

THE ANTI-OTTOMAN FIGHT OF THE INHABITANTS OF BANAT
UNDER MICHAEL THE BRAVE'S RULE
(Summary)

As a consequence of the expansion of the Ottoman empire, the region of Banat was divided into two large areas at the beginning of the second half of the 16th century. The inhabitants couldn't put up with the situation, rising in arms against the invaders. They were joined by the Serbian population who was suffering the same fate.

In February 1594 a Romanian-Serbian uprising broke out, backed up by Gheorghe Palatici, the ban of the town of Lugoj, and Sigismund Bathory, the prince of Transylvania. Palatici helped the rebels by giving them armament and sending his military commanders to prepare the army for fight. Encouraged by their first victories against the Turks, the rebels expanded their operations reaching the north bank of the Danube, storming the forts and sending away the Turkish garrisons stationed there. As the rebellion continued to grow, the rebels increased in number but yet

⁴⁰ Gheorghe Lanevschi, *Mihai Viteazul și Aradul*, în "Ziridava", XI, Arad, 1979, p. 283

⁴¹ Ion Georgescu, *Baba Novac . Legendă și realitate istorică*, Editura "Albatros", București, 1980, p. 158-159.

⁴² XXX, *Mihai Viteazul în conștiința europeană*, III, Editura Academiei RSR, București, 1984, p. 83-84.

they couldn't face the Ottoman army alone. Accordingly, they asked for Sigismund Bathory's help. Unfortunately, the Transylvanian prince was reluctant to show his open support for the rebel's cause. Even though his troops, led by Moise the Szekely, were prepared for a confrontation with the enemy, he disposed them along the border but he refused to intervene.

The Turks were halted for a while by the offensive of imperial general Teuffenbach and the rebels took the opportunity of seizing several strategic forts: Varset, Siria, Ineu, Lipova, Becicherecu-Mic, Titel, etc.

Despite the victories of the imperial army, the Turks regrouped their forces and started a new offensive against the Christians under Sinan Pasha's command. Without any military support from Sigismund Bathory, the inhabitants of Banat suffered a huge defeat at Becicherecu-Mare in July 1594. Most of the rebels were massacred. The survivors took refuge in Transylvania and some of the former leaders enrolled in Michael the Brave's army. This fact proves the close relations between the Romanian prince and the leaders of the rebellion. Even though the uprising was put down, the Turkish garrisons from the fortresses of Banat were attacked by Gheorghe Borbely, the new ban of the town of Caransebes who had presided over his free band of followers. In reprisal for his taking over the forts of Bocsa and Varset in July 1595, the Turks destroyed Dobra and other seven neighbouring villages. Followed closely by the Turks, the Transylvanians sought refuge in Wallachia. In the knowledge that the Ottomans had entered their territory, a cavalry of 1,500 people was sent against them from Sebes-Alba.

Meanwhile the Transylvanian army attacked the fortress of Varadia on the bank of the Mures river- garrisoned by 200 soldiers- and after a short clash they seized the fortress and massacred the Turks.

Starting the anti-Ottoman fight throughout the region of Banat, Gheorghe Borbely laid siege to the fortress of Faget. An Ottoman army made up of 8,000 people led by the bey of Timisoara was defeated and completely captured by the brave ban on 13-14 August.

After this victory Borbely's army stormed the fortress of Lipova after the garrison had refused to hand over the town. In order to repair the damages caused to the walls of the fortress by the Christian artillery, 300 Romanian peasants from the area were forced to rebuild the town's fortifications. Even though they were given a promise to be generously rewarded and exempted from taxes for life, they broke out at night protected by darkness. They joined Borbely's army providing him useful information about the most vulnerable parts of the fortifications. Thus, after a siege that lasted only few days, the inhabitants of Banat won a victory on 19 August 1595.

While the fortress of Lipova was being liberated from the Ottoman's control, Michael the Brave obtained a resounding victory at Calugareni. From Lipova the army from Banat, led by Borbely, headed for Ineu. They took over the town and drove away the Turkish garrison on 21 October 1595.

The resounding victories of Michael the Brave at Calugareni and Giurgiu as well as the victories of the people of Banat at Lipova and Ineu were highly praised all over Europe. They were relevant for the Romanian unity in the anti-Ottoman fight.

In order to recapture the fortress of Lipova, Pasha from Timisoara called upon the Tartars for help and together they surrounded the town of Lipova on 5 May 1596. In order to trick Soliman, the bey of Timisoara, into thinking he had got reinforcements, Borbely ordered his artillery to start an intense fire, with all the cannons, on the night between 10-11 May. Consequently, the Ottoman commander ordered the retreat towards Timisoara, so much the better as they were attacked by Gheorghe Palatici, the ban of the town of Lugoj.

As it was expected, one more time the Transylvanian prince refused to support the inhabitants of Banat. Only on 10 May 1596 he left Alba-Iulia, leading an army of 20,000 fighters and, slowly advancing, he reached Ilia on 28 May. Later he made a pompous entrance to the town of Lipova. Reviewing the battlefield, the damaged walls and the garrison of the inhabitants of Banat, he congratulated their leaders on their victories.

On 10 June 1596 Sigismund laid a siege to the fortress of Timisoara. Leading an army of 4,000 people, Michael the Brave came to Cristians' aid. At the same time 20,000 Tartars came to help the Ottomans laying waste. In spite of crushing the Tartars, the Transylvanian and the Wallachian armies could not take over the fortress because the Turks put up a stout resistance. Unprepared for sustaining a long-term siege, the allies gave up fighting after 40 days. The last attempt of the Transylvanian prince to take the fortress under his control took place between 17 October-17 November 1597. The siege was led by chancellor Stefan Josika but after fighting under harsh climatic conditions he gave up hope of taking over the fortress and returned to Transylvania.

After Sigismund's abdication in favour of his cousin, cardinal Andrei Bathory (25 March 1599), Transylvania renounced its anti-Ottoman fight, the new prince openly supporting a peace agreement with the Sublime Porte.

When Michael the Brave conquered Transylvania the fortresses of Lipova, Ineu, Siria, Lugoj and Caransebes were brought under his control. His strategy aimed to turn the fortresses of Lipova and Ineu into military

bases. From here he planned to start his fight for liberating the whole region of Banat from the Turkish control.

At the beginning of the year 1600, prince Michael sent his famous captain Baba Novac with a band of outlaws to guard the fortress of Lipova.

The Turks would never give up their claim to ownership of the town of Lipova. At the same time the Austrians were also very interested in taking control over the town. Raising in arms against prince Michael, the Hungarian noblemen carried on negotiations with general Basta which ended in their betrayal at Miraslau. In this dramatic battle, the prince of all Romanians was backed up by the garrisons of the fortresses of Lipova, Ineu, Lugoj and Caransebes.

After Michael the Brave had been defeated, the Hungarian noblemen took over the fortresses of Lipova and Ineu and started persecuting his adepts. Among their victims there were the former ruler of Lipova, Ioan Silisteanu (beaten to death by the Hungarian counts after he had been sent to negotiate with general Basta), and Baba Novac who, following his prince's advice, joined the imperial army. Sent by general Basta to Lipova, he was arrested by the Hungarian noblemen and died after excruciating tortures on 5 February 1601 at Cluj. He was skinned alive, burnt at the stake and then impaled.

After the victory at Guraslau, Michael the Brave resumed his plan to unite the three Romanian principalities under one single sceptre. According to his great plans the fortresses from the region of Banat were supposed to play an important role. Unfortunately, the assassination of our first unifying prince at Campia Turzii on 9 August 1601 put an end to this daring plan. The Romanian people of Banat have treasured up the memory of the brave "Wallachian prince of universal interest".