



# Between “Faithful Subjects” and “Pernicious Nation”: Greek Merchants in the Principality of Transylvania in the Seventeenth Century\*

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Towns in Transylvania were among the first in which Balkan Greeks settled in their advance into Central Europe. In this essay, I investigate the evolution of the juridical status of the Greeks within the Transylvanian principality during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in order to understand how they were integrated into the institutional and juridical framework of Transylvania. A reinterpretation of available privilege charters granted to the Greeks in Transylvania sheds light on the evolution of their official status during the period in question and on the nature of the “companies” the Greeks founded in certain towns of the principality in the seventeenth century. A close reading of the sources reveals tensions between tax-paying Greeks, whom the seventeenth century Transylvanian princes referred to as their “subjects of the Greek nation,” and the non-resident Greek merchants. Furthermore, strong inconsistencies existed between central and local policies towards the Greeks. I analyze these discrepancies between the princely privileges accorded to the Greeks and the status of the Greek merchants in Nagyszeben (Hermannstadt, today Sibiu, Romania) in particular. The city fathers of this town adhered strongly to their privilege of staple right and insisted on imposing it on the Greek merchants, but the princely grants in favor of the Greeks nullified de facto the provisions of the staple right. While they had obtained concessions that allowed them to settle into Transylvania, Greeks nevertheless negotiated their juridical status with the local authorities of Nagyszeben as well.

Keywords: Transylvania, Saxon towns, Greek merchants, Saxon traders, annual fair, staple right, trade, seventeenth century

## *Introduction*

This paper explores the juridical status of Greek merchants in Transylvania during the second half of the sixteenth century and the seventeenth century, a status created through norms (dieta legislation, princely grants, and town

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\* Archival research for this article was made possible with the support of the European Research Council grant, *Luxury, Fashion, and Social Status in Early Modern South-Eastern Europe*, ERC-2014-CoG no. 646489–LuxFaSS, hosted by the New Europe College in Bucharest, Romania.

statutes) and, as Zsolt Trócsányi argues, practice.<sup>1</sup> The emphasis of my analysis is on the policy of the Transylvanian princes toward the Greeks and the tensions and dissensions between the central legislation and local regulations in this respect. The town of Nagyszeben serves as the case study for the purposes of my analysis. The Transylvanian Diet regularly issued decisions concerning the Greeks, but this dietal legislation has been studied by Lidia A. Demény and Zsolt Trócsányi and consequently will not be revisited here at length.<sup>2</sup> It is crucial, however, to understand the interplay and the hierarchy between the different laws and statutes, while the Greeks themselves were naturally active factors in creating their juridical status and, in my opinion, used the shifting attitudes and the discrepancies in the rules to their benefit.

A brief introduction into the historical background of the political and economic situation in early modern Transylvania provides a better framework for the argument. By the middle of the sixteenth century, Greek and other Balkan-Levantine merchants, Ottoman subjects, had taken control of the trade with products coming from or via the Ottoman Empire.<sup>3</sup> The complex notion of the Greek merchants in early modern Transylvania shall be discussed later. The “Turkish goods,” as they are called in the contemporary sources, were much sought after and made the Balkan merchants indispensable in the supply of products from the east for Transylvania.<sup>4</sup> The so-called “Turkish goods” in which the Greeks traded consisted mostly of cotton and silk textiles, cotton and silk threads, carpets, specific carmine and saffian leather products, spices, dried fruits, olive oil, rice, alum, and various dyestuffs. While a detailed analysis of the commercial exchange in seventeenth-century Transylvania is sorely lacking, evidence from the unpublished customs accounts of Nagyszeben shows that the imports of goods from the Ottoman Empire by the Greeks continued along the patterns set in the previous century. The great obstacle with regard to the Greeks was accommodating the need for their skills with the Transylvanian political and juridical system of nations and privileges. We know from Olga Cicanci’s monograph that in 1636 the Greeks founded one “company” in the town of Nagyszeben and one in Brassó (Kronstadt, today

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1 Trócsányi, “Gesetzgebung,” 98.

2 Demény, “Le régime,” 62–113; Trócsányi, “Gesetzgebung,” 94–104.

3 Dan and Goldenberg, “Le commerce balkano-levantin de la Transylvanie au cours de la seconde moitié du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle et au début du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” 90.

4 The generic name of “Turkish” goods for merchandise coming from the Ottoman Empire was used in other parts of the former medieval kingdom of Hungary as well. See Gecsényi, “‘Turkish goods’ and ‘Greek’ merchants,” 58; Fodor, “Trade and traders in Hungary,” 5.

Braşov, Romania) in 1678.<sup>5</sup> In my analysis of a wider array of documentary evidence, I argue that these “companies” were the result of a longer process of accommodation and integration of the Greeks in Transylvania, and that the nature of these organisations has been largely misconstrued. I use the term “merchant associations” instead.

Transylvania was among the first polities in Central Europe in which Greek and other Hellenised merchants from the Ottoman Balkans settled for business. The reasons for their choice were probably manifold. Beginning in 1541, Transylvania was a vassal state to the Porte, a situation which encouraged entry of the Ottoman subjects into the local market. Furthermore, the towns of Brassó and Nagyszeben in particular had been leading trading centers in the region since the Middle Ages, offering good business opportunities for profitable trade. One should not ignore a declared preference to live in Transylvania for religious reasons as well: in an official statement from 1624, Arbanassi merchants from Chervena Voda, which lies to the south of the Danube River in what today is Bulgaria, who settled in Transylvania declared that living in a Christian country was more precious than their life or merchandise.<sup>6</sup>

The seminal article of Traian Stoianovich distinguished several categories of Balkan Orthodox merchants who dominated international trade in Southeastern and Central Europe in the eighteenth century. Among them, he listed “the Greek, Vlach and Macedo-Slav muleteer and forwarding agent of Epirus, Thessaly and Macedonia,” and “the Greek and the Bulgarian of the Eastern Rodope.”<sup>7</sup> The customs accounts of Nagyszeben and the records of the Greek merchant association show that the merchants who preferred Transylvania as their business destination belonged to this particular group described by Stoianovich: their places of origin were in historical Epirus, in northeastern and northwestern Bulgaria, or in the Pirin Mountains.<sup>8</sup> Wallachia and Moldavia, neighboring principalities to the south and east of Transylvania, were significant places of origin for the Greek merchants. A recent study by Lidia Cotovanu on the Greek migration in Wallachia and Moldavia in the late Middle Ages reveals the same regions in the Balkans as the original homelands of the Greeks.<sup>9</sup>

5 Cicanci, *Companiile*, 24–25.

6 The document is published in Veress, *Documente privitoare la istoria Ardealului, Moldovei și Țării Românești*, 257–58: *de mi készek levén inkább életünket is letenni, hogy sem többé az keresztények közül török keze és birtoka alá menni*. For the entire episode of these Arbanassi merchants see: Barbu, “Les Arbanassi,” 206–22.

7 Stoianovich, “The conquering Orthodox Balkan merchant,” 234.

8 Cicanci, *Companiile*, 100–01, 145–55.

9 Cotovanu, “L’émigration sud-danubienne,” 2–7.

The Transylvanian Diet proposed and passed articles of law concerning the legal status of the foreign merchants, including the Greeks.<sup>10</sup> In seventeenth-century Transylvania, there was more than just one kind of “foreign” merchant. Zsolt Trócsányi has rightfully differentiated between the dietal decisions concerning alien merchants and those dealing strictly with the Greeks.<sup>11</sup> Trócsányi identifies the main directions in the legislation on the Greeks, although his assertions regarding the attitude of the princes in this matter are not entirely accurate. For instance, Trócsányi argues that Prince Gabriel Bethlen (1613–29) restricted the activity of the Greeks owing to his “monopolistic foreign trade ideas.”<sup>12</sup> As will become evident, Prince Bethlen was in fact supportive of Greek trade in Transylvania.

A discussion of identity among Greeks from the Ottoman Empire is beyond the scope of this paper, especially since I am using exclusively Transylvanian official sources on the matter.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, it is worth asking: who was a “Greek” in early modern Transylvania? The term was used in various ways: a “Greek” was a Greek-speaking, Eastern-Orthodox merchant, but essentially any merchant coming from the Ottoman Empire and bringing oriental goods was called a Greek.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, in many situations Greeks were set apart from non-Greek Ottoman subjects, such as Armenians, Jews, and Turks, just as in certain situations Transylvanian Greeks were distinguished from foreign Greeks. Once they became “inhabitants” of the country, i.e. once they agreed to pay taxes, Greeks were treated differently from the merchants who had the same origins but had not settled in Transylvania. The first official mention of this dichotomy between Greeks who owned houses in the principality and those who did not comes from the decision of the Diet in 1591.<sup>15</sup> In the eighteenth century, this polarization of the diasporic Greek communities between Ottoman subjects and naturalized Greeks was also evident in Vienna and Naples.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, while we can argue that the notion of a “Greek” was polyvalent, with their growing presence in the country in the seventeenth century, the term was used with more precision, and the Greeks were definitely distinct from the

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10 See a good explanation of how this institution functioned in Trócsányi, “Gesetzgebung,” 95.

11 Ibid., 95.

12 Ibid., 104.

13 See recent debates and specialist literature at Grenet, “Grecs de nation,” 311–44.

14 Petri, “A görögök közvetítő kereskedelme,” 69–70; Harlaftis, “International Business of Southeastern Europe,” 390–91.

15 *Erdélyi Országgyűlési Emlékek* (hereinafter EOE), vol. 3, 391.

16 Grenet, “Grecs de nation,” 318–19.

merchants of other nationalities coming from the Ottoman Empire. This is evident, for instance, in a decision of the Transylvanian Diet from 1650: “All Jews and all Greeks should wear cloaks according to their sort, and if anyone of them should wear a Hungarian military cape, he will be fined 200 florins.”<sup>17</sup>

I present first the juridical status of Greeks in Transylvania created through the agency of princely grants and then discuss the regulations of the town of Nagyszeben as an example of a local policy toward these alien merchants. I conclude with an interpretation of the complex relations between norm and practice in this respect. Owing to the staple right of Brassó, Nagyszeben, and Beszterce (today Bistrița, Romania), the three major towns on the southern and eastern borders of Transylvania with the neighboring principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, foreign merchants were not allowed to enter Transylvania beyond these points and were obliged to sell wholesale to the local merchants.<sup>18</sup> The Saxon towns who enjoyed this privilege argued constantly for their rights to be preserved and observed: throughout the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, the grants given in favor of the Greeks were made at the expense of the ancient rights of the Transylvanian Saxons.

While generally the presence of the Greeks in Transylvania was seen as beneficial, there were recurrent fears and concerns about them that came up from time to time in the dietal legislation: one of the concerns was that they were draining the country of good coins and precious metals (e.g. the 1618 decision of the Diet), and another stemmed from the mistrust in the Greeks as spies for the Ottomans (e.g. the 1600 decision of the Diet or art. 1 in tit. LII of the *Approbatae Constitutiones*).<sup>19</sup>

### *Greeks and the Princes of Transylvania*

The first decision of the Diet, most probably initiated by Prince Gabriel Báthory (1608–13), to give all alien merchants the freedom to enter Transylvania and sell their goods after having paid the customs duties came in 1609.<sup>20</sup> While subsequent legislation retreated on this measure and reinforced the obligation

17 “mind sidó mind görög tartson neme szerint valo köntöst; ha ki pedig magyar katona köntöst viselne, légyen kétszázsz forint büntetésnek.” EOE, vol. 11, 78.

18 For a complex discussion of the medieval privilege of staple and deposit see Weisz, *Vásárok és lerakatok*, 61–62, 73–74. For the specific case of Nagyszeben and its staple right, see “Dreptul de etapă al Sibiului în secolele XVI–XVII,” 131–43.

19 EOE, vol. 4, 552; *Ibid.*, vol. 7, 477.

20 *Ibid.*, vol. 6, 125; L. Demény, “Le régime,” 92.

to visit only the staple sites, the breach into the system of the staple towns had been made.

The recent digital publication of the *Libri Regii*, the protocols of the Transylvanian chancery,<sup>21</sup> brought to light unknown princely charters, uncovering crucial facts concerning the settlement of Greeks in the principality. Historical research has hardly taken these “royal books” into account; beginning with Nicolae Iorga, all researchers have relied exclusively on the rich material of the Greek merchant associations in Nagyszeben and Brassó and the decisions of the Transylvanian Diet regarding the Greeks. Furthermore, the presence and activity of Greek merchants in other Transylvanian towns has been entirely neglected by scholarship, some authors only stating that such associations (“companies”) might have existed but that evidence was not available. A linguistic barrier and a national bias were evidently at play here: authors who took a keen interest in the Greek communities in Transylvania did not have access to the Hungarian archival material, while scholars specializing in Transylvanian history with good access to local historical sources have not paid much attention to the presence of the Greeks in trade and the economy in the early modern period.<sup>22</sup> Since the inventories of the Greek merchant association in Nagyszeben and Brassó both contained copies of the 1636 privilege of George Rákóczi I (1630–48), scholars considered it the first document issued for the Greeks in Transylvania.<sup>23</sup> Authors such as Nicolae Iorga and T. Bodogae state that the protocols of these two Greek “companies” include copies of further confirmations of this charter, which was renewed frequently.<sup>24</sup> According to the *Libri Regii* however, this 1636 document is not the first grant of privileges to Transylvanian Greeks. At the complaint of Greeks of Alba County and of the towns of Kolozsvár (today Cluj Napoca, Romania), Marosvásárhely (today Târgu-Mureș, Romania), and Hunyad (today Hunedoara, Romania) concerning other Greeks, Wallachians, Moldavians, and Turks, Prince Gabriel Bethlen issued a mandate on 22 October 1627.<sup>25</sup> The rivalry between tax-paying Greeks and the other Balkan-Levantine merchants, including other Greeks, became a recurrent issue among these

21 *Az erdélyi fejedelmek oklevelei* (hereinafter *Libri Regii*). For the *Libri Regii* in Transylvania see Fejér, “Editing and Publishing Historical Sources,” 15–17.

22 A notable exception is the book by Miskolcay, *A brassói román levantei kereskedőpolgárság*.

23 See especially Cicanci, *Companiile*, 24–25.

24 Bodogae, “Le privilège commercial accordé en 1636,” 650; Iorga, *Studii și documente cu privire la istoria românilor*, vol. 12, V–VI.

25 *Libri Regii*, vol. 27, 162b–64.

trading communities. Bethlen’s privilege in favor of the Transylvanian Greeks reveals that there were established communities of Greeks in several cities in Transylvania (in the princely capital Gyulafehérvár [today Alba Iulia, Romania], Kolozsvár, Marosvásárhely and Hunyad), most notably in ones without the staple right. I would also underline that the text of Bethlen’s grant drew a clear distinction between his “faithful subjects” and other foreign merchants coming from Wallachia, Moldavia, or the Ottoman Empire. This charter throws an entirely different light on the issue of the Greek presence in the principality of Transylvania, as it addresses the resident/non-resident, i.e. tax-paying/non-paying dichotomies in a manner suggesting that the Greeks had been settled in these towns for quite some time. The non-resident merchants were ordered to sell only their own merchandise and not to buy goods from other traders:

We have understood from the humble request of our faithful subjects of the Greek nation who live in the towns of Gyulafehérvár, Kolozsvár, and Marosvásárhely and in the market town of Hunyad that many Wallachians, Moldavians and Greeks, Vlachs, Turks and other people of similar kind of the Turkish Empire who come to do their trade with Turkish merchandise sell their goods with the ell and by the florin [...] to the great damage of our inhabitants of the Greek nation living here in Transylvania.<sup>26</sup>

Prince Bethlen thus called the Greeks “his faithful subjects of the Greek nation,” which suggests a good relationship between the two parties. Greeks did business for the prince, as is clear from a 1619 free pass given by Bethlen’s wife, Zsuzsanna Károlyi, to a number of Greek merchants who were entrusted by the prince to sell 24 hundredweights of mercury. The motivation was that, “according to the law,” the Greeks could not leave the country with gold or silver good coins, and therefore they had to invest their money after the fair

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26 “quod cum ex humillima fidelium subiectorum nostrorum Graecorum nationis universorum hominum in civitatibus Albensis, Claudiopoliensi et Vasarhelyensi nostris ac Hunyadiensi oppido degentium relatione accipiamus, [...] quam plurimos Daci alpestres, Moldavienses ac Turcici Imperii Graecos, Valachos, Turcos ac alios cujusvis ordinis homines qui nostrum imperium Transilvanicum mercede Turcica quaestum suum faciendum non solum ulna venditione vero florenali res suas mercimoniales aequae venderent, ac postmodum aere bono conflato iterum ac externas nationes sese recipiant hique regni nostri Transilvaniae incolis Graecae videlicet nationi multum incommodantes summamque eisdem afferentes iniuriam [...] demiterentur.” *Libri Regii*, vol. 27, 162b–64.

in Nagyszeben.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, in April 1618, the Diet passed a decision forbidding Greeks to export good currency or objects made of precious metals.<sup>28</sup>

In the literature dealing with the founding of the Greek merchant association in Nagyszeben, the succession of events appears to be straightforward: in 1636, Prince George Rákóczi I granted them the privilege of setting up their own association under the direction of a “principal” and administering their own justice.<sup>29</sup> The Nagyszeben Greek association, according to its internal documents, was founded only in 1638 or 1639, when its members held the first meeting and elected their *proestos*.<sup>30</sup> The document published by T. Bodogae was hailed by this author and others as the founding privilege of the Nagyszeben Greek trading “company.”<sup>31</sup> A cliché was born out of this simplification: recent literature, including works I have written, took it over from Cicanci’s book without criticism.<sup>32</sup>

When reading the text of the 1636 charter, two things become obvious which should have raised questions: there is no mention of Nagyszeben or of any other place in Transylvania whatsoever, and the charter does not contain the word “company.” Principally, the grant sets the limits for the Greeks’ trade and allows them their own administration of justice.<sup>33</sup> Nicolae Iorga had indicated as early as 1906 that the 1636 charter was a grant issued to all Greeks living in Transylvania, but his opinion did not become part of the mainstream scholarship. Iorga also asserted that the Nagyszeben “company” was “one of the most significant branches of the great Transylvanian Greek company,”<sup>34</sup> and even though this assertion would be a logical conclusion of the foundational charter, other evidence suggests that such a guild or association encompassing

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27 January 18, 1619: “Nylhan vagion minden rendeknel, bogȳ ez országbnak constitutioia szerez̄et az̄ georeogeokt̄ül az̄ aranj, taller, dutka es minden eḡieb fele jó monetaknak ez̄ országbnul valo k̄j vitele interdicaltatot: melibez̄kepest ez̄ mostani elmult Vizkereszt napi Szebenben leveo sakadalomra ment georeogeok kenzerittetennek ide Feiervara keneseö vetelre jeömi [...] Melj̄ meghnevezett georeogeoknek adatot uram eo kegyelme in summa buz̄on negy masa keneseöt jó kezesseḡ alatt ez̄ jeovendö Viragb Vasarnapon valo Vasarbelj̄ sakadalomigh, bogȳ akkorra ararul eppen contentalliak uramat eö kegyelmet.” National Archives of Sibiu, Medieval Documents, U IV 254.

28 EOE, vol. 7, 477; Demény, “Le régime,” 93.

29 Bodogae, “Le privilège,” 649; Cicanci, *Companiile*, 23–24.

30 Ibid., *Companiile*, 25.

31 See also Demény, “Le régime,” 97; Karathanassis, *L'hellénisme en Transylvanie*, 29.

32 See Pakucs-Willcocks, *Sibiu–Hermannstadt*, 120, and Ciure, “The contribution of the commercial companies,” 147.

33 A critical edition of a copy of the charter, as recorded in the protocols of the Greek merchant association in Nagyszeben, at Tsourka–Papastathi, *I Elliniki*, 375–78.

34 Iorga, *Scrisori și inscripții ardeleni și maramureșene*, V.



all Greek merchants in Transylvania did not exist. Although “company” is not a term used in Rákóczi’s grant, it was used by the Greek merchants: *kompania*.

Despina Tsourka-Papastathi argued against Cicanci’s interpretation of historical facts immediately after the publication of her book.<sup>35</sup> Tsourka-Papastathi offered a more elaborate argumentation of the accurate reading of this 1636 charter in her own book on the Nagyszeben “company,” and she published a critical edition of the document as well.<sup>36</sup> She expressed her doubts about this charter being the foundational privilege of the Nagyszeben “company.”<sup>37</sup>

Let us analyze briefly the contents of the 1636 privilege charter. The preamble mentions beyond any doubt that this grant was offered to all Greek merchants in Transylvania: *ex humillima totius communitatis universorum Graecorum in ditione nostra, quaesturam exercentium, supplicatione*.<sup>38</sup> This phrase strengthens my arguments concerning the Transylvanian Greeks: they had been paying taxes to the treasury, a fact which entitled them to approach the prince with their grievances. The terms of Rákóczi’s grant were very clear: first, the Greeks could elect a suitable man to be their head (*idoneum virum in principalem eorum inspectorem eligere possint et valeant*), who would arbitrate disputes between Transylvanian Greeks and foreign Greeks. Any litigation with a nobleman or an inhabitant of the country was to be brought to the attention of the local courts, who had the power to arrest any accused Greek. Secondly, the Greek merchants could sell freely at the fairs, under strict conditions. However, they could only offer their stock wholesale (i.e. sell by the bale and not the ell, and not under the value of 100 denars), and for only three days before and after the fair. These restrictions on free sale in fact were intended to favor local traders and merchants, who thus had the benefit of retail sale and could obtain profit margins on the goods bought from the Greeks wholesale.

While Greeks in other Transylvanian towns had established themselves and had been acknowledged by the central authorities as shown by the 1627 charter of Gabriel Bethlen, Nagyszeben had placed many obstacles to stop the Greeks at the gates, obstacles matched only by the opportunities for good business in the town. In my opinion, the non-specific charter granted by Prince George Rákóczi I in 1636 created the first opening for the Greeks to enter the most coveted town in Transylvania. In a memoir from 1747 addressed to Empress Maria Theresia,

35 Tsourka-Papastathi, “À propos des compagnies grecques de Transylvanie,” 423.

36 Idem, *I Elliniki*, 375–78.

37 Idem, “The Decline of the Greek ‘Companies,’” 217, note 5.

38 Bodogae, “Le privilège,” 650.

the Greek merchants from Nagyszeben claimed to have lost in a fire the founding charter for their association. Despina Tsourka-Papastathi believes this assertion, and she suggests that a separate grant for the Greek merchant association in Nagyszeben must have been issued in 1637 or 1638.<sup>39</sup> Cicanci mentioned that an undated memoir of the Nagyszeben Greek merchant association addressed to the Transylvanian governor alludes to privileges obtained by the Greeks in 1623, 1630 and 1632, and 1656.<sup>40</sup> Iorga also knew of another privilege charter of 1641, preserved in transcripts in the protocols of the Nagyszeben “company,”<sup>41</sup> although other authors who studied this archive do not mention it. I personally do not think that a different founding privilege existed at all: the Transylvanian prince could not have overlooked the fact that Nagyszeben possessed the staple right. Greeks entered Nagyszeben by bending the law slightly. According to the protocols of the Nagyszeben Greek association from 1655,<sup>42</sup> the scribe could not recover the privileges of the “old Greek merchants” because they were lost due to bad archiving.<sup>43</sup> If there are so many confirmations and copies of the 1636 privilege, surely the one that allegedly was lost could have been replaced over time. Furthermore, the 1636 charter was preserved in copies in the archives of the Brassó Greek merchant association as well.<sup>44</sup>

The founding privilege of the Brassó Greek association from 1678 acknowledges the Nagyszeben “company” (*compania*) as a model. First, a decision of a Diet was confirmed by Michael Apafi (1661–90), setting the annual tax payable by the Brassó Greeks,<sup>45</sup> separately from other Greek communities in Transylvania.<sup>46</sup> Subsequently, the Prince issued the charter *ad normam companiae Graecorum nostrorum Cibinii commorantium*, according to which the Brassó Greeks were allowed their own administration of justice.<sup>47</sup> The choice of the Greeks to organize themselves in localized trading associations or guilds instead of a community encompassing all Greeks in Transylvania has to be explained through the social and cultural experiences and expectations of these newcomers into Transylvania. Their solidarities relied more strongly on

39 Tsourka-Papastathi, “The Decline,” 217, note 5.

40 Cicanci, *Comaniile*, 22 and 91.

41 Iorga, *Scrisori și inscripții*, VI.

42 Ibid.

43 Cicanci, *Comaniile*, 30.

44 Ibid., 25.

45 EOE, vol. 16, 621.

46 Cicanci, *Comaniile*, 25.

47 Full text of the charter published by Iorga, *Acte românești*, 2–3.

local connections: extended family and neighbors from their villages or towns of origin. Nevertheless, Greeks paid their taxes jointly at first and also had common duties. I shall return here to the idea, put forward by Iorga, that a pan-Transylvanian Greek association was divided into local branches, the Nagyszeben one being one of the most prominent ones.<sup>48</sup> While the historical evidence does not support this hypothesis, it is clear that in the eyes of the Transylvanian political and fiscal authorities the Greeks were one entity, one “nation.”

As a final amendment to another misconception regarding the Greek “trading companies,” I would stress that they did not copy the English Levant Company<sup>49</sup> or any other Western European trading company.<sup>50</sup> The Greek “companies” in Transylvania were not joint-stock business ventures. Before arriving to the wrong conclusion, Olga Cicanci was rightly looking in the Balkans for the possible models for the Nagyszeben and Brassó associations of the Greek merchants. The Transylvanian Greek “companies” were associations of individuals engaged in trade, but each merchant was responsible for his own ventures. When in 1694 the head and other members of the Nagyszeben merchant association appeared in front of the town judges to testify for a fellow “companion,” they strongly refused to settle any unpaid debts. They stated: *Nemo enim pro alio solvere tenetur*.<sup>51</sup> The aim of their association was more a juridical and political one, aimed at protecting their individual commercial interests. Thus, it was very similar to a merchant guild.

The following princely charter dealing with the Greeks was issued on May 14, 1643 by the same George Rákóczi I. This is a mandate instructing clerks and officials to allow foreign Greeks, Armenians and Serbs to trade freely in Transylvania, because these merchants had agreed to pay an annual tax of 2000 florins.<sup>52</sup> The document names the individual Greeks entrusted with collecting the tax from all concerned, including Greeks from Hunyad, Hátszeg (today Hațeg, Romania), and Marosvásárhely. Lidia Demény asserted that a similar mandate was given by George Rákóczi I two years earlier.<sup>53</sup>

Five years later, on April 9, 1648, at the request of the Greeks in Gyulafehérvár, Prince George Rákóczi I ordered that the Jews share the burdens of the services

48 Iorga, *Studii și documente*, vol 12, V.

49 See the idea first at Cicanci, *Companiile*, 171.

50 Ciure, “The contribution,” 147.

51 Pakucs-Willcocks, “Als Kaufleute,” 88.

52 From the *Libri Regii*, vol. 20, 168, and published in “Erdélyi görög kereskedők szabadalomlevelei,” *Magyar Gazdaságtörténelmi Szemle* 5 (1898): 402–03.

53 Demény, “Le régime,” 98.

assigned to the Greeks: either transporting mercury or managing the post-house and post-horses. In this mandate, significant details about the legal framework for the trade of the Greeks emerge:

The Greeks living in our suburb of Gyulafehérvár inform us jointly that [...] the Jews had taken away business from them, because whenever a Turk comes with goods, the Jews go even as far as Deva to meet him and buy up his stock, selling it onward for double the price, although they are not allowed to do so.<sup>54</sup>

Jews had been allowed to settle in Transylvania in 1623, when Gabriel Bethlen had stipulated in his privilege that one of their tasks was to bring merchandise from Istanbul.<sup>55</sup> Rivalry quickly ensued with the Greeks, who were competing for the princely favors and for the distribution of the same goods.

On February 1, 1653, Prince George Rákóczi II (1648–60) issued a mandate at the request of tax-paying Greeks according to which all Greek, Armenian, and other foreign merchants (except for the Jews) who traded in Transylvania pay their due taxes. The competition between tax-paying Greeks and the other Balkan-Levantine merchants, including the non-resident Greeks, was a recurrent theme throughout the seventeenth century. This document reveals how the Greeks themselves explained their predicament to the Transylvanian prince:

Tax-paying Greeks doing commerce in our realm of Transylvania have reported that often Greeks who do not belong to any society [*társaságokon kívül levő görögök*], Armenians, and other nations come to this country to do trade, but refuse to pay the rightful contribution [paid by the Greeks]. Many of them resort to local judges and public officers for protection, paying them bribes. Furthermore they [Greeks outside the associations] don't allow others to pay taxes either, those who get married and settle in towns and villages, claiming that they are now inhabitants of the country, even though they continue to do trade.<sup>56</sup>

A mandate of Prince Michael Apafi from October 21, 1678 settled the annual contribution that the Greek merchant association from Nagyszeben had to pay, separately from the other Greeks, and gave the Nagyszeben Greeks an order to

54 *Libri Regii*, vol. 22, 75; “Erdélyi görög kereskedők szabadalomlevelei,” 403–04.

55 EOE, vol. 8, 143.

56 *Libri Regii*, vol. 30, 173–74. The document is preserved in a 1659 confirmation from Prince Ákos Barcsai.

change to good money the contribution paid by the Szeklers for the tribute to the Porte. This *annuentia* thus sheds light on a new duty entrusted to the Greeks, that of money-changing: “the tax of 10 000 florins that [the Szeklers] owe on St. George’s day, the said Greeks should take into their hand to change into good money, as is the custom to change it to good imperial thalers.”<sup>57</sup>

*Nagyszeben and the Greek Merchants: Town Statutes and the Staple Right in the Seventeenth Century*

The town magistrate and council of Nagyszeben issued their own statutes and regulations aimed at organizing the political, social, and economic life of the town. The Greek merchants had become an issue for the local authorities by the sixteenth century, and this issue was addressed accordingly by the town officials. The growing pressure from the southern merchants to be allowed to trade freely was more important for the town of Nagyszeben than it was for the Transylvanian Diet. The struggle<sup>58</sup> was to preserve the privilege of the staple right, granted to the town of Nagyszeben in the fourteenth century. In a nutshell, the original privilege allowing the exclusive distribution of cloth on the local market for the Nagyszeben merchants against the merchants from Upper Hungary (Kassa [Kaschau, today Košice, Slovakia]) had come to offer local Saxon traders a lucrative position to buy up and sell the products coming from the Ottoman Empire. Well into the sixteenth century, according to the staple right, merchants coming from Wallachia had to deposit their goods at Tâlmács (Talmesch, today Tâlmăciu, Romania) and later Sellenberk (today Șelimbăr, Romania) and offer their stock wholesale to local merchants.<sup>59</sup>

However, there was undeniable pressure from these foreign merchants to sell unhindered on the Transylvanian market. Otto Fritz Jickeli mentioned that in 1577 a Greek merchant obtained the first princely privilege to sell salted fish, blankets, and sheep.<sup>60</sup> The Saxon towns succeeded in having the Diet on their side throughout the sixteenth century, but the overall attitude and consequently the legislation gradually shifted in favor of the Greek merchants. The last

57 “Erdélyi görög kereskedők szabadságleveli,” 405.

58 I am using this word reluctantly; it was overused by older literature when discussing the efforts made by the Saxons to preserve their trading privileges and stopping foreign merchants from selling freely in Transylvania.

59 Pakucs-Willcocks, *Sibiu–Hermannstadt*, 26–27.

60 Jickeli, “Der Handel der Siebenbürger Sachsen,” 88, quoting the work of von Bethlen, “Grundlinien zur Kulturgeschichte Siebenbürgens,” 246.

weapon the Saxons could resort to was their own town statutes. Sixteenth-century documentary evidence, albeit scant, indicates that the Greeks had not entered the town and that they carried out their business at the staple place.<sup>61</sup>

The first town statute of the seventeenth century was issued in 1614. Nagyszeben was recovering politically and economically from the devastation caused by the former prince of Transylvania, Gabriel Báthory, who had occupied, plundered, and emptied the city of its inhabitants. The new prince, Gabriel Bethlen, was trying to pacify the Saxons, and he negotiated with them new terms of mutual collaboration. Gabriel Báthory had deviously occupied Nagyszeben, after asking to spend the winter in the city; now the Saxons were asking for safeguards and guarantees that Bethlen's winter sojourn in Nagyszeben would not end in occupation and distress. The new prince tried to make amends, reaching an agreement with the community of Transylvanian Saxons<sup>62</sup> and, particularly, with the authorities of Nagyszeben.

Among the conditions requested by the Saxon *universitas*, which negotiated the terms on Nagyszeben's behalf, one concerned foreign merchants:

16. The Greeks and other traders, coming with their goods from Moldavia, Wallachia, and other places, should be obliged to go first to the staple places, to the twentieth, and to the customs stations without any delays; they should sell their wares there, and not go to fairs, under the penalty of confiscation of their goods, because this causes great damage to the Transylvanian merchants and to the country. This is evident also from the fact that the good money, ducats and gold, is paid for them, and they [the foreign merchants – MPW] take the good money into foreign countries, causing a shortage of money in Transylvania.<sup>63</sup>

Despite the prince's reassurances, the position of the Saxons within the Transylvanian Diet had waned significantly, and they rarely prevailed. Prince Bethlen's own stance was in favor of an abundance of goods from the Ottoman lands, and as we have seen, he had forged good relations with the Greeks.

In 1631, the city fathers of Nagyszeben issued their *statuta specialia*, the first article of which tackled the issue of Greek merchants and their disregard for existing laws:

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61 See for instance the litigation between two Greeks in 1561: Pakucs-Willcocks, "Making a Profit in Sibiu," 109–10.

62 Cziráki, "Brassó és az erdélyi szászok," 847–76.

63 EOE, vol. 6, 386–87. Also mentioned by Demény, "Le régime," 93.

We shall discuss first the harmful nation of the Greeks (*die schädliche nation der Griechen*), who have become prevalent not only in Siebenbürgen [i.e. Saxon Seats – MPW], but travel unhindered through the entire country [i.e. the principality of Transylvania – MPW], causing great damage to the country; also they have taken such liberties (*Licenz*) within our towns, staying here all year round and selling their goods as they wish, causing damage and disadvantage to our city folk and merchants, by taking the food from their mouths, not taking into account the fact that the locals are the ones who carry the burdens of the city.<sup>64</sup>

The privilege of the staple right (*Staffel*) was at the core of this statute: the Nagyszeben merchants had become accustomed to having the Ottoman products brought to their doorstep, giving them the upper hand in relation to foreign merchants, especially the Balkan-Levantines.<sup>65</sup> Such an attitude cost them in the long-run: the Greeks had access to the oriental goods, information, and support networks.<sup>66</sup>

The 1631 town statute argued that Greeks were the only ones who disregarded the ancient privilege obtained by the Nagyszeben citizens for their faithful services to the Hungarian monarchs. The city council and the community therefore decided

that the Greeks and other nations coming with goods and products through the Turnu Roșu pass should go to the staple place or *Niederlag*, and after they have paid the twentieth dutifully, they should not repack [the goods – MPW] but sell them in open shops to the inhabitants and artisans, who should be able to get whatever they need for their work. [The Greeks] should not sell to other foreigners, and should only sell by the pound, the centner, and the dozen, and for gold florins. After the fourteen days set by the law run out, local traders are allowed to sell their goods to the Greeks, but the Greeks should not take [these purchases] to the houses or to the inn, under the penalty of losing their goods. Furthermore, the Greeks should not take their goods back home, and if they try to cheat and sell them in secret, their goods should be confiscated when the truth is uncovered.<sup>67</sup>

64 Schuler von Libloy, *Merkwürdige*, 90. See also Cicanci, *Companiile*, 89.

65 The merchants of Vienna, too, became “lazy,” taking advantage of their staple right: Landsteiner, “Handel und Kaufleute,” 208.

66 Braude, “Venture and Faith,” 519–42.

67 Schuler von Libloy, *Merkwürdige*, 91.

The city fathers of Nagyszeben organized their concerns according to the interests of the guilds and townsfolk, giving them, at least in theory, the first choice in buying the goods they wanted or needed. The 1631 Nagyszeben town statute also stipulated that “Armenians, Greeks, Turks, Jews and other nations” who pay the customs duties were allowed to enter the country during the times of the annual fairs.<sup>68</sup> It was, however, an article that had little effect on the actual situation of the Greeks and foreign merchants in Transylvania. This statute echoes the 1597 “articles,” which aimed to create the rules to establish equal access for all townsfolk to merchandise and services, of which first on the list were the “goods brought by the Greeks.”<sup>69</sup>

The fact that the Greeks established their own trading guild in Nagyszeben after George Rákóczi I’s 1636 privilege was not acknowledged in any official document issued by the local Saxon authorities. The general *conflux* of the Saxon *universitas* on 19–24 January 1654 had decided that “foreign merchants, Greeks, Armenians and Jews, cannot trade with goods that grow or are made in this country,” and it listed things such as pigs, lambskins, wool, or wax.<sup>70</sup>

In 1656, the city council of Nagyszeben issued a decision intended to control the Greeks who had settled in the town by imposing harsh rules and limits on their trading. This regulation built on the privilege granted by George Rákóczi I twenty years earlier: unless the Greeks were willing to pay 50 florins a year to rent the town shops, they could only sell freely within the time span of 14 days before and after the annual fairs. Furthermore, a curfew was set for the Greeks at eight o’clock in the evening, they could only buy wholesale from the market and not to the detriment of locals, and they could not practice their religion or open schools.<sup>71</sup> Although this statute does not mention the staple right, it became the reference point for the very harsh negotiations with the Viennese authorities for the statute of Greek merchants during the eighteenth century. Thus, a later memoir (1726) of the Saxons addressed to the Viennese court confirms the fact that the 1656 statute had been accepted and agreed to by the Greeks. Nagyszeben officials declared that they only made these concessions to the Greeks because a plague in 1654 had taken a hard toll on the Nagyszeben

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68 Ibid., 91.

69 Wagner, *Quellen zur Geschichte*, 148.

70 Hientz et. al., *Hermannstadt und Siebenbürgen*, vol. 10, image 173.

71 The statute was published by Ioan Moga, “Politica,” 156–57, note 1.



merchants, thus compelling them to take advantage of the presence of the Greeks temporarily.<sup>72</sup>

The town statute from 1698 addressed the question of foreign and local merchants by declaring that the locals had always had an advantage over foreigners, “a privilege which should not be overlooked or forgotten,” and arguing that even though the “Greeks and other foreigners are tolerated temporarily (*ad tempus*), they should be given precedence over the locals after having supplied the town with goods.”<sup>73</sup>

I have argued that, although there was no formal abolition of the staple right, this medieval privilege became obsolete and surpassed by legislation and historical context. In the aforementioned memoir of 1726 addressed to Vienna, the Saxons stated that the Greeks had never been granted the right to sell freely in Nagyszeben and that this was a harmful abuse of the law.<sup>74</sup> However, the Saxons had created a norm from the practice of the staple right, shifting the original provisions of the medieval privilege to suit their own needs and the changing economic realities.<sup>75</sup>

### *The Greeks in Transylvania between Freedom of Trade and Limitations*

After discussing the documentary evidence, I offer a summary of the findings, focusing on the gains obtained by the Greeks in the principality of Transylvania and the strict legal and institutional framework that was created for them.

In the seventeenth century, Greeks made great advances in securing their leading position in the distribution of goods from the Ottoman Empire in Transylvania. However, they were far from being on equal footing with the local merchants. They were given specific duties to carry out for the common good of the principality, which were mentioned in this article. Their prowess and acumen for business were undeniably acknowledged by the Transylvanians: in 1671 the Greek judge was given the task of appointing people to investigate the exchange rates of foreign currencies.<sup>76</sup> Greeks were allowed to pursue their trade under strict conditions, which are underlined in a mandate of Prince Michael Apafi from 1675 sent to the royal judge of Nagyszeben:

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72 Moga, “Politica,” 157, note 2.

73 Schuler von Libloy, *Merkwürdige*, 116.

74 Moga, “Politica,” 157, note 3.

75 Pakucs-Willcocks, “Dreptul de etapă,” 131–43.

76 EOE, vol. 15, 184.

We have read your letter and understood, about the goods of that Italian, that the Greeks living there [in Nagyszeben – MPW] have bought up his goods perfidiously, acting very badly and wickedly, whereas they had no permission (*annuentia*), neither from ourselves, nor from the country [the Diet – MPW] to buy such goods for profit to the detriment of our citizens, goods that other foreign merchants bring into our country to sell. On the contrary, we know that it is forbidden for them to interfere.<sup>77</sup>

The text of the princely instruction highlights one crucial limitation imposed on foreign merchants, and particularly on the Greeks, who wanted to do trade in Transylvania: they were only permitted to sell the goods they carried themselves. This rule had two major implications. First, the prohibition against foreign merchants selling the goods of other non-locals stems from the 1627 privilege given by Gabriel Bethlen to the Greeks in various towns in Transylvania, and one comes across it in subsequent official documents. In 1648, the Greeks themselves complained about Jews who purchased oriental products in Transylvania for resale, while an article of the Diet from 1654 clearly stated that “Jews and other foreign merchants [...] should bring the goods from abroad themselves.”<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, in 1675 it was decided that Greeks, Armenians, and Turks could only buy from local merchants.<sup>79</sup> Some of these concerns and stipulations were mirrored by regulations of the Nagyszeben Greek merchant association as well: in 1687, the members of the associations were not allowed to pass on their merchandise to another merchant to sell. Moreover, a regulation from 1690 limited the number of fair members of the Nagyszeben merchant association were allowed to visit to two per year.<sup>80</sup> Secondly, Greeks and Jews, as we have also seen, were confined to selling only goods imported by them from the Ottoman Empire. The Diet had decreed this in 1591,<sup>81</sup> and Bethlen’s 1627 privilege defined Greeks by their dealing in “Turkish goods.”

Fundamentally, while their situation improved in the seventeenth century, the Greeks and other foreign merchants from the Ottoman Empire retained their status of aliens and outsiders. Even when they decided to declare themselves inhabitants for tax purposes and own property in Transylvania, their juridical standing was inferior to that of the local merchants. These interdictions

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77 National Archives of Sibiu, Medieval Documents, U 1211, Hungarian original.

78 EOE, vol. 11, 177.

79 Ibid., vol. 16, 174.

80 Cicanci, *Companiile*, 123.

81 EOE, vol 3, 191–92.

and limitations to business were meant to preserve the advantages of the local merchants for distribution and retail sale. In this intricate and definitely not linear construction of their juridical status, the Greeks resorted to individual strategies to improve their chances for integration. These strategies included marriages to local women (e.g. in 1646 a certain György Policzani asking for permission from the prince for his betrothal to a Saxon woman),<sup>82</sup> the purchase of property, ennoblement,<sup>83</sup> and entering the service of the Prince (certain Greeks farmed out the customs and the salt mines). János Pater, a Greek active in the second half of the seventeenth century, was the most representative example in this respect.<sup>84</sup> Similar strategies of integration have been identified in Wallachia and Moldavia, though the scale of the Greek presence was incomparably larger there than in Transylvania.<sup>85</sup>

The inconsistent legislation and the ambiguity of attitudes toward the Greeks, centrally and locally as well, are characteristic of this century. For instance, the Diet of November 1675 retreated on its previous policy to encourage the Greeks and other foreign merchants, deciding that they should not be allowed to travel or wander freely through the country or use the back roads, where they could be a danger to the country: “and they are allowed free entrance until Brassó, Nagyszeben, Szászváros (today Orăștie, Romania) and Bánffyhunyard (today Huedin, Romania) towards Kolozsvár, but they are forbidden to go anywhere else.” The article of the law points to corrupt customs officers who allowed these merchants to travel further into the country, but also to fellow traders who acted as guides for the newcomers.<sup>86</sup> It is clear that these were two of the most common ways of entering Transylvania clandestinely. In Nagyszeben, there was also pressure from the community to have a constant supply of the “goods brought by the Greeks”: requests for the better regulation of trade in oriental goods were presented to the city council.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, in the 1640s, the wife of the royal judge in Nagyszeben, Colomann Gotzmeister, during a

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82 National Archives of Sibiu, Medieval Documents, U IV 500.

83 National Archives of Sibiu, Medieval Documents, U IV 2402: nobility charter for Thomas Osztaniczai (1671).

84 Demény, “Le régime,” 105–06.

85 Lazăr, *Les marchands en Valachie*, 105–16; Apetrei, “Forme de integrare socială a grecilor,” 303–08.

86 EOE, vol. 16, 174; Trócsányi, “Gesetzgebung,” 99.

87 Such as in 1630, 1634, 1670: National Archives of Sibiu, Medieval Documents, U IV 366 (1630), U IV 394 (1634).

bitter divorce trial, was accused of having connections to the recently established Greek merchant association in Nagyszeben.<sup>88</sup>

### *Final Remarks and Suggestions for Further Research*

How many Greeks were there at any given moment in seventeenth-century Transylvania? The number of members in the trading associations can be an indicator of rough figures: Olga Cicanci has identified 32 members in the Greek merchant association of Nagyszeben in 1695, while in other years for which she could find data the numbers are even lower, usually less than 30.<sup>89</sup> In 1670, the Diet had ordered the Nagyszeben Greek merchant association not to have more than 60 members at any given time.<sup>90</sup>

The Brassó association of the Greek merchants seems to have been larger than the Nagyszeben one, but along with these figures we also need to take into account the unknown figures for the Greeks settled in other places. As mentioned before, Transylvanian authorities also unsuccessfully tried to count the Greeks in the 1670s,<sup>91</sup> but the Habsburg administration of Transylvania managed to organize a census of the registered Greeks in Transylvania at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The number of merchants was a little over 200,<sup>92</sup> a number consistent with the estimate for the seventeenth century.

A significant feature of the Greeks in Transylvania in the seventeenth century was that they were still quite mobile:<sup>93</sup> visiting homes and families, undertaking business trips, or fleeing uncomfortable situations in Transylvania were strong reasons for the underlying mobility of Greeks and other Balkan merchants.

The frictions between the settled and non-settled Greeks in Transylvania reveal how dynamic their diaspora was and how the communities were constantly replenished with new members. Late-seventeenth-century data from the account books of Siguli Stratu show how a Greek trading house operated: based in Nagyszeben, the merchant had family members acting as his agents at fairs and

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88 Roth, *Hermannstadt*, 111.

89 Cicanci, *Companiile*, 65.

90 EOE, vol. 16, 180.

91 Demény, “Le régime,” 108.

92 Dumitran, “Comercianții greci din Transilvania,” 241.

93 For mobility in early modern Europe excellent studies by Lucassen, “Towards a Comparative History,” 20–21, 31.

in other trading centers, buying and selling, borrowing and settling debts, and exchanging money.<sup>94</sup>

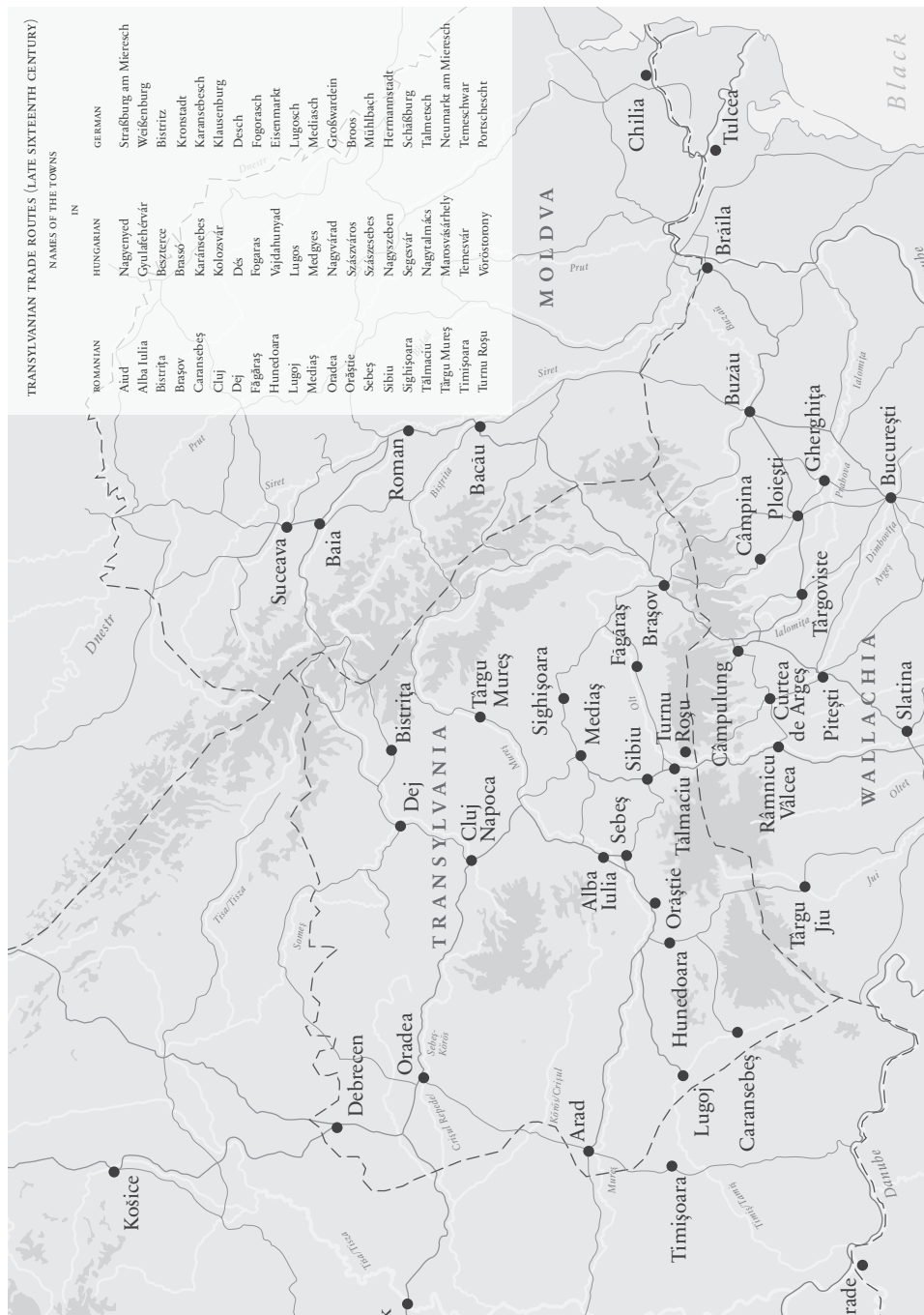
The work of Márta Búr has shown the situation of the Greeks in Hungary, where the first official Greek merchant associations were founded in Tokaj, Gyöngyös, Miskolc, and other towns in the second half of the seventeenth century. Greeks were faced with hostility in these towns as well, while authorities attempted, to no avail, to restrain the scope of their economic activity. As was the case in Transylvania, local authorities had assigned Hungarian Greeks the role of providers of Ottoman products, but Búr noticed that the Greeks chose to settle in market towns, where they could have good access to natural products and livestock. Greeks buying and selling grains, cattle, and sheep organized themselves in traders’ associations similar to the Transylvanian ones in order to protect themselves and their businesses, whereas Greeks dealing in Turkish goods remained individual traders with no guild-like bonds between them. Greeks in Hungary, at least in the early stages of their settlement, also constantly returned to their hometowns in the Balkans.<sup>95</sup>

Vassiliki Seirinidou has argued that there were two types of Greek diaspora in Central Europe, an early one in the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries, carrying out retail trade in Turkish products but also keeping shops and monopolizing retail distribution of local goods in towns and villages, and a second diaspora, which formed around the middle of the eighteenth century and engaged in wholesale trade between the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires. She argues that while the second diaspora was born out of the first one, it had a different status, outlined in the peace treaties of Karlowitz (1699) and Passarowitz (1718).<sup>96</sup> I agree with Seirinidou that the status of the Greek merchants changed drastically after the Ottomans lost their authority over Hungary and Transylvania, but I cannot second her opinion that the second diaspora was formed by new merchants, who had to have the capital to engage in wholesale trade. As I have tried to show here, the Greek and other merchants, subjects of the Ottoman sultans, were very diverse in their origin, financial capability, interests, and status. If we are going to arrive at a subtle understanding of how the Greek diaspora in early modern Central Europe came into being, we must take into account a variety of factors. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the migration of the Greek merchants was still marked by a constant return to their homeland: the absence

94 *Catalogul documentelor*, 19–29.

95 Búr, “Handelsgesellschaften,” 289–91.

96 Seirinidou, “Grocers and Wholesalers,” 87–88.



Mária Pakucs-Willcocks, “Economic Relations Between the Ottoman Empire and Transylvania in the Sixteenth Century: Oriental Trade and Merchants,” in *Osmanischer Orient und Ostmitteleuropa: Perzeptionen und interaktionen*, edited by Robert Born and Andreas Puth (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2014), 211, with thanks to Timo Stingl.

of the close family and the reliance on the extended male kinship for business is, in my opinion, a better indicator of the status of the Greeks. While some of them acquired either membership in an association (“company”) or paid their share of the common tax, until the eighteenth century, when the extended privileges were granted by Vienna, they could be considered as “migratory labor”<sup>97</sup> force. They had a highly-specialized profession, which was based on decades of shared experience, knowledge about the target markets, capital, and so on. In Transylvania, the Greeks, Jews, and Armenians were assigned specific tasks: their role was to provide goods from the Ottoman Empire.

Further research on the still underexplored archives of the Greek merchant associations in Nagyszeben and Brassó should offer more insights into the world of these Balkan merchants. Also, the close study of private letters, business correspondence, bills of exchange, and letters of credit which are found in the local archives will further a better understanding of their business activities and their increased share in Transylvania’s foreign trade beginning with the last decades of the seventeenth century.<sup>98</sup>

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97 According to the typology suggested by Lucassen, “Towards a Comparative History,” 17.

98 Vencel Bíró has indicated that the archives of the Apor, Lázár and Teleki families in the state archives of Cluj and Budapest contain numerous such documents: Bíró, *Altörjái gróf Apor István*, 32, notes 5–17.

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