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# “Turkish” Textiles in South-Eastern and East-Central Europe in the Early Modern Period: The Evidence of Transylvanian Customs Accounts

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## Abstract

This paper analyzes data from customs accounts in Transylvania from the middle of the sixteenth century to the end of the seventeenth on traffic in textiles and textile products from the Ottoman Empire. Cotton was known and commercialized in Transylvania from the fifteenth century; serial data will show that traffic in Ottoman cotton and silk textiles as well as in textile objects such as carpets grew considerably during the second half of the seventeenth century. Customs registers from that period also indicate that Poland and Hungary were destinations for Ottoman imports, but Transylvania was a consumer’s market for cotton textiles.

## Keywords

Ottoman textiles – customs registers – cotton – silk – Transylvania – East-Central Europe – early modern period

## Introduction

In this paper, I shall examine the imports of textiles from the Ottoman Balkans into Central Europe throughout the early modern period based primarily on customs accounts from Transylvania. While existing scholarship has addressed the traffic in Ottoman textiles in the region, the present study aims to extend the scope of that analysis and introduce new sources and insights on the topic, investigating to what degree Transylvanian sources elucidate the circulation of

goods in Southeastern Europe. Taken together, the customs registers of Transylvania, little known and underutilized by economic historians, capture the traffic of commodities along the commercial routes leading from Istanbul to Vienna and Polish towns (Cracow, Jarosław) via Sibiu (German: Hermanstadt), Braşov (German: Kronstadt), and Cluj (Hungarian: Kolozsvár), and offer a richer perspective on the commercial exchange between the Ottoman Empire and East Central Europe.

Research on early modern consumption in Southeastern Europe is lacking, and this oversight has become even more evident in recent years when textile consumption and its role in early modern global trade has garnered considerable attention internationally. Nevertheless, by compiling data on the commercial traffic through the main Transylvanian customs houses, and complementing them with information from normative documents stipulating official prices and customs tariffs, we may obtain a clearer picture of the geographical distribution of Ottoman textiles beyond the confines of the empire.

In the first part of the present study, I provide a brief discussion of the primary sources and the interpretative key I employ in the analysis. After introductory remarks on the medieval background of long-distance trade in Southeastern and East-Central Europe, the paper proceeds to the dynamics of trade and the circulation of textiles produced in the Ottoman Empire or imported from Ottoman markets and identified as such in the sources. These textiles and fabrics fall into several categories, depending on their raw material and the degree to which they had been processed, including cotton and linen fabrics, cotton yarns, (raw) silk, silk yarns, woollen cloth, and finished products, such as towels and carpets.

The corpus of thirty-five customs registers from the town of Sibiu covering the period between 1500 and 1692 constitutes the principal source material of the present analysis.<sup>1</sup> Lidia Demény utilized the part of this collection pertaining to the late seventeenth century; otherwise, the registers' potential has remained largely unexploited to this day.<sup>2</sup> The sixteenth-century registers

1 *Rechnungen aus dem Archiv der Stadt Hermannstadt und der sächsischen Nation* (Sibiu, 1880), 271-304; and Mária Pakucs-Willcocks, *Sibiu-Hermannstadt. Oriental Trade in Sixteenth Century Transylvania* (Cologne, 2007), Appendix IV, *The Customs Account Books of Sibiu 1537-1597*, CD-ROM. The seventeenth-century customs accounts remain unpublished: National Archives, Sibiu County, Fonds *Primăria și magistratul oraşului Sibiu. Socoteli vamale, Inventory 197* [Town hall and magistrate of Sibiu. Customs accounts], no. 43-47, 52, 53, 59, 63, 64, 66, and 67.

2 Lidia Demény, "Le commerce de la Transylvanie avec les régions du Sud du Danube effectué par la douane de Turmu Roşu en 1685," *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire* 7, no. 5 (1968): 761-777; Eadem, "Comerţul de tranzit spre Polonia prin Ţara Românească și Transilvania (ultimul sfert al secolului al XVII-lea)" [The transit trade toward Poland through Wallachia and Transylvania during the last quarter of the seventeenth century], *Studii* 22, no. 3 (1969): 465-498.

reveal a distinct way of recording commercial traffic, namely that the scribes recorded detailed information (date of arrival, merchants' names, and list of their stock) exclusively for traders and goods coming into Transylvania from the Ottoman Empire.<sup>3</sup> The practice of exclusive registration of oriental trade continued in the seventeenth century. This particular style of bookkeeping has conditioned the focus in the present analysis on the circulation of textiles arriving in Transylvania from the Ottoman Empire.

Owing to the circumstances of their archival preservation, the customs registers of Sibiu that I follow in the present study do not form a continuous series; therefore, I break up the statistical data into three chronological sequences: 1540-1597, 1614-1622, and 1672-1692, highlighting the specific features of each period.

The customs registers of Sibiu from the last two decades of the seventeenth century raise several methodological challenges concerning the variety of units of measurement used. In the late seventeenth century, the Sibiu customs officials switched from units of length for measuring textiles to units usually used for weight or volume: the Ottoman *okka* and the horseload.<sup>4</sup> The shift towards weight units for measuring textiles could have two plausible explanations: first, rather than registering only the customs duty in kind, as had been the practice earlier, in the second half of the seventeenth century, the officials wrote down the total amount of merchants' stock. Secondly, the trade in textiles increased significantly in real terms, a fact which could explain the preference for a more convenient format of reckoning. Furthermore, an inconsistent taxation system adds to the imprecision of estimates, and the figures and values calculated for the last quarter of the seventeenth century are even more approximate than we would expect.

Another aspect we have to keep in mind is the lack of precision and instability of the terms employed to denote particular goods, which varied between towns and languages of record-keeping used in Transylvania at the time (Latin, Hungarian, and German).<sup>5</sup> Some textiles, such as *bogasias*, retain

3 Radu Manolescu, *Comerțul Țării Românești și Moldovei cu Brașovul (secolele XIV-XVI)* [The trade of Wallachia and Moldavia with Brașov, fifteenth-sixteenth centuries] (Bucharest, 1965), 68-69; and Pakucs-Willcocks, *Sibiu-Hermannstadt*, 34-42.

4 A 1627 survey of the Zrinyi estates in Hungary mentions the horseload for measuring textiles: István Bogdán, *Magyarországi őr-terfogat-, súly- és darabmértékek 1874-ig* [Units, weights, area and volume measurements in Hungary until 1847] (Budapest, 1991), 577.

5 Names and naming of global goods are an exciting topic that has gathered momentum in recent years, see John Jordan and Gabi Schopf, "Fictive Descriptions? Words, Textiles and Inventories in Early Modern Switzerland," in *Inventories of Textiles—Textiles in Inventories. Studies on Late Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture*, ed. Thomas Ertle and Barbara Karl (Göttingen, 2017), 226. On fabric names and Transylvanian price regulations see Éva Deák, "Ruhaanyagok az erdélyi országgyűlés árszabásaiban Bethlen Gábor uralkodása

their Turkish name in all sources, while others are difficult to recognize in the different languages.<sup>6</sup> To some extent, the continuing presence of particular commodities could be obscured by the seventeenth-century substitution of Latin and German for Hungarian in the Sibiu customs records, and the unfaithful translation of the names of textiles.<sup>7</sup>

The analysis of textile trade is complemented with data from other Transylvanian towns. From the first half of the sixteenth century customs registers are available for Braşov, processed by Radu Manolescu,<sup>8</sup> whereas for the town of Cluj there is a comprehensive series of twenty-three customs registers for the 1599-1637 period, published and examined by Ferenc Pap.<sup>9</sup> Most of the merchandise coming into Transylvania from the Ottoman Empire was weighed with Ottoman weights, and this fact is useful in processing data from the Cluj customs accounts, where there is no separation between the flows of traffic as in the Sibiu registers. For instance, Ottoman silk was always weighed in *littra*, a specific Ottoman unit of measurement for silk, while spices preserved the Ottoman *kanthar*, different from the European hundred-weight. Methodologically, the continuing use of Ottoman weights in the non-Ottoman setting of Transylvania is crucial in sifting through the data in the Cluj accounts: we can thus separate Ottoman imports from similar products coming from Vienna.

Parallel with imports and transit of textiles from the Ottoman Empire there was a counter-flow of Western and Central European cloths into Transylvania, which were consumed locally or distributed further into the Balkans. Local production of woolen cloth in the major centers of the principality complemented

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idején" [Clothes in the price regulations of the Transylvanian Diet during the reign of Gabriel Bethlen], *Ethno-Lore* 29 (2012): 382, 388.

6 John Jordan and Gabi Schopf, "Global Goods in Local Languages: Naming Cotton Textiles in the Swiss Cantons," in *Names and Meaning in Early Modern Germany*, eds. Marjorie Elizabeth Plummer and Joel F. Harrington (New York, 2019), 150.

7 The administrative language of the customs records follows the status of the customs stations: when administered on lease by the town officials of Sibiu, records were written in their native German, otherwise Hungarian was the language utilized in public documents in seventeenth-century Transylvania and was thus applied for accounting at the customs stations as well. Zsolt Trócsányi, *Erdély központi kormányzata, 1540-1690* [The central administration of Transylvania, 1540-1690] (Budapest, 1980), 236-237.

8 *Quellen zur Geschichte der Stadt Kronstadt/Brassó* vol. 1-3 (Braşov, 1876-1896); Manolescu, *Comerţul*, 97-100.

9 Ferenc Pap, *Kolozsvári harmincadjegyzékek* [Thirtieth customs accounts from Cluj] (Bucharest, 2000); Pakó László, "Kolozsvári harmincadjegyzék 1631-ből" [The Cluj thirtieth customs account of 1631] *Erdélyi Múzeum* 77, no. 1 (2015): 153-176.

imports via trade.<sup>10</sup> These two sources of textile trade and production will not be addressed in this study.

Outlining the historical setting of medieval Transylvania provides the historical context for a more in-depth insight into the origins of the regional commercial and political system in place during the early modern period. The towns of Braşov and Sibiu, founded in the twelfth century by German and other Western European colonists as guests (*hospites*) of the Hungarian kings, became important trading centers in the region from the fourteenth century onward. During the late Middle Ages, these commercial centers in Transylvania were connected to long-distance trade, whereby Western cloth and manufactured products were exchanged for spices and oriental textiles.<sup>11</sup>

The first mentions of Ottoman goods in Transylvania come from the early fifteenth century. The 1412 customs tariff issued by the Transylvanian voivode to the benefit of the merchants of Braşov included the instruction that a customs duty of a thirtieth (*tricesima*) had to be paid on spices (pepper, saffron, ginger, and cloves), *mohair* (goat's hair), cotton, and "all goods brought by the Saracens (i.e. Turks)."<sup>12</sup> Another customs tariff, promulgated in 1413 by the ruler of Wallachia, mirrors this increased commercial presence, generically referring to goods "coming from the sea or across the Danube."<sup>13</sup> In the following centuries, spices and other oriental goods continued to arrive in Transylvania from the Balkans, as documented by the customs accounts of Sibiu and Braşov.<sup>14</sup> The first customs registers, preserved for both towns at the turn of the sixteenth century (1500 and 1503 respectively), show a lively traffic in long-distance trade, with the typical exchange of Western manufactured products (especially cloth and knives) for Eastern goods, mostly spices and cotton tex-

10 Samuel Goldenberg, "Comerţul, producţia şi consumul de postavuri de lână în ţările române (sec. XIV-jumăt. sec. XVII)" [Trade, production and consumption of woolen cloth in the Romanian lands, fourteenth to mid-seventeenth centuries] *Studii* 24, no. 5 (1971): 877-898.

11 Andrea Fara, *La formazione di un'economia di frontiera. La Transilvania il XII e il XIV secolo* (Naples, 2010), 295-307; and Zsigmond Pál Pach, "Levantine Trade Routes to Hungary, 15th-17th Centuries," *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 33, no. 1 (1987): 57-65.

12 Zsigmond Pál Pach, "A Levante-kereskedelem I. Lajos és Zsigmond korában" [The Transylvanian route of Levantine trade in the age of Louis I and Sigismund], *Századok* 109, no. 1 (1975): 17, note 76 explaining that in contemporary usage "Saracens" did not refer specifically to Arabs but generically to Muslims; and *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen*, vol. 3, ed. Franz Zimmermann, Carl Werner, and Georg Müller (Sibiu, 1902), 544-547.

13 *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen*, vol. 4, ed. Franz Zimmermann and Gustav Gündisch (Sibiu, 1937), 426.

14 Pakucs-Willcocks, *Sibiu-Hermannstadt*, 88-89.

tiles. This dynamic of international trade concurs with the perspective offered by Halil Inalcık, who has synthesized the circulation of Ottoman cotton textiles in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries at the port of Caffa on the Black Sea and at the Ottoman ports on the Danube.<sup>15</sup>

The emergence of the Principality of Transylvania as a tributary state of the Sublime Porte (1541-1699) reshaped the political and commercial landscape of the region. A stronger presence of Ottoman merchants in Transylvania to the detriment of local traders gradually increased the role of the principality in the transit trade between the Levant and East-Central Europe. Beginning with the mid-sixteenth century, Balkan-Levantine or “Greek” merchants distributed these “Turkish goods” from the Ottoman Empire into Central Europe.<sup>16</sup> With the “Greeks” establishing their own associations here after 1636,<sup>17</sup> Transylvania and its commercial towns emerged as a hub for redistributing oriental products, particularly Ottoman cotton and silk.<sup>18</sup>

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- 15 Halil Inalcık, “The Ottoman Cotton Market and India: The Role of Labor Cost in Market Competition,” in his *The Middle East and the Balkans under the Ottoman Empire: Essays on Economy and Society* (Bloomington, IN, 1993), 266-269; Idem, “The Bursa-Braşov Route,” in *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, vol. 1, ed. Halil Inalcık and Donald Quataert (Cambridge, 1994), 297-299; Idem, *Studies in the History of Textiles in Turkey* (Istanbul, 2011), 71.
- 16 Ikaros Mantouvalos, “Greek Immigrants in Central Europe: A Concise Study of Migration Routes from the Balkans to the Territories of the Hungarian Kingdom (From the late 17th to the early 19th Centuries),” in *Across the Danube: South-East Europeans and their Travelling Identities (17th–19th C.)* eds. Olga Katsiardi-Hering and Maria A. Stassinopoulou (Leiden, 2017), 26-27; Olga Katsiardi-Hering, “Commerce and Merchants in Southeastern Europe, 17th-18th Centuries: ‘Micro-Districts’ and Regions,” *Études Balkaniques* 51, no. 1 (2015): 19-20; Lajos Gecsényi, “‘Turkish Goods’ and ‘Greek’ Merchants in the Kingdom of Hungary in the 16th and 17th Centuries,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungariae* 60, no. 1 (2007): 58; and Pál Fodor, “Trade and Traders in Hungary in the Age of the Ottoman Conquest,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungariae* 60, no. 1 (2007): 5. On the Greek migration from the Balkans to north of the Danube see Lidia Cotovanu, “L’émigration sud-danubienne vers la Valachie et la Moldavie et sa géographie (XV<sup>e</sup>-XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles): la potentialité heuristique d’un sujet peu connu,” *Cahiers balkaniques* 42 (2014): 2-7. On “Turkish” goods in Poland see Gilles Veinstein, “Marchands ottomans en Pologne-Lituanie et en Moscovie sous le règne de Soliman le Magnifique,” *Cahiers du monde russe* 35, no. 4 (1994): 729-730; and Lidia A. Demény, “Le régime des douanes et des commerçants grecs en Transylvanie au cours de la période de la principauté autonome (1541-1691),” *Makedonika* 15 (1975): 64-65.
- 17 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 in den Grenzzonen zwischen dem 16. und 18. Jahrhundert*, eds. Robert Born and Andreas Puth (Stuttgart, 2014), 226.
- 18 F.W. Carter, “Cracow’s Transit Textile Trade, 1390-1795: A Geographical Assessment,” *Textile History* 19, no. 1 (1988): 53, 55.

Owing to the long time span they cover, the Sibiu customs accounts are good indicators for secular trends in Transylvanian imports from the Ottoman Empire. The annual value of the commercial traffic was around 15,000 gold florins in the mid-sixteenth century, similar in scale to the sums registered in Braşov, and dropped under 10,000 gold florins at the end of the century. This level of traffic was maintained during the second decade of the seventeenth century, while the end of the century saw an evident recovery with an average of 20,000 gold florins per annum in trade. At the end of the seventeenth century, there was also a surge in the number of merchants involved in the trade.<sup>19</sup>

Turkish textiles were decidedly the principal commodities among Ottoman imports flowing into Transylvania. In the Transylvanian customs accounts cotton, silk, linen, wool, and a variety of mixed fabrics are recorded. Together with the finished fabrics, raw cotton, cotton yarns, raw silk, and silk yarns were staple items of the commercial traffic. The requisite for compressed entries in the customs accounts allowed only for brief descriptions of quality: color and fineness, and more rarely a geographic origin, are the usual indicators recorded.<sup>20</sup> When mentioned, the quality and style of textiles were noted concisely: fabrics could be soft or coarse, dyed, striped, or colored in the basic colors: white, black, red, blue, or green. Exceptionally, the Sibiu registers for the years 1672 and 1673 describe the goods passing through customs in a more detailed fashion: they mention Indian *bogasia*, dyed Indian cloth (probably cotton chintz), and colorful silk kerchiefs. Cotton yarns, and occasionally silk yarns, were recorded with the description of their color, mostly because the customs tariffs on blue and red yarns differed from the duties paid on undyed yarns.

Of the cotton textiles *bogasia* (twill), which was plain or dyed in different colors, had been familiar to Western Europeans since the Middle Ages. It constituted the most ubiquitous cotton textile in the customs accounts of Sibiu and Braşov, imported consistently and without interruption throughout the period examined here, having reached the peak of its popularity in the middle of the sixteenth century. In 1690-1692, the Sibiu customs accounts record a sort of “borla bogasia,” indicated its possible origin in Borlu, Anatolia, an important

19 Mária Pakucs-Willcocks, “The Transit of Oriental Goods through the Customs of Sibiu/Hermannstadt in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: An Overview,” in *Economy and Society in Central and Eastern Europe: Territory, Population, Consumption*, eds. Daniel Dumitran and Valer Moga (Münster, 2013), 21-22, fig. 1 and 2.

20 Éva Deák, “The Colorful Court of Gabriel Bethlen and Catherine of Brandenburg,” in *The Materiality of Color: The Production, Circulation, and Application of Dyes and Pigments, 1400-1800*, eds. Andrea Feeser, Maureen Daly Goggin, and Beth Fowkes Tobin (Farnham, 2012), 203-212.

center of twill production.<sup>21</sup> A specific Ottoman fabric was *alaça*, a mixed cloth of cotton and silk with a shiny finish;<sup>22</sup> it was carried into Transylvania in small amounts throughout the period examined.

A variety of cotton and linen fabrics, of different sizes and quality, were listed as linen (*Leinwand*, *patyolat*, *gyolcs*) in the customs accounts. As Veronica Gervers pointed out, “the names of plain fabrics, usually woven in tabby weave, do not refer to their fiber or country of origin, but indicate rather the fineness of the yarns used and of the weave.”<sup>23</sup> In the Sibiu customs records, linen fabrics were usually “long” or “square” in the sixteenth century; in the subsequent period, linen was described under different varieties (“Indian,” “narrow,” or “rustling”), pointing perhaps to more than just one kind of fabric.

Raw cotton (*baumwolle*, *bumback*, *pamut*) appears in the customs accounts from 1500, but, according to the early fifteenth-century customs tariffs discussed previously, it was transiting to the region even before that date. Therefore, cotton was known and consumed in Transylvania before it became a global commodity and the favorite of Western European fashion in the late seventeenth century. This chronology mirrors a similar timeline in other regions of the Mediterranean and southern Europe that were provisioned with cotton from the Black Sea and the Levant.<sup>24</sup> In the early modern period, several regions of the Ottoman Empire, in Anatolia and the Balkans, produced and spun cotton.<sup>25</sup> Knowing that exports of cotton were prohibited,<sup>26</sup> it stands to question whether the commercial activity of Greek merchants, the main agents of the trade in Transylvania and other tributary states, was interpreted as “export” by the Ottoman authorities. There is strong evidence that cotton was consumed locally in Transylvania: in 1550, the records show the sale of “Turkish goods” taken as customs duties in Sibiu to townsfolk, including women weavers.<sup>27</sup>

21 Inalcik, *Studies in the History of Textiles*, 70. See also a case of *bogasia* being part of the assets of the grand vizier in 1683 in Hedda Reindl-Kiel, “The Empire of Fabrics: The Range of Fabrics in the Gift Traffic of the Ottomans,” in Ertle and Karl, eds. *Inventories of Textiles*, 155-156.

22 Inalcik, *Studies in the History of Textiles*, 92.

23 Veronica Gervers, *The Influence of Ottoman Turkish Textiles and Costume in Eastern Europe* (Toronto, 1982), 61; and Irena Turnau, *History of Dress in Central and Eastern Europe from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Warsaw, 1991), 61-62.

24 Maureen Fennell Mazzaoui, *The Italian Cotton Industry in the Later Middle Ages, 1100-1600* (Cambridge, 1981), 43-44.

25 Suraiya Faroqhi, “Notes on the Production of Cotton and Cotton Cloth in XVIth and XVIIth Century Anatolia” *Journal of European Economic History* 8, no. 2 (1979): 405-417; Eadem, “Textile Production in Rumeli and the Arab Provinces: Geographical Distribution and Internal Trade (1560-1650),” *The Journal of Ottoman Studies* 1 (1980): 64-65.

26 Faroqhi, “Notes,” 451.

27 Pakucs-Willcocks, *Sibiu-Hermannstadt*, Appendix IV, 80.



Another staple of the oriental products recorded in the Transylvanian customs accounts was cotton yarns. They came either in their natural color or dyed blue or red. These yarns were used in decorative stitching and were very popular in East-Central Europe. They were seen as a typical Turkish product as far as Košice (Hungarian: Kassa), as shown by the 1625 accounts of a retail shop in northern Hungary where they were still measured with their original Ottoman weight.<sup>28</sup>

Silk fabrics, such as *karmasin* woven in the Ottoman Empire, competed with the *taffetas* coming from Italy, but we can assume that silk yarns came mostly from Anatolia.<sup>29</sup> Raw silk and silk yarns were recorded in all Transylvanian customs accounts, albeit in modest amounts—though these increased in the last decade of the seventeenth century to over four metric tons in 1690.<sup>30</sup> Among the finer fabrics imported were silk *atlas* or *taffeta*, both of Italian origin, which reached Transylvania via Ottoman Rumelia but, just like *mohair*, always came in small amounts due to their higher price. Even in local town ordinances aimed at restricting the retail sale of imported goods by foreign merchants, the sale of such expensive textile was allowed in smaller units of length.<sup>31</sup>

Of the woolen fabrics, *aba*, a coarse textile, sold in a variety of qualities (from fine to coarse), became popular in the seventeenth century. First recorded in the Braşov customs registers in 1542, it was also a major trade item in Ottoman Buda in the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>32</sup> Undyed *aba* was produced in the principality as well, and the Transylvanian authorities issued instructions in an attempt to protect local weavers from Ottoman imports.<sup>33</sup> Woven in numerous urban centers across Rumelia, Ottoman *aba* was most likely utilized

28 György Kerekes, *Polgári társadalmunk a 17. században Schirmer János 1625-1674. kassai kereskedő üzleti könyve alapján* [Our bourgeois society in the seventeenth century based on the account book of János Schirmer, merchant in Košice] (Košice, 1940), 165, 177.

29 Murat Çizakça, "A Short History of the Bursa Silk Industry (1500-1900)," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 23 (1980): 142-152, where the author explains that the higher prices offered in Europe for raw silk stimulated its export to the detriment of finished silk cloth.

30 The data from these accounts complement the information on consumption of silk at the borders of the Ottoman Empire, as discussed recently in Suraiya Faroqhi, "Ottoman Silks and Their Markets at the Borders of the Empire, c. 1500-1800," in *Threads of Global Desire: Silk in the Pre-Modern World*, eds. Dagmar Schäfer, Giorgio Riello, and Luca Molà (Martlesham, 2018), 316-317.

31 Sibiu market regulation of 1545: Gustav Seivert, *Hermannstädter Lokal-Statuten* (Sibiu, 1869), 22-23.

32 Zsigmond Pál Pach, "Aba, kebe, igriz. Posztófajták a hódoltsági török vámnaplókban a 16. század derekán," [Types of cloth in the customs accounts of the Hungarian Turkish territories at the middle of the sixteenth century] *Történelmi Szemle* 29, no. 1 (1997): 1-19.

33 Goldenberg, "Comerțul," 879.

for overcoats and military uniforms.<sup>34</sup> At the end of the seventeenth century, *aba* came into Transylvania in large quantities, as shown in Table 2.

Not all sorts of textiles enjoyed such continuity in long-distance exchanges. Muslin, for instance, under the name of *muszul*, first appeared in the Transylvanian records in the seventeenth century, at the same time as Indian muslins flooded the Ottoman markets.<sup>35</sup>

Apart from the fabrics, large quantities of towels, hand towels, and napkins were part of the flow of Ottoman imports.<sup>36</sup> Carpets carried from the realms of the Ottoman Empire into Transylvania remain the sole surviving objects from this trade in the early modern period. The popularity of these carpets can be inferred from the fact that Transylvania currently has the largest collection of Ottoman carpets and rugs outside Turkey, most of them preserved in the churches and museums of towns and villages formerly inhabited by the Transylvanian German-speaking population. Stefano Ionescu has worked extensively on the history of Turkish rugs in Transylvania and the extant collections of these items.<sup>37</sup> On account of their popularity during the early modern period, a particular type of Anatolian rug has been labeled “Transylvanian” in the specialist literature since the early twentieth century.<sup>38</sup>

The use of general terms obscures the wide variation encompassed by each category of textiles and fabrics included in the customs records. However, the Transylvanian customs tariffs and price regulations of the seventeenth century give us a glimpse of the underlying richness of textiles.<sup>39</sup> In 1627, Prince Gabriel Bethlen (1613-1629) issued two price regulations for locally manufactured goods and for imported commodities. The fabrics and yarns from the Ottoman Empire are listed under two headings: “silk materials” and “Greek merchandise.”<sup>40</sup> These lists of maximum prices together with extant customs tariffs enable us to recreate the landscape of textiles available to Transylvanians at that time, which was more varied than the customs regis-

34 Nikolai Todorov, *The Balkan City, 1400-1900* (Seattle, 1983), 551; Pach, “Aba, kebe, igriz,” 3.

35 Inalcik, *Studies in the History of Textiles*, 134.

36 Athanasios Gekas, “A Global History of Ottoman Cotton Textiles,” *EUI Working Papers* (MWP 2007/30): 9, [https://www.academia.edu/27625393/A\\_Global\\_History\\_of\\_Ottoman\\_Cotton\\_Textiles\\_1600-1850](https://www.academia.edu/27625393/A_Global_History_of_Ottoman_Cotton_Textiles_1600-1850) (accessed November 18, 2017).

37 *Antique Ottoman Rugs in Transylvania*, 2nd ed., ed. Stefano Ionescu (Rome, 2007).

38 Emese Pásztor, *Ottoman Turkish Carpets in the Collection of the Budapest Museum of Applied Arts* (Budapest, 2007), 113.

39 Zsolt Simon, “Tarifa tricesimală a Transilvaniei din 1634” [The Transylvanian thirtieth tariff of 1634], *Anuarul Institutului de Cercetări Socio-Umane “Gheorghe Șincai”* 29 (2010): 243-246.

40 *Monumenta comitalia regni Transylvaniae*, vol. 8, ed. Sándor Szilágyi (Budapest, 1882), 299, 379-387.

ters reveal. In the corpus of normative texts, around seventy sorts of fabrics can be identified, along with further subdivisions by place of origin and color; in contrast, only fifty-seven types of textiles are recorded in the Cluj customs registers. Most fabrics in the customs tariffs and price lists consist of Western and Central European cloth (forty-five types) and silk fabrics, especially of Venetian origin. With respect to Ottoman textiles, however, there is a higher degree of concordance between the normative regulations and the customs registers of Sibiu, *bogasias*, *abas*, linen, silk and silk yarns, and dyed cotton yarns all appearing in both.

While normative texts provide us with a static view on textiles, without indication of their availability on the market, actual insights into the circulation of fabrics and their dynamics over the years are provided by customs registers. In the following section of this paper, I shall provide data regarding the quantity and value of Turkish textiles recorded in Transylvania from the middle of the sixteenth century until the end of the seventeenth. Since the series of customs registers for individual towns are incomplete due to their scarce archival preservation, there are gaps in evidence for certain periods and overlaps in others. It is reasonable, therefore, to take as a point of reference the longest series of such records, those from Sibiu, and to discuss the evidence of the early modern Transylvanian customs accounts in three chronological groups.

### Turkish Textiles in Transylvania, 1540-1597

Throughout the medieval period, spices were the most valuable commodity imported from the Levant. This was also the case for Transylvanian towns, which imported large quantities of pepper, and even in the early fourteenth century customs tariffs paired oriental textiles with spices.<sup>41</sup> This spice trade, linking the region with the Ottoman Empire via the Black Sea or by overland routes across the Balkans, registered a slow but steady decline throughout the sixteenth century, so much so that in the seventeenth century spices made up a tiny fraction of commercial traffic. Already by the mid-sixteenth century, textiles originating in the workshops or markets of Istanbul and Ottoman Rumelia had become the dominant commodity in commercial traffic, successfully filling the gap left by the dwindling supply of spices from the Levant.<sup>42</sup>

41 Zsigmond Pál Pach, "A Levante-kereskedelem erdélyi útvonala a 15-16. század fordulóján" [The Transylvanian route of Levantine trade at the turn of the 15th and the 16th centuries], *Századok* 112, no. 6 (1978): 1026.

42 Pakucs-Willcocks, *Sibiu-Hermannstadt*, 101-103.

According to Suraiya Faroqhi's estimate, the cotton output of Anatolia in the 1570s amounted to "between 4,200 and 7,000 metric tons."<sup>43</sup> This scale of production dwarfed the relatively modest quantities of raw cotton found in the Transylvanian customs accounts, with the largest aggregate volume registered for Sibiu and Braşov reaching around seven metric tons in 1546 and in 1553/1554. In the 1540s, when the customs accounts of the two towns overlap, the variations in textiles and cotton yarns are significant from one year to the other. Thus in 1542, the total value of imported Turkish textiles (including fibers and yarns) in Sibiu and Braşov together peaked at 34,500 gold florins, a high point that was not reached in subsequent years for which registers are preserved.<sup>44</sup> For the second half of the sixteenth century, only the customs accounts from Sibiu are available for analysis, and they reveal a slight decrease in the overall traffic with Turkish goods and in the imports of textiles to annual values of up to 9,600 gold florins in 1593 and 7,537 in 1597.<sup>45</sup>

It is to be noted that in this period the range of recorded textiles and yarns is modest, and the quantities of silk negligible. The bulk of imports of Ottoman textiles consisted of cotton twill (*bogasia*) and cotton yarns.

### Turkish Textiles in Transylvania in the First Decades of the Seventeenth Century

In Table 1 the overall values from the Sibiu accounts for 1614 to 1622 illustrate the quantities of Turkish textiles recorded. The average turnover of annual trade in Sibiu was similar to that in the second half of the sixteenth century. Total values are given in gold florins and the quantities of textiles in bolts (*pieces*), without attempting their conversion into the metric system.<sup>46</sup>

For the years 1615 and 1616, extant registers for both Sibiu and Cluj provide us with a distinct opportunity to compare the traffic in Ottoman textiles. Since the latter town constituted a commercial hub on the route to Hungary and Poland-Lithuania,<sup>47</sup> comparing the evidence for both cities allows us to identify merchants who passed through both custom houses, along with their

43 Faroqhi, "Notes," 408.

44 Pakucs-Willcocks, *Sibiu-Hermannstadt*, 83, table 11 and 161, table AI.15.

45 *Ibid.*, 151, table AI.1.

46 A *piece* could vary between 22 and 28 meters, depending on the type of textile. István Bogdán, *Régi magyar mértékek* [Old Hungarian measures] (Budapest, 1987), 60-61.

47 Francisc Pap, "Orientarea central-europeană a comerţului clujean în prima jumătate a secolului XVII" [The Central European direction of the trade of Cluj in the first half of the seventeenth century], *Acta Musei Napocensis* 17 (1980): 209-218.

TABLE 1 Ottoman textiles in the Sibiu customs accounts 1614-1622

Textiles	Bogasia (bolts)	Linen (bolts)	Cotton, cotton yarns (lb.)	Silk and silk yarns ( <i>littra</i> )	Aba (bolts)	Value of all textiles and textile objects*
1614 (May-Dec.)	220	1,280	660	80	200	1,770
1615	1,000	5,500	1240	430	600	8,000
1616	780	1,720	860	350	320	4,200
1618	1,000	5,200	5,000	500	740	7,500
1622 (March-Jan. 1623)	860	3,620	8,400	380	320	7,800

\* In Hungarian gold florins.

SOURCE: NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SIBIU, CUSTOMS REGISTERS, INVENTORY 197.

names and the wares they carried. Obviously not all goods recorded in Cluj necessarily arrived by way of Sibiu, but we can nonetheless infer that Ottoman commodities brought from southern Transylvania passed through the town on their way to Central Europe.<sup>48</sup> “Turkish” goods in the Cluj customs records are identified explicitly by the scribes, who refer to the merchandise as being brought from “Turkey,” or indicate localities south of the Danube, such as Nikopolis, Vidin, or Istanbul as points of departure for merchants.<sup>49</sup> When no such geographical indicators are provided, the Ottoman origin is identifiable by the use of Ottoman units of measurement. Figures One and Two illustrate the traffic in certain products: *bogasia*, *aba*, cotton yarns, *mohair*, and silk, for the years 1615 and 1616. Whereas products coming from the Ottoman Empire do not seem to have reached Cluj and northern Hungary in large quantities, in contrast to their ubiquity in Sibiu, the Cluj registers reveal a far more diversified palette of fabrics and textiles, consisting predominantly of Silesian and Moravian cloth, and Venetian velvets and taffetas.<sup>50</sup>

The share of Ottoman textiles in the total traffic in fabrics registered at the Cluj customs is relatively small, representing around ten percent of the value of Western and Central European products—cloth and Italian silks.

48 Mária Pakucs-Willcocks, “Negustori din Imperiul otoman în comerțul Sibiului, 1614-1623” [Merchants from the Ottoman Empire in the trade of Sibiu, 1614-1623], *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie* 30 (2012): 197.

49 Pap, *Kolozsvári*, 57.

50 *Ibid.*, 74-75, tables A and B.

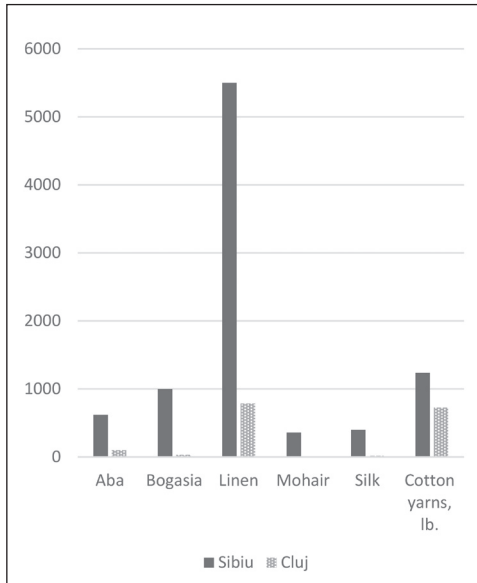


FIGURE 1 Compared amounts (in bolts) of Turkish textiles in Sibiu and Cluj customs accounts in 1615.

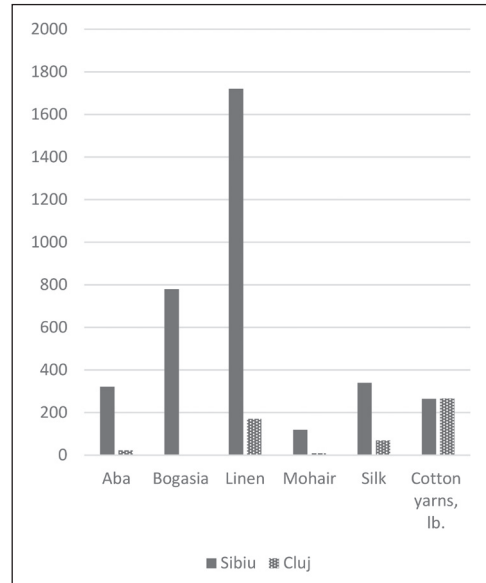


FIGURE 2 Compared amounts (in bolts) of Turkish textiles in Sibiu and Cluj customs registers in 1616.

Discrepancies cannot be explained in a straightforward manner with the available sources. There is hardly any systematically collected data on the distribution and consumption of imported textiles in Transylvania, but we can infer that a good proportion of the Turkish goods were absorbed locally, sold in town shops and at various fairs. Furthermore, Cluj was only one of the possible outlets for re-distribution of goods coming from the south of Transylvania, and other routes for moving the textiles on into Poland were available.<sup>51</sup>

### Turkish Textiles in Transylvania, 1672-1692

For this time period, the sole source for studying the dynamics of trade is the series of customs records from Sibiu. Indian cotton textiles, the great competitors of Ottoman cotton fabrics,<sup>52</sup> were recorded here in the second half of

51 Demény, "Comerțul de tranzit," 477-478.

52 Suraiya Faruqi, "Ottoman Cotton Textiles: The Story of a Success that did not last, 1500-1800," in *Spinning the World: A Global History of Cotton Textiles, 1200-1850*, eds. Giorgio Riello and Prasanna Parthasarathi (Oxford, 2009), 97.

the seventeenth century. In particular, the customs accounts for 1672 and 1673 record a strong presence of dyed Indian cotton *bogasia*, but the Indian cloth had appeared as an item in a 1634 customs tariff.<sup>53</sup> Undoubtedly, as Table 2 illustrates, in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, the trade in textiles witnessed a major boost, and the quantities recorded at customs houses increased significantly in comparison with the volumes and values recorded in the registers for earlier decades: from a value of 8,000 gold florins in 1615, the annual value of imported Turkish textiles increased to nearly 28,000 gold florins in 1688.

At the end of the seventeenth century, some of the textiles and yarns are recorded in the Sibiu customs accounts as generic “Rumelia merchandise,” “Bursa merchandise,” or “Istanbul merchandise,” making it more difficult to estimate the itemized quantities brought from the Ottoman Empire. The contents of these mixed consignments are rarely noted, and from the few instances where the items are listed, it becomes clear that they blended various categories of goods. For example, one shipment of Bursa merchandise consisted of silk, *bogasia*, carpets, and rugs in the stock of one merchant, and another, on a different occasion, was made up of silk, *bogasia*, muslin, more silk, and linen.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, the actual quantities of *bogasia*, cotton yarns, and silk in the last quarter of the seventeenth century are larger than shown in the separate tables and need to be included in the aggregate values. The customs duties paid on these bulk consignments varied from merchant to merchant, most likely according to their composition, since a horseload of wares containing silk fabrics represented a higher monetary value than the same quantity of *bogasia* and cotton yarns. Thus, I have used a mean price in order to calculate the overall value of such shipments, presented in Table 3.

Customs registers not only record variations in the dynamics of trade and the composition of traded goods but also allow us to discern broader trends. It is clear that the increase in the imports of textiles in Sibiu is a direct result of the increased number of “Greek” merchants and transports during the same period, when the number of traders recorded at the customs point doubled in comparison with earlier decades.<sup>55</sup> The Sibiu registers for these decades mention the merchant’s declared destination in Poland or Hungary; this offers us a unique opportunity to estimate the area covered by the Ottoman products imported via Transylvania. Of all the Ottoman textiles recorded in the Sibiu

53 Simon, “Tarifa,” 246.

54 Sibiu customs register of 1690, no. 67, July 20, July 25.

55 Pakucs-Willcocks, “Transit of Oriental Goods,” 22; and Carter, “Cracow’s Transit Textile Trade,” 37.

TABLE 2 Ottoman textiles in the Sibiu customs accounts, 1672-1692

Textiles	Bogasia (bolts)	Linen (bolts)	Cotton linen, muslin, batist (bolts)	Cotton and cotton yarns (lb.)	Silk and silk yarns ( <i>littra</i> )	Aba (bolts)	Value of all textiles and textile objects**
1672	648	687	2,785	4,500	3,718	71	8,700
1673 (Jan-Aug)	481	700	1,755	3,000	4,554	11	7,700
1682 (Apr-Dec)	430*	350	850	15,500*	2,500*	3,825	15,265
1683	685*	-	500	14,100*	3,100*	3,475	13,900
1684	1,210*	-	2,880	34,750*	2,600*	4,800	22,700
1685 (Jan-Oct)	860*	-	2,935	11,800*	3,000*	6,080	15,870
1686 (Jan-Oct)	300*	-	200	9,700*	400*	7,700	12,500
1687 (Jul-Dec)	50*	-	31	1,800*	-	5,624	10,700
1688	-*	-	-	5,100*	-	18,170	27,800
1689	1,600*	-	-	4,700*	300*	26,050	22,000
1690	2,600*	-	500	30,100*	8,200*	17,500	19,500
1691	650*	-	150	19,500*	600*	20,700	12,200
1692 (Jan-May)	650*	-	400	6,200*	1,200*	3,660	6,300

\* Indeterminable quantities also included in mixed consignments (see Table 3); \*\* = Values in Hungarian gold florins; includes values from Table 3.  
SOURCE: NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SIBIU, CUSTOMS ACCOUNTS. INVENTORY 197.



TABLE 3 Quantities of mixed consignments of Ottoman textiles, yarns and textile products

Year	Rumelia merchandise		Istanbul merchandise		Edirne merchandise		Bursa merchandise	
	Q	V	Q	V	Q	V	Q	V
1682	113	4,970	3	264	2	110	3	174
1683	75	3,300	12	696	8	440	6.25	363
1684	144	6,330	40.5	2,350	14	770	2.5	145
1685	120	5,200	23	1,335	7	35	7.75	450
1686	115	5,060	15	870	–	–	6	348
1687	118	5,190	41	2,378	1	55	–	–
1688	203	8,900	130	7,540	–	–	3	174
1689	180	7,900	44.5	2,580	8	440	3.5	203
1690	105	4,600	1	58	9.5	523	71	4,118
1691	43	1,800	4.5	261	–	–	6	348
1692	72	3,170	16	928	6	330	18.5	1,073

Q = quantity in horse loads, where 1 horse load = ca. 140 kg; Nicolae Stoicescu, *Cum măsurau strămoșii. Metrologia medievală pe teritoriul României* [How did Ancestors Measure: Medieval Metrology in Romania] (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1971), 256-258; V = Value in Hungarian gold florins.

SOURCE: NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SIBIU, CUSTOMS ACCOUNTS. INVENTORY 197.

customs accounts, thirty-three percent of the incoming textiles were transported on into Poland in 1672, fifty-six percent in 1673, and forty-nine percent in 1683. The re-distribution of goods toward Poland fell to twelve percent in 1691. This shift was most likely determined by the Habsburg conquest of Buda in 1686, following which many merchants changed their destination to Buda as a waypoint towards the imperial capital of Vienna.<sup>56</sup>

The Sibiu customs accounts prove that imports of cotton from the Ottoman Empire continued uninterrupted throughout the period under study here. The bulk of Ottoman textiles were light and affordable fabrics of cotton and linen, utilized for lining and undergarments. At the same time, the reasons for ebbs

56 Lidia Demény argued that the transit trade from the Ottoman Empire into Poland was temporarily diverted through Wallachia and Transylvania from its traditional Moldavian route owing to the Ottoman-Polish war of 1672, see Demény, “Comerțul de tranzit,” 466-467. The evidence for the continuous use of the Transylvanian route after 1672 argues to the contrary.

and flows of individual fabrics, such as the untrimmed woolen cloth known as *aba*, which enjoyed a somewhat belated success, require further in-depth examination. There is a consensus among scholars that textiles imported from the Ottoman Empire had a profound impact on the fashion and tastes of Central European elites and middle classes. As studies by Veronika Gervers, Irena Turnau, and Lilla Tompos have shown, this process can be traced both in the widespread penetration of Turkish sartorial models and the adoption of Turkish names for various clothes and footwear in the early modern period.<sup>57</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

The Transylvanian customs accounts have the advantage of recording products destined for mass consumption, with affordable fabrics and finished products making up the bulk of the commercial traffic. As we learn from the financial records of Prince Gabriel Bethlen, high-end luxury textiles, such as brocades, velvets, and silks for the princely court were generally bought on special order. While most of Prince Bethlen's commissions originated in Vienna and Venice,<sup>58</sup> the surviving documents also list a handful of substantial orders for specific goods to be procured in Istanbul. These included carpets, gold thread, camelot, silk velvet, silk yarns, and silk sashes.<sup>59</sup> Prince George Rákóczi I (1630-1648) had his diplomatic envoys procure specific items, such as a golden silk horse blanket with rich embroidery in gold thread.<sup>60</sup> Nobility of the realm placed similar orders with Greek merchants, who acted as their personal agents.<sup>61</sup> The taste for Turkish silk objects among the Hungarian and Transylvanian aristocracy is well documented by the work of Emese Pásztor on the textile holdings

57 Gervers, *The Influence*, 12; Irena Turnau, "The Main Centres of National Fashion in Eastern Europe from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries," *Textile History* 22, no. 1 (1991): 48-49; and Lilla Tompos, "Oriental and Western Influences on Hungarian Attire in the 16th and 17th Centuries," in *Turkish Flowers: Studies on Ottoman Art in Hungary*, ed. Ibolya Gerelyes (Budapest, 2005), 91-92.

58 Florina Ciure, *Relațiile dintre Veneția și Transilvania în secolele XVI-XVII* [The relations between Venice and Transylvania in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries] (Brăila-Oradea, 2013), 187-199.

59 Béla Radvánszki, *Udvartartás és számadáskönyvek* [Household account books], vol. 1, *Bethlen Gábor fejedelem udvartartása* [The household accounts of Prince Gabriel Bethlen] (Budapest, 1882), 51-60 for a list of purchases from 1622 worth nearly 1,500 gold florins.

60 Letter of István Szalánci to Prince Rákóczi from 1632: Gervers, *The Influence*, 7.

61 Mária Pakucs-Willcocks, "'This Is Their Profession': Greek Merchants in Transylvania and their Networks at the End of the 17th Century" *Cromohs: Cyber Review of Modern Historiography* 21 (2017-2018): 42-43. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.13128/Cromohs-24547>.

of the Budapest Museum of Applied Arts.<sup>62</sup> A similar attachment to Turkish fabrics and vestments has been identified by Evelin Wetter and Ágnes Ziegler for the Transylvanian Saxon urban patriciate and the Lutheran clergy after the Reformation.<sup>63</sup>

The customs accounts of Cluj for the first decades of the seventeenth century show imports of silk fabrics of Italian origin and English cloth, whereas Braşov and particularly Sibiu became more specialized markets for Ottoman textiles, cotton, and cotton yarns. From the ledgers of Georg Dollert, a retail salesman in Sibiu at the end of the sixteenth century, we learn that although he had English cloth and Czech knives in his stock, the overwhelming bulk of the items in his shop were “Turkish textiles.”<sup>64</sup> After confronting the traffic at the various customs points in Transylvania, it may be argued that Transylvania was a true meeting ground of East and West in terms of textile imports.

Merchants bringing spices and textiles from the Ottoman Empire to Central Europe frequently chose the Saxon towns of Sibiu and Braşov as their points of entry into the region. These two hubs in southern Transylvania dominated this trade, since—as a comparison with mid-sixteenth century Ottoman customs register shows—“Turkish goods” were absent from the traffic at smaller crossing points. Géza Dávid’s study on two such “centers of secondary importance” supports this conjecture.<sup>65</sup> Albeit the quantities of goods arriving there were small, the significance of Transylvania as a region for consumption and redistribution of Ottoman textiles, such as cotton, *bogasia*, silk, *aba*, and Turkish carpets needs to be acknowledged.

62 Emese Pásztor, “Ottoman Turkish and Iranian Textiles in the Collection of the Museum of Applied Arts in Budapest,” in *The Art of the Islamic World and the Artistic Relationships between Poland and Islamic Countries*, eds. Beata Biedrońska-Słota, Magdalena Ginter-Frołow, and Jerzy Malinowski (Cracow, 2011), 394-395.

63 Evelin Wetter and Ágnes Ziegler, “Osmanische Textilien in der Repräsentationskultur der siebenbürgisch-sächsischen Patriziats,” in *Türkenkriege und Adelskultur in Ostmitteleuropa vom 16. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert*, eds. Robert Born and Sabine Jagodzinski (Ostfildern, 2017), 270-279.

64 Albert Scheiner, “Die Sprache des Teilschreibers Georg Dollert,” *Archiv des Vereins für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde* 47, no. 2 (1933): 80-82.

65 Géza Dávid, “Customs Duties and Treasury Incomes in the *Vilayet* of Temesvár: An Early Account Book of Becskerek and Becse,” in *Living in the Ottoman Ecumenical Community: Essays in Honour of Suraiya Faroqhi*, eds. Vera Constantini and Markus Koller (Leiden, 2008), 159-161, 172.

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