. *In this article, we try to investigate and explain the connection between the Banat of Lugoj-Caransebes and the central institution in Transylvania, during the XVIth and XVIIth centuries. In the Principality of Transylvania, the banat of Lugoj and Caransebes was a member of the council of the prince, as second to the grand captain of Oradea. The most important prerogatives of the bans of Lugoj and Caransebes are the military ones, as they also had other important military positions in the Principality. They had diplomatic attributions as messengers and negotiators in the relations with the Ottoman Empire or in the relations with Walachia and Moldavia. They were the presidents of the nobility's assemblies from the Banat of Lugoj and Caransebes or of two districts. The documents mention the „chair of judgement” of the ban, which had competency regarding property, succession, confiscation or distraint of estates for political reasons, in case of betrayal. They have also participated to the religious affairs, encouraging Calvinism and the translation of some religious books into Romanian.*

Keywords: *Banat, prerogatives, military, diplomatic attributions, religious affairs*

The history of banate of Lugoj and Caransebes in the XVIth-XVIIth centuries represents an integrant part of the medieval history of Transylvania, of the history of Romanians in general. The second half of the XIXth century brought the publication of the first documents referring to Banat, by the Hungarian historian Szilagy Sandor, in some series dedicated to the debates of general commissions of Transylvania (*Monumenta Comititalia Regni Transsylvania* 1875-1898). The Banat historian Pesty Frigyes continued the publication of medieval documents referring to the history of Banat, especially of

the old Romanian districts, of the county of Severin or of county of Caras. His documentary series continue to represent fundamental sources as they capitalize archive pieces dating back in the XIIIth-XVIIIth centuries, on the basis of which the life of Banat Romanians under all its aspect can be re-constituted (Pesty 1876; Pesty 1878; Pesty 1882-1883).

At the beginning of the XXth century another synthesis dedicated to the history of Banat appeared, following the evolution of Banat of Severin, owed to Patriciu Dragalina. Although today it is surpassed considering the information and the interpretations, the work of Patriciu Dragalina has the merit of having drawn the main aspects of the history of Banat of Severin and of having highlighted the continuity that exists between the Banat of Severin (XIIIth-XVIth) and the banat of Lugoj and Caransebes (XVIth-XVIIth centuries) (Dragalina 1900-1902). He is among the first who emphasized the military, strategic role played by the Banat of Severin for the defense of the Kingdom of Hungary and the principality of Transylvania. The documents edited by Andrei Veres between 1929 and 1939 are of great importance for the history of Ardeal and Banat (Veres 1929-1939) .

The controversial personality of the last ban of Lugoj and Caransebes, Acatiu Barcsai, was rigorously analyzed, on the basis of the testimonies of the epoch, by I. Bănăţeanul (Bănăţeanul 1960: 29-35), who highlighted his role as a stimulator of cultural-church progress and Ion Totoiu approached the problem of Turkish domination in Banat and Crisana, achieving the first study about the history of vilayet of Timisoara (Totoiu 1960: 5-35). In 1965 the historian Stefan Stefanescu published a reference book that already became classical, about the institution of banat in Tara Romaneasca, analyzing the prerogatives and the role of the ban of Craiova, work that can serve as a comparative reference point for the analysis of the institution and the prerogatives of banat in the banat of Lugoj and Caransebes (Ştefănescu 1965).

Significant contributions in the medieval history of Banat were made in the '70s-'80s of the XXth century by the researchers Costin and Cristina Fenesan, in the conditions of materialization and introduction in the scientific circuit of numerous sources, some of them new-fangled. Costin Fenesan also approached the epoch of prince Gabriel Bethlen, studying both his reports with Stefan Vaida, former ban, one of his adversaries, and the political situation of the banate of Lugoj and Caransebes between 1614 and 1615 (Feneşan 1977: 411-418; Feneşan 1976: 175-183). Costin Fenesan's preoccupations for medieval history of Banat were crowned by the publishing in 1981 of a volume of **Documente medievale banatene**, inserting 92 documents belonging to the interval 1440-1653, 84 of which are new and of exceptional importance for the unraveling of the social-political structures of the banate of Lugoj and Caransebes. (Feneşan 1981).

Tragic events for the principality of Transylvania at the middle of the XVIIth century, including the disappearance of Lugoj and Caransebes constituted

the object of several studies owed to Cristina Feneșan (Feneșan 1977: 223-238; Feneșan 1979: 319-340) and Liviu Borcea (Borcea 1980: 361-366; Borcea 1985: 97-118).

The researcher Ligia Boldea studied in detail the political evolution and the meanders of the social ascension of the noble family de Macicas, in the XIV-XVIth centuries (Boldea 1986-1987: 171-177), while Viorel Achim focused on the analysis of public assemblies in the districts of Banat, mentioning their composition, their organization, specific competences etc (Achim 1987: 371-378; Achim 1988: 191-203). Cristina Feneșan explained the premises of the instauration of Ottoman domination in Banat in the middle of the XVIIth century, on the basis of some new sources and Costin Feneșan presented the territorial evolution of the county of Severin at the end of the XVIIth century.

The Revolution in December 1989 eliminated the political and ideological constraints that negatively influenced the liberty of creation of the Romanian historians. After 1990, Viorel Achim continued the incursions in the history of medieval Banat, using an impressive documentation, inclusively external sources, insisting on the districts of Banat, but also on the confessional aspects (**Catolicismul la romanii banateni in evul mediu**) (Achim 1996: 41-55; Achim 1996: 391-410; Achim 2002: 125-128). These studies, to which other are added, were reunited in the year 2000 in a volume suggestively named **Banatul in evul mediu** (Achim 2000).

An important contribution to the cognition of medieval institution of Transylvania and Banat was brought by the historian Ioan Aurel Pop from Cluj. The historian from Cluj discussed and analyzed minutely and rigorously the structure and organization of Romanian princely and aristocratic assemblies in Transylvania, dedicating several chapters to the particular situation of medieval Banat (Pop 1991).

Susana Andea, a researcher from Cluj, referring to political reports between Transylvania, Tara Romaneasca and Moldova between 1656-1688 reconstitutes in a rigorous manner the internal and international political context of the collapse of prince Gheorghe Rakoczy II and the annexation of the banate of Lugoj and Caransebes by the Ottoman Empire. The complex and contradictory personality of the last ban of Lugoj and Caransebes, the Romanian Acatiu Barcsai is restored in the context of international reports (Andea 1996).

The researcher of Turkish history and problems Calin Felezeu analyzed in detail the statute of the principality of Transylvania in the relations with the Ottoman Empire in the period 1541-1688, highlighting the differences that appear from one epoch to another and on the basis of the Turkish ahd-namels (Felezeu 1996). Calin Felezeu also studied the fluctuations of the boarder between the vilayet of Timisoara and the banate of Lugoj and Caransebes. The list of the residents of Ardeal at the Poarta is presented in the annex, among which Romanian aristocrats of Banat are found (Felezeu 1996: 334-347).

The prerogatives and competences of the bans of Lugoj and Caransebes were analyzed by Dragos Lucian Țigău in two studies, on the basis of the approach of an impressive number of sources (Țigău 1998: 225-241; Țigău 1999: 237-251). In the Vth volume of the treatise **Istoria Romanilor** that appeared under the aegis of the Romanian Academy, Susana Andea refers to the judicial attributions of the ban of Lugoj and Caransebes (*Istoria Românilor* 2002: 711).

The banate of Lugoj and Caransebes represents a direct continuation of the banate of Severin, set up and organized by the Arpadian kings in 1230. The banate of Severin disappeared in the context of a complex political-military conjuncture, determined by the success of the Ottoman offensive in Central Europe in the times of the sultan Soliman the Magnificent (1520-1566). The conquest of the citadels of Belgrad (1521), Orsova (1522) and Severin (1524) by the Turkish and the catastrophe from Mohacs (1526) sealed the fate of banate of Severin, the succession of the bans being interrupted in 1526, being followed by a long holiday, attested by the documents of the epoch (Romanescu 1944-1946: 10-14; Hurmuzaki 1889-1893: 656-657).

The most important institution of the Eastern Banat in the XVIth-XVIIth centuries is the institution of banat. The appointment of the bans of Lugoj and Caransebes represented, in most cases, the result of the decision and will of the princes of Ardeal but almost always the princes took into consideration the interests of the Romanian aristocracy of Banat, the rank of banat being owned in most cases by Romanian nobles of Banat of the families Barcsai, Bekes, Garlisteanu de Rudaria, Palatici de Ilidia, Vaida de Caransebes, Tompa (Bulboacă 2006: 96-99).

There are situations when the same person holds the title of ban several times: Petru Petrovici of Suraklin (between 1548 and 1549; 1554-1557), George Berendy (1566; 1568-1569), George Palatici de Ilidia (1586-1588; 1592-1594; May-June 1596), Paul Keresztessi de Nagy Magyer (1605-1606; 1610-1613). Most bans kept their positions for a relatively short period (1-3 years), notable exceptions being represented by the last two bans of Lugoj and Caransebes, Paul Nagy of Deva (June 1617-June 1644) and Acatiu Barcsai (December 1644-September 1658), who enjoyed the trust of princes Gabriel Bethlen, Gheorghe Rakoczy I and II.

The most important prerogatives of the bans of Lugoj and Caransebes, as the ones of the bans of Severin, were the military ones, Banat representing a buffer-area between the vilayet of Timisoara and the principality of Transylvania. Most bans proved military aptitudes before occupying this position (Bulboacă 2010: 82-89).

After being appointed in this position, the ban of Lugoj and Caransebes would obtain supreme military command upon the region. The ban can cumulate other important military functions, like Paul Nagy of Deva who held for more than 16 years (1627-1643) the position of captain of personal pedestrian guard of

princes Gabriel Bethlen and Gheorghe Rakoczy I (Feneşan 1981: 153-154; 159-160). Although he had in suborder a series of administrators of citadels and castellans with military attributions, the ban always initiated approaches for the fortification of the citadels of Banat (Caransebes, Lugoj, Jdioara, Mehadia), to obtain high quantities of armament and sufficient munitions and to maintain a high number of soldiers (Țigău 1999: 235).

The bans of Lugoj and Caransebes proved real military qualities during the campaigns in which they participated. Thus, during the Anti-Ottoman war of 1593-1606, the bans Borbely of Sima and Andrei Barcsai became famous through the victories they obtained in 1595-1596 and 1598 against the Turks. The military role of the ban of Lugoj-Caransebes is comparable to the one of the great captain of Oradea, another important citadel from the strategic point of view, for the defense of Transylvania.

Together with the military prerogatives of the bans of Lugoj and Caransebes, the **political-diplomatic competences** are also important (Bulboacă 2006: 101-103). From the occupation of the position, many bans would possess a remarkable diplomatic experience. The ban Stefan Tompa, who in 1570 was part of a mission of Ardeal to the Poarta also proved diplomatic qualities. He made himself remarked as a diplomat and George Palatici of Ilidia, sent as a messenger to the ruler of Tara Romaneasca (Mihnea Turcitul), to the beilerbei of Rumelia, at the Poarta and subsequently maintaining a correspondence with the great unifying ruler Mihai Viteazul (Păiuşan 1983: 31-32; Hurmukazi 1889-1893: 380).

Through the sixth department of the chancellery of the principality of Transylvania the epistolary exchange of the ban of Lugoj and Caransebes with the dignitaries of other states in the vicinity was being achieved, firstly with the pasha of Timisoara (*Istoria Românilor* 2003: 699). The ban had to prove his diplomatic qualities on the occasion of accompanying and accommodating the foreign messengers by the princely court of Alba-Iulia. The ban often possesses a network of spies and informers in the Ottoman Empire (especially the vilayet of Timisoara), through which he secures important information for the prince. Other times, the ban can be met in the position of delegate of the prince of Transylvania to the Poarta or to different official ceremonies (Țigău 1998: 231).

During the 17th century, in Transylvania, the ban was a close assistant of the prince, and one of his confident persons, sometimes even a relative (Petru Bethlen was the first cousin of Prince Gabriel Bethlen), and he was the promoter of the Prince's politics in Lugoj and towards the vylayet of Timisoara. During the diplomatic parleys, the ban[s] gave sometimes information about the situation in the Ottoman Empire and Eastern Europe, to the princes of Transylvania, maintaining spy networks (Bulboacă 2006: 106-107).

Master, de facto, of Transylvania, the Austrian general George Basta substituted himself to the Princes of Transylvania and he discharged and

nominated ban[s] of Lugos and Caransebes. In the place of Andrei Barcsai he nominated two ban[s], Petru Huszar of Brenhida and Simion Lodi of Troger (Bulboacă 2006: 108). Petru Huszar couldn't stop the Ottoman attack against Transylvania, mission that he received from George Basta, and he was killed by the Turks, and Simion Lodi of Troger, a foreigner, instituted in Lugos and Caransebes a regime of terror (Bulboacă 2006: 109-110). The inhabitants of the Banat called on Radu Serban to help them dethrone him, but this measure was unsuccessful.

The ban Paul Kerestesyi, a close assistant of Prince Gabriel Bathory, distinguished himself as a diplomatist when he intervened at the Porte in order to obtain for the Prince the throne of Walachia and by financially helping Matei Basarab to get the throne of Walachia (Hurmuzaki 1889-1893: 313-315). The ban Petru Bethlen was the one who captured the rebel Stefan Vaida, the former ban, in 1607, who refused to surrender Lipova to the Turks, fact that was necessary to strengthen Gabriel Bathory's position at the Porte (Feneşan 1976: 175-183; Feneşan 1977: 411-418).

The most important diplomatic activity was that of the last ban, Acatiu Barcsai (1644-1658), and it's illustrated by his relations with Walachia and Moldavia during the reigns of Matei Basarab, Vasile Lupu, Gheorghe Stefan, Constantin Serban Basarab. A career diplomatist, the confident person of Prince Gheorghe Rakoczy II, he was a member of the "locumtenens comitee" that governed Transylvania when the Prince participated at the unfortunate campaign in Poland (1657) (Andea 1996: 104-110).

Together with the military and diplomatic prerogatives, the bans of Lugoj and Caransebes held **administrative and judicial attributions**. As the historian Ioan Aurel Pop from Cluj mentioned, the aristocratic assemblies of the banate of Lugoj and Caransebes are chaired by bans or deputy bans, continuing the tradition of princely and aristocratic assemblies in the 8 privileged districts of Banat (Pop 1991: 159). In order to leave the country, the inhabitants of the area of Banat needed the ban's approval. The medieval documents of property mention the judging chair of the ban, who had competences in the domains of property, succession or even confiscation and sequestration of goods for political reasons (rebellion towards the prince) but only for the Romanian aristocracy and population in the banate of Lugoj and Caransebes. (Hurmuzaki 1889-1893: 452-453).

The ban had to detect the goods of the rebels, to catalogue them and to keep them in Caransebes. This was the case of Stefan Vaida, rebel towards the prince Gabriel Bethlen, whose properties are confiscated in 1614 by the ban Petru Bethlen, his goods being sequestered (Bulboacă 2006: 111).

The bans took over the juridical attributions of the bans of Severin. The ban would never judge by himself, but only together with the noblemen "assessors of the judgment chair". Most of the causes presented at bans'

judgment chair refer to the domination upon the land, to inheritances, to pawns, to girls' inheritances, emergences from severalties, redemptions, unfair possession of estates, reconciliations, buying-selling, exchanges, disputes among relatives (*Istoria Românilor* 2003: 711).

For the ones that are not pleased for the sentence given by the seat of judgment of the ban there was the possibility of appeal at the princely Table. Some bans, like Acatiu Barcsai, accomplished the position of president of the princely Table (*Istoria Românilor* 2003: 706). The ban Acatiu Barcsai also participated as a member in the commission of revision of **Constitutiile Aprobate ale Transilvaniei** (in 1653), that guarantees the privileges of the two districts of Banat (*Constitutiile Aprobate ale Transilvaniei* 1997: 21; 246).

In the XVIth-XVIIth century, the bans of Caransebes-Lugoj conducted the confessional life of Eastern Banat, actively sustaining the Reform, more precisely the Calvinism. Thus, the ban Acatiu Barcsai forbade the finalization of the construction of a Catholic church at Slatina de Timis in 1644 and financially supported the printing of a Romanian book, of Calvinistic structure (Radosav 2003: 86-87; *Relationes missionariorum de Hungaria et Transilvania. 1627 – 1707* 1995: 83)

The authority and social prestige that he enjoys are determined, to a great extent, by the personal fortune that he owns. The documents of those times illustrate the fact that the bans owned significant rear estate fortunes both in the cities and along the districts of Lugoj and Caransebes. The landed patrimony of the bans extended by obtaining new domains granted by princes of Ardeal, meant to repay the fidelity and the faithful services brought to the central power and to the country (Țigău 1998: 229).

The institution of deputy bans, mentioned in documents as early as the existence of the banat of Severin, is closely tied to the institution of banat of Lugoj and Caransebes. The attributions of deputy bans were, generally, similar to the ones of the bans, excepting the military prerogatives (Pop 1991: 159-160). The deputy bans preside over the nobles' assemblies of the district of Caransebes or of the nobles in the whole territory of Banat, they also lead the processes connected to the ownership of the land or they are involved in diplomatic actions. Some deputy bans get to accumulate important fortunes, they become influent personalities of the local elites, maintaining their position for more successive years. This is also the case of ban Nicolae Macicas (1650-1658) (Feneșan 1976: 196-197; 198-199).

Except for some cases, most bans were Romanians or at least of Romanian origin, the role of bans being the one of preserving the autonomy and the privileges of the Romanians in the two districts of Banat that remained unoccupied by the Turks (Lugoj and Caransebes) until 1658 (Feneșan 1977: 230-238; Ciobanu 1997: 48-61).

The disappearance of the banate of Lugoj was produced in the context of the tragic events in 1658, when the great vizier Mehmed Kuprulu undertook a punitive expedition against prince Gheorghe Rakoczy the IInd, who had flagrantly encroached upon his dispositions. Under the threat of the Turkish army and lacking all support of prince Gheorghe Rakoczy the IInd, on August the 23rd the authorities of Ardeal accept the “election” of the last ban of Lugoj and Caransebes, Acatiu Barcsai, as prince of Transylvania (Felezeu 1996: 109). The Porta imposed the new prince extremely tough conditions, among which the renunciation to the citadels that were providing the defensive line of the country in the western part: Lugoj, Ineu, Caransebes, Dezna, that passed under Turkish domination. The districts of Caransebes and Lugoj were yielded to the Turks by Acatiu Barcsai only in the context of the Ottoman ultimatum of September 1658 (Gemil 1986: 720).

Conclusions

In the Principality of Transylvania, the banat of Lugoj and Caransebes was a member of the council of the prince, as second to the grand captain of Oradea. The most important prerogatives of the bans of Lugoj and Caransebes are the military ones, as they also had other important military positions in the Principality. They had diplomatic attributions as messengers and negotiators in the relations with the Ottoman Empire or in the relations with Walachia and Moldavia. They were the presidents of the nobility’s assemblies from the Banat of Lugoj and Caransebes or of two districts. We consider that the institution of banat and vice-banat, honored mainly by Romanian noblemen from Banat, confer the Eastern Banat a special statute in the principality of Transylvania, being a “Romanian country” also politically, not only demographically. We are convinced that the extension of the investigation upon the political, religious and cultural history of eastern Banat of the XVIth-XVIIth centuries would bring more light upon some controversial or less known aspects, as it was the case of most bans and vice-bans of Lugoj and Caransebes, that deserve special studies, in order to be recuperated by the Romanian historiography.

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