

# ON THE IMAGE OF THE CITY OF TIMIȘOARA AND OF THE BANAT AREA IN THE 15<sup>th</sup> AND 17<sup>th</sup> CENTURIES

## IMAGINEA ORAȘULUI TIMIȘOARA ȘI A BANATULUI ÎN SECOLELE AL XV-LEA ȘI AL XVII-LEA

I. PETROMAN\*, Snježana TOLIĆ\*\*, Cornelia PETROMAN\*, I. CABA\*\*\*

\*Agricultural and Veterinary University of the Banat, Timișoara, România

\*\*J. J. Strossmayer University, Osijek, Croatia

\*\*\*Mihai Eminescu University, Timișoara, România

Corresponding author: I. PETROMAN, e-mail: i\_petroman@yahoo.com

**Abstract.** Though medieval descriptions of Timișoara are scarce – the most consistent of all being that of the Ottoman traveller Evlyia Celebi and of the Austrian traveller Henrik Ottendorf – the reconstitution of the epoch, i.e. of the features of a medieval town and city, can only rely on extremely diverse information. The lack of documents that describe directly and without any exaggeration aspects of life, corroborated with a very large number of indirect evidence can result in a proper, edifying global image on the ground of an engraving and of a map of the streets of medieval Timișoara that are unique in the historiography of this town. The general engraving of Timișoara, published in the revue **Magazin istoric** by the Romanian Ioan Hațegan, confirms the information supplied by Henrik Ottendorf which, confronted with those supplied by Evlyia Celebi and with the drawing made by the Austrian F. Watthay, coincide. In addition, it is confirmed that in the middle Ages the name of the river flowing through the ditches of the city was the *Timișul Mic*. A problem that could be confusing in Henrik Ottendorf's description is that of the location of the Castle, which he locates south from the city, not in the narrowest part of the fortification, but right in the middle of it.

**Rezumat.** Deși descrierile medievale despre Timișoara sunt puține, cea mai consistentă fiind a călătorului otoman Evlyia Celebi și a călătorului austriac Henrik Ottendorf, reconstituirea acestei epoci, în cazul de față a caracteristicilor unui oraș și cetăți medievale, se bazează pe informații extrem de diverse. Lipsa unor documente care să descrie direct și fără exagerare aspecte de viață, coroborată cu un număr foarte mare de mărturii indirecte, reușește să contureze o imagine globală corectă și edificatoare pe baza unei stampe și a unei hărți a străzilor Timișoarei medievale, considerate unicat în întreaga istoriografie consacrată acestei localități. Stampa generală a Timișoarei, publicată în **Magazinul istoric** de românul Ioan Hațegan, confirmă informațiile lui Henrik Ottendorf care, confruntate cu cele ale lui Evlyia Celebi și cu desenul de epocă al austriacului F. Watthay, coincid. În plus, se confirmă faptul că în Evul Mediu numele râului care curge prin șanțurile cetății este *Timișul Mic*. O problemă care poate semăna confuzie în descrierea lui Henrik Ottendorf este aceea a locului față de cetate a castelului pe care îl plasează la sud, dar nu în partea cea mai îngustă a fortificației, ci chiar în mijlocul acesteia.

**Key words:** Timișoara, city, image, engraving, other localities in the Banat area, the 15<sup>th</sup>, the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries

**Cuvinte-cheie:** Timișoara, cetate, imagine, stampe, alte localități din Banat, secolele al XV-lea și al XVII-lea

### INTRODUCTION

The Latin denomination *districtus* designs an administrative formation with important economic and even political attributions, developed within a country by the native population and, sometimes, by colons, in order to protect its internal autonomy. An ancient Romanian land, the Banat, with its capital city Timișoara, can be proud of an impressive number of such districts: 38. During history, their number varied depending on economic, social, and political

conditions. Among the 38 districts, eight benefited from special privileges: Caransebeș, Lugoj, Mehadia, Almăj, Bârzava, Carașova, Ilidia, and Comiat. As a territory, they covered the south-eastern part of the County of Timiș and the entire County of Caraș such as they are nowadays (HAȚEGAN, 2006).

A continuator of these districts after the Ottoman conquest of the Banat will be, between 1550 and 1685, that Banat of Lugoj and Caransebeș, with an essential strategic role in the fight against the Ottomans by the Danube. After the conquest of Timișoara (July 1552), the Ottoman army directs to the eastern and southern areas of the Banat aiming at conquering the entire province, but it is stopped by the negotiations led by Mircea Ciobanu, Prince of Walachia, with the Ottoman Porte: thus, for 106 years, this formation will prove its viability through brave knights of the Banat of Lugoj and Caransebeș called by the historian Patriciu Drăgălina “condottieri of the East”.

## **MATERIAL AND METHOD**

There are few descriptions of the medieval Timișoara and of the Banat area. The study of the manuscript of Henrik Ottendorf, the Austrian messenger to the Pasha of Belgrade in 1663, and of other documents concerning Timișoara and the Banat area, allowed us to reconstitute a whole epoch – in our case a medieval town and city together with its characteristics, as well as different aspects linked to the surroundings of Timișoara, by consulting the Ottoman Evlyia Celebi’s book and the Romanian Ioan Hațegan’s map.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The town of Timișoara, that draws its name from the river *Timiș* and from the Hungarian word *var* ‘city’, is located beyond the Danube and the Tisa as you look from Vienna, in that part of the Low Hungary, known under the name of the County of Timiș. Few of the city’s houses can be seen from far – only the towers of the mosques, as the city is located on a plain covered by the trees of the gardens round the city (OTTERDORF, 2006).

Towards the east, there is the “maronische” (the Maxond Plain) and, beyond the Danube, there is Bulgaria. It was built before the Ottomans by the Magyar kings. Towards the south, there is the town of Belgrade and, 13 miles farther, the Danube River. Towards the west, there is the Tisa River, close to a city and a small town named Petsch, located some 8 miles away. Towards the north there are the Eyssen Thur and Transylvania, at about 9 miles away, as one can see the Mounts of Transylvania from Timișoara.

In the suburbs, towards the east and north, over about one mile around, there is a large and even plain, followed by a forest and by short shrubbery covering a distance of four miles to Denta.

Timișoara used to be divided into three parts: the city, the town, and the suburbs. The Castle, situated north, is an old building with four corners, with strong walls and four strong, square towers, surrounded by marshes and by the river Timiș. Before the Castle there was a large tower that was connected to the Castle by a bridge (HIERONIMUS, 1603).

The town was surrounded by a high palisade wall made of wattles stuck with clay, and reinforced in several places with earth, so that they can support artillery. The town had five gates (HAȚEGAN, 2006; OTTERDORF, 2006).

Timișoara was, at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a strong city with high walls somewhere along the present streets Mărășești, Ceahlău, and Bocșa, with a Castle – the present Museum of the Banat – independent from the city; the linking point was represented by the „water tower” and by a lifting bridge over a branch of the Timiș River between the Castle and the city.

Though mentioned in the previous century as a borough, Timișoara gained its status as a town. It was located within an area delimited by the present Municipal Hospital (Clinicile Noi), the Take Ionescu Boulevard, the Victor Babeș University of Medicine, and the Central Post Office. It counted almost 450 households and 4,500-5,000 inhabitants. South from the Castle there was Palanca Mică, a district within the perimeter of the Constantin Diaconovici Loga Boulevard and the Capitol Cinema Hall (HAȚEGAN, 2006; OTTERDORF, 2006).

A whole chapter is dedicated to Timișoara and to the Banat area by Nicolaus Olachus who says, “Stânca, or the mountain dominating the town of Caransebeș, is the source of the Timiș River, that, bathing both Caransebeș and the Castle, the small town of Lugoj (whose inhabitants are almost all mounted soldiers dedicated to the army) as well as Coștei, flows towards south and reaches the strong city of Timișoara, named after this river.”

In the summer of 1661, Evlyia Celebi, travelling across the Banat area, says that Lugoj “has been under the Ottoman rule for only three years”, the city being “a wooden and earth one, square, located on a flat plain. Its ditch was full of the river’s water. It had a single gate and a decorated, lifting bridge over the ditch, which was lifted every night”.



Figure 1 – Stamp representing Timișoara  
(after HAȚEGAN, 2006)

Some more conclusive data on Timișoara are supplied by descriptions from the 17<sup>th</sup> century: “The town and its districts grouped most of the inhabitants. The city hosted most of the specific facilities: the bazaar, the large mosque and several other similar buildings, three public baths, the post office house, the inns, the barracks of the janissaries, dwellings. The streets were narrow, paved with thick wood boards. The houses had two levels and were covered by pointed roofs. They mention the two large districts Palanca Mare and Palanca Mică

covering more than half of the total urban area (HAȚEGAN, 2006). They were made up of a few public use buildings, a large number of shops, a few inns, and dwellings. The districts are characterised by yards with trees and by vegetable gardens.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The reconstitution of an epoch – in our case the characteristics of a medieval town and city – needs documenting from different historical sources which, in most cases, may prove to be exaggerated. The most consistent description of the city of Timișoara is that of the Ottoman traveller Evlyia Celebi made between 1660-1664, corrected by an engraving and a map of the streets of the city, developed by the Austrian traveller Henrik Ottendorf in 1663.

Henrik Ottendorf's information confronted with Evlyia Celebi's text and with the Austrian F. Wathay's engraving coincide, but there is an aspect that can be confusing concerning the location of the Castle, which is located south from the city and not in the narrowest part of the fortress.

Nicholaus Olachus's descriptions are a little bit exaggerated as far as the plain fauna between the rivers of Timiș, Mureș, and Danube is concerned. The author says that on this part of the plain one can often see male deer, female deer, and their fowl in numbers going up to three or four thousand, and even more.

### **LITERATURE**

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