

A CONVENTION CENTRE ON THE INTERNATIONAL ROAD: THE OSIJEK FAIR DURING THE OTTOMAN PERIOD

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ABSTRACT

In the Ottoman Empire the quality of the commercial activity was shaped due to the size of the market area. There existed various building types among the commercial structures, such as ‘bedesten’, ‘arasta’, ‘han’, ‘kapan’ etc, as well as periodic large fair areas where international merchants convened once or twice a year. In the early modern period, Balkan fairs became central places on the major arteries from the East towards the West. The fair organization and protection were maintained by the local charitable waqf foundation and local officials. The waqf was responsible for the tax collection and the organization of the fairground. As an example among the Balkan fairs, Osijek Fair was identified with the shops, stables, carts and the guarding troops, where each function was allotted to separate areas. Illustrations display that inner streets of the Osijek Fair were designed according to the geometric pattern, where items were organized and controlled in a rational order. The coach also appears as a crucial transportation vehicle of the early-modern trade. The geometric street pattern and rational distribution of the building lots can also be compared with contemporary fairs in Italy.

Key Words: Ottoman trade, Trade routes, Balkan fairs, Osijek, Fairground, Geometrical street pattern

ULUSLARARASI GÜZERGAH ÜZERİNDE BİR TİCARİ MERKEZ: OSMANLI DÖNEMİNDE ÖSEK PANAYIRI

ÖZET

Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda düzenlenen ticari etkinliklerin niteliği çoğunlukla ticari alanın büyüklüğü ile bağlantılıdır. Ticari yapı örnekleri arasında 'bedesten', 'arasta', 'han', 'kapan' gibi çeşitli bina tiplerinden söz etmek mümkündür. Yılda bir veya iki kez yüzlerce uluslararası tacirin bir araya geldiği döngüsel panayırlar da bu kapsamda değerlendirilmektedir. Yeniçağ Balkan panayırları doğudan batıya ilerleyen ana güzergâhların bağlantı noktaları üzerinde bulunmaları nedeniyle merkezi konuma sahiptir. Bu panayırların düzenlenmesi ve dış saldırılara karşı korunmasını yerel vakıf kurumu ile bölgesel askeri yöneticiler sağlamaktadır. Vakıf aynı zamanda vergilerin toplanması ve panayır alanının ticari etkinliğe dönük düzenlenmesinden de sorumludur. On yedinci yüzyılda Hırvatistan'da kurulan Ösek Panayırı ticari etkinliklerin etkin biçimde işlemesi amacıyla dükkânlar, ahırlar, büyükbaş hayvan barınakları ile güvenliği sağlayan birliklerin bulunduğu çeşitli işlevsel alanlara ayrılmıştır. Döneme ait çizimlerde betimlenen Ösek Panayırı iç sokak dokusunun geometrik karakteri, alandaki mal akışının akılcı bir program dâhilinde düzenlendiğini ve denetlendiğini yansıtmaktadır. Yeniçağ ulaşım aracı olarak atlı arabanın da bu programın oluşumuna önemli katkısı bulunmaktadır. Panayır alanındaki geometrik sokak düzeni ile bina gruplarının işlevsel dağılımı İtalya'daki diğer eşzamanlı panayır alanları ile karşılaştırılabilir niteliktedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı ticareti, Ticari güzergâhlar, Balkan panayırları, Ösek, Panayır alanı, Geometrik sokak dokusu

Ottoman Commercial Structures

History of the Turkish commercial centres in Anatolia reaches back to the Seljukid period in the 13th century (Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium, 1991:

775-6; Türk Ansiklopedisi, 1977: 364). Sümer underlined ‘*Yabanlu Pazarı*’ around Kayseri, as a medieval fair open to foreign tradesmen for forty days a year. A stronghold around the fair, Castle of Zamantı or Tsamandos protected the market area (Sümer, 1985: 11-24, 33-45).

Security and taxation of the periodic markets became essential also among the Ottoman regional policy. In the early days of the local market establishment, a Germiyan tradesman informed Osman Ghazi that those who guarded market area were expected to collect the tax, according to an Anatolian tradition. Aşıkpaşazade concluded that, Osman Ghazi’s (1299-1324) pragmatic method of conquering Bythinian settlements was partly through the market organization where the Ottomans offered protection to the tradesmen (Atsız, 1992: 20, 25-26; Uzunçarşılı, 1969: 72).

Commercial activity was formed due to the size of the market area. Local or rural weekly bazaar (*pazar*) provided free, but limited area for the exchange of the regional products (Özgüven, 2001: 67-85). The term describes an open market ground, but ‘*çarşı*’ denotes a covered area, where the organization was arranged according to the specialized crafts (Cerasi, 1999: 119-120). The Covered Bazaar in Istanbul might present an example for the permanent ‘*çarşı*’, where local production was strictly controlled by the guilds and the official regulations. Inalcik distinguishes the local trader ‘*esnaf*’ from the merchant, ‘*tüccar*’ or ‘*bezirgan*’. ‘*Esnaf*’, as adhered to the traditional guild, was an artisan and shopkeeper alike, and he was subject to control by the ‘*ihtisab*’ regulations (İnalcık, 1995: 162).

Wholesale merchants in cities conducted business in massive buildings, ‘*han*’ (Akdağ, 1995: 156-157) or ‘*kapan hanı*’¹. Tradesmen in the large ‘*han*’ sustained the monopoly of a certain type of product, such as grain, silk or fur, and each block market was named according to the species. The wholesale

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market and the distribution mechanism here were carefully conducted; the storage and provision of rough material were controlled due to strict regulations. The monopoly jealously opposed to any other forms of marketing of the product, but the merchants managed to obtain the privilege when it was rewarded by the Sultan in the form of an imperial decree (Akdağ, 1995; Cezar 1983).

There were '*bedesten*' (or '*bezistan*') and '*arasta*', as buildings of the Ottoman trade. Early *bedestens* in Istanbul, such as the 'Sandal Bedesten' in the Covered Bazaar emerged as one of the earliest commercial buildings during the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror (1451-1481). After the 16th century, the administrators encouraged to add permanent structures around the Covered Bazaar whereas permanent roads became vaulted inner avenues (Gülersoy, 1979: 5, 6-8)². Another type of commercial buildings was the *arasta* which was based on a vaulted main corridor and symmetrical shops. A typical example for *arasta* was Mısır Çarşısı in Istanbul around the Yeni Valide Mosque where the Islamic axial shopping avenues were constructed.

The fair (*panayır*), on the other hand, appeared as a convention point of international merchants who were not restricted by local guild regulations³. From the architectural point of view, the annual fair included temporary structures, which were constructed on the large area.

Characteristics of the Ottoman Fairs

Major military routes functioned as the infrastructure of the international trade. Classical military highways, Via Militaria and Via Aegnatia formed the basic road network in Balkans, as connecting Anatolia with the European territories. As the major cities on the arteries emerged, such as Edirne, Philippopolis, Salonica, Sophia and Belgrade, it became evident when the main roads reinforced cities' strategic and commercial position

(Jireček, 1990; Stoianovich, 1999: 230-237).

The early modern logistics comprised the technical accessibility of roads, the availability of carts, storage and security. For example, in the second half of the sixteenth century, Hungarian cities, such as Esztergom, Buda, Pest, Székesfehérvár, Mohács and Filek became centres of commerce, listed as fortified market towns (Lazar, 1996: 77)⁴. As the riverine routes in Hungary enabled efficient transportation, ports became important infrastructure of the commercial activity. The ships were able to anchor at the ports of emerging Danubian towns, such as Esztergom and Vác. On the other hand, roads and construction of bridges offered alternative possibilities of transportation where only large centres provided storage with proper security. Coaches and carts were available vehicles for shipping the products. In the seventeenth century coaches were technically improved and speed was increased as iron wheels were added (Lay, 1994: 141-143)⁵.

From the point of medieval logistics in Anatolia, the Seljukid commercial system had offered impressive caravanserais on the major arteries, especially on the Silk Road. Caravanserais were massive buildings with large entrances, such as fortifications. Here the passengers could have temporarily stored the shipment in a safe building block. Also the Ottoman system presented secured areas of temporary storage. ‘*Han*’ buildings on the major roads were available structures of commerce. Unlike the Seljukid caravanserai, the Ottoman Han was not a massive building, but there were *hans* on the road between Buda and Belgrade which were built within the fortified enclosures, e.g. palanka forts (Özgüven, 2003: 155-160; Gaal, 1985: 55-88; Fekete, 1925: 384-388).

In the early modern period, Balkan fairs became central places on the major arteries in the southern and central Europe⁶. To Braudel, approximately

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hundred Balkan fairs were organized in the seventeenth century (Braudel, 1995: 379). Open area of the fair was designed according to the commercial needs. Fairs became focal points probably for the inter-regional traders as they offered “elaborate fairgrounds with a surrounding wall and fixed booths” (Faroqhi, 1997: 490). Around 1660’s Evliya Çelebi described largest fairs in the southeastern Europe in his encyclopaedic travelogue. Five of them, Nagy-Varat, Mashkilor, Yannina, Dojran and Ellasson emerged as well-known international market areas in East Europe (Faroqhi, 1978: 50-68). Fairs became important from the point of location among the main arteries. Yannina was founded on the way to Narde; Dojran was around the Dojran Lake.

The fair organization and protection were maintained by the local charitable waqf foundation and officials. The waqf was responsible for the tax collection and the organization of the fairground. During the season, military troops guarding the neighbouring settlements were responsible for the security of the area. Bey of Trikkala, for example, maintained the safeguard of merchants in Fairs of Mashkilor and Ellasson, as they were accompanied by soldiers of the Yeniçeri Agha in Salonica. The molla of Serres was responsible for the security of the Dojran fair in Macedonia. Troops of Yanova or Varat soldiers protected Nagy-Varat fair in East Hungary. Surrounding palisade walls also contributed to the safety of merchants.

The tradesmen were originated from Asia (Arabia, Persia, India, China, Central Asia, Damascus, Aleppo and Iraq), from Europe (Hungary, Sweden, Germany, Poland, Spain, Genoa), and from Africa (Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt) (Çelebi, cilt. 5-6, 1984: 531-532; cilt. 8, 125-126). Large fairs facilitated meeting of merchants from the East and West. Consequently precious goods and local practices were exchanged among the tradesmen, as Venetian merchants took position at the large fairs. Similarly, Genoese tradesmen brought local products from colonies around the Black Sea and put them on

the European market (Fleet, 2006: 19, 98-99).

Evliya gave some accounts on the organization of the fair area. “A walled, rectangular enceinte surrounded the fairground”, he reported and “four entrances reach to the large crossing streets and to twenty secondary roads”. The description recalls the chequerboard plan. The Dojran fair, on the other hand, was founded as a large enceinte where the internal roads were designed as chequerboard, again according to Evliya’s words⁷.

Building lots in the Balkan fair were allocated to the shops, stables, carts and the guarding troops, which were located in separate functional places. In Dojran there were separate areas and buildings for the purchase of textiles, jewellery, animals, slaves or food and additionally, an area of entertainment. A firm building enabled the protection of the precious goods. Administrative rooms located in a kiosk-like structure built over the entrance gates. The revenue was stored in the kiosk rooms. In his descriptive book, Luigi F. Marsigli illustrated a simplified version of the kiosk (Marsigli, 1732).

Fair areas were places where different species of goods were distributed to orderly created symmetrical shop houses. Evliya witnessed in Dojran and Yannina that “there were blocks of two storey shops and they were covered by the tile roof.” It was the same in Mashkilor where the waqf supported the shop construction. Here the tile roof and the walls secured the precious goods. Established merchants took place in the blocks within the fair area, whereas less important tradesmen occupied booths and tents outside of the walls (Çelebi, 1984).

Osijek and the ‘Panayir’ District

The Town of Osijek emerged as one of the major military centres. Ottoman Ösek, today’s Osijek (Hungarian Eszék) was a Hungaro-Croatian city

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on the River Drava, as having roots in medieval Hungary⁸. In the Roman period, the settlement was named as ‘Mursa Maior’ or Colonia Aelia Mursa, as a commercial town. After the military campaign by the Süleyman the Lawgiver in 1530, the town appeared as a meeting point on the military road which helped to the security of the frontier operations in the South Danubian territory.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, the town became an Ottoman centre mainly for the military operations towards the West. On the other hand, Osijek became a center of trade where the merchants convened two times a year. During the fair season, a notable sum of income tax was charged, and the Ottoman commercial activities on the Hungarian territory were reinforced. Evliya Çelebi visited the Osijek fair in the 1660’s. He describes the fair as one the largest in the region as he underlined that “during the cherry season or in fall thousands of merchants from Anatolia, Arabia, Persia, and from other lands visited the area.”

According to Evliya, Osijek was surrounded by the fortress, a firm structure with double layer walls. The city was divided into five quarters: the inner fortress, the middle fortress, the varosh settlement, the outer settlement and the fair area next to the varosh. The Muslim community mostly inhabited in the inner settlement (varosh) where each house had a large courtyard and an orchard. Because of the swampy character of the ground, stone was not an available construction material. Only timber and ‘horasan’ type of brick were allowed for permanent structures. According to eyewitnesses, streets in the town appeared as clean and well preserved. In the 1660’s it was noted that two large neighbourhoods near Drava were in sight, and one of them had a whitewashed surrounding wall made from palisade stakes. In the outer settlement, majority of houses belonged to the Christians and Gypsies, as the Muslims took little place. Evliya described the Osijek fair as follows: “There

is a palanka on the southern side of Osijek fortress. One would describe the palanka as a mighty enceinte. That the fair is about four hundred paces is a signature for that the bazaar is to be organized annually”⁹.

The Austrian traveller, Heinrich Ottendorf ¹⁰, provided information on the Osijek fair: “The inhabitants of Osijek town are not others than the Turks. As compared with others, they are polite, and exert less control on women. I think the reason for that is the yearly market, so they (Turks) find opportunity to encounter people from other traditions. The outer settlement (Vorstadt) is surrounded by a palisade, reinforced by fences with mortar and by a dry ditch. The town is built towards the southern and western direction¹¹. Fairs (with famous caravans) are organized two times a year. Tradesmen arrived here from the lands, such as Constantinople, Persia and Arabia with many beautiful goods hardly to find even in Belgrade. The caravans park outside of the palisade on a plain around”.

According to Evliya, arrival of the security guards to the fairground commenced with a ceremony, which also signified the relationship between the commercial activity and its protection. “As soon as the place became crowded, he wrote, the Pasha of Polga came to the area as accompanied by his armed troop, tents and equipment and he waited for the visiting merchants. Later the *kazzaz aghas* came with three thousand soldiers and brave men, who were to maintain the security of the merchants day and night. Only thereafter the merchants were ready to bring the items to the market area”. Evliya reported that “plenty of bundles were unwrapped and purchased. On the 40th day everyone took his good away and left the fair area as accompanied by the soldiers of Kanizsa” (Çelebi, 1984).

Evliya described the street pattern in Osijek as the chequer board, which was designed according to “the science of geometry”. The streets of the

fair settlement were created as linear corridors where “the end of the market can be observed from the entrance of any street”.

There were rows of shop houses on the geometric streets. Ottendorf described a covered street where rows of booths and vaults were located on both sides. He also underlined that some tradesmen were allowed to utilize the shops and they were also able to keep their goods in a large han building integrated with the gate at the end¹². Four han blocks in Osijek were illustrated in the Ottendorf Album. They were placed next to the entrance gate around the pontoon bridge extending towards the small fort of Darda. Differing from the comments of Evliya, the Ottendorf illustration represents the fair area as it was arranged according to the orderly designed streets, but not to the chequer board pattern. Evliya’s description of chequer board plan might be re-read as the orderly, geometric streets.

Functional areas in the Osijek fair were clearly identified, as the shops, stables, carts and the guarding troops took separate places. That a large area was allocated to the stables and to the parking coaches was significant from the point of securing the transportation vehicle. Also geometrical streets were probably designed according to the coaches’ and caravans’ technical availability that might have followed a direct path along the shopping blocks.

The settlement characteristics were also demonstrated by the contemporary western illustrations. Ottendorf illustration in the 1660’s shows Drava River, the pontoon bridge and the town of Osijek as surrounded by the palisade. A long, axial street and various smaller streets represent the street pattern of the fairground (ILL-1). Another depiction, belongs to the mid-17th century. Here the fairground was represented as a separate area, where the pontoon bridge extended towards the Darda fortress on the other side. Orderly vaulted streets were depicted (ILL-2). A third illustration from the same period

reflects again the Osijek fair area by representing the shopping blocks and streets in between (ILL-3).

These elements can be compared with the contemporary fairs in Italy. According to an illustration from the eighteenth century, the enclosed area of the Bergamo Fair was divided by linear shopping streets into the regular, geometric areas. A fountain at the crossroad of streets was designed as to denote the central square of the fair (Gutkind, 1969: 190). Also the Crema Fair represents similar settlement organization in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (Lanaro, 2003: 37-49). Here “the distribution of spaces and shops at Italian fairs depended on the economic and social hierarchy” (Lanaro, 2003: 43). Walled spaces (*fiera in muro*) and the functional axis were designed in the North Italian fairs, such as Crema, Brescia, Bolzano and Vicenza. The Farfa fair around Bologna or Chalon sur Saône in France were among other market areas where the timber buildings could rapidly be rebuilt to suit the merchants’ needs.

Conclusion

Literary sources provide information on the fair organization in the 17th century. According to the eyewitnesses, fairs in the Ottoman Empire were founded on the strategic roads. It might have taken place on a plain area, such as in Mashkilor or Muzezyrib. Pious foundations played important role for the initiation and organization of the fair, as well as for the tax collection. The foundation might have allocated the revenue collected to charitable facilities.

Security was crucial during the fair season. Merchants from distant lands came to conduct commercial facilities in the area. They agreed to deliver the products as the provincial military troop took the responsibility of organizing a safe fairground. Another guarantee of security was the surrounding enceinte, usually a palisade, as equipped with necessary towers

and armament. There appear two different practices from the point of guarding the market area: The Italian fairs were controlled through the permanent buildings, whereas the Ottoman control was mainly achieved through the military troops and strong outer walls.

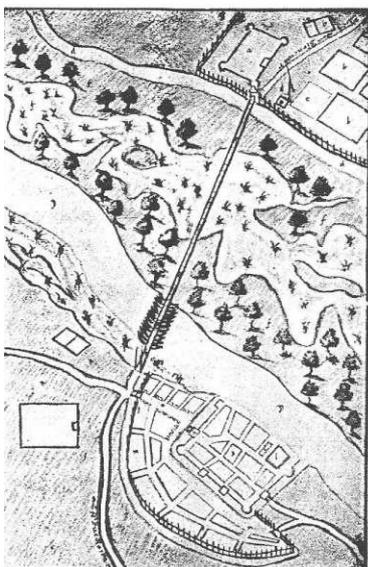
The duration of the fair season related with the length of the enceinte. Larger fairs, such as Osijek and Mashkilor were open for forty days, as the smaller others remained shorter. Another feature is that the shop houses were built as half-permanent, timber structures. They could have been utilized in the forthcoming season, in case of regular reparation by the pious foundation. Those merchants who conducted luxurious item and jewellery trade enjoyed the privilege of locating the items in the intramural blocks during the fair season. A larger *han* building in the central part of Dojran and Osijek fairs presented secure areas, but small-scale trade could have taken place outside of the walls.

Every fair was permanently equipped with orderly shopping streets, blocks of shops and squares. The Ottoman fair could have been observed as a market area where necessary blocks of shops were arranged for the commercial purpose. Evliya wrote that the geometric pattern and parallel streets in between the blocks were evident in the Osijek fair. The rational arrangement of the shopping streets was due to the necessity of a strict organization among the merchants. The coach also appears as a crucial transportation vehicle of trade. Contemporary illustrations display that inner streets of the fair area were designed as uniform and straight lines, where items were controlled in prescribed order. The uniformity could also be construed as 'rationality'. Well-organized shops and parallel roads in a fair became the characteristic feature, also in the north Italian fairs.

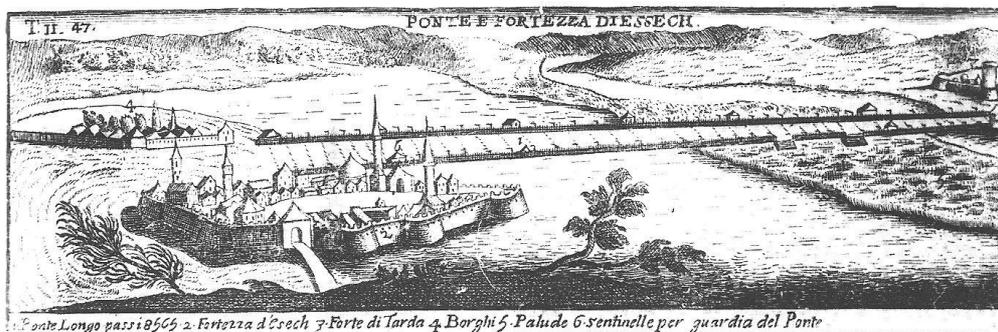
As Ottendorf noted, cosmopolite city culture from the East possibly faced with the West, when the tradesmen bartered items and when they also compared the cultural values and the traditions with those of colleagues on the fairground.

ILLUSTRATIONS

ILL-1: Ottendorf depiction of Osijek

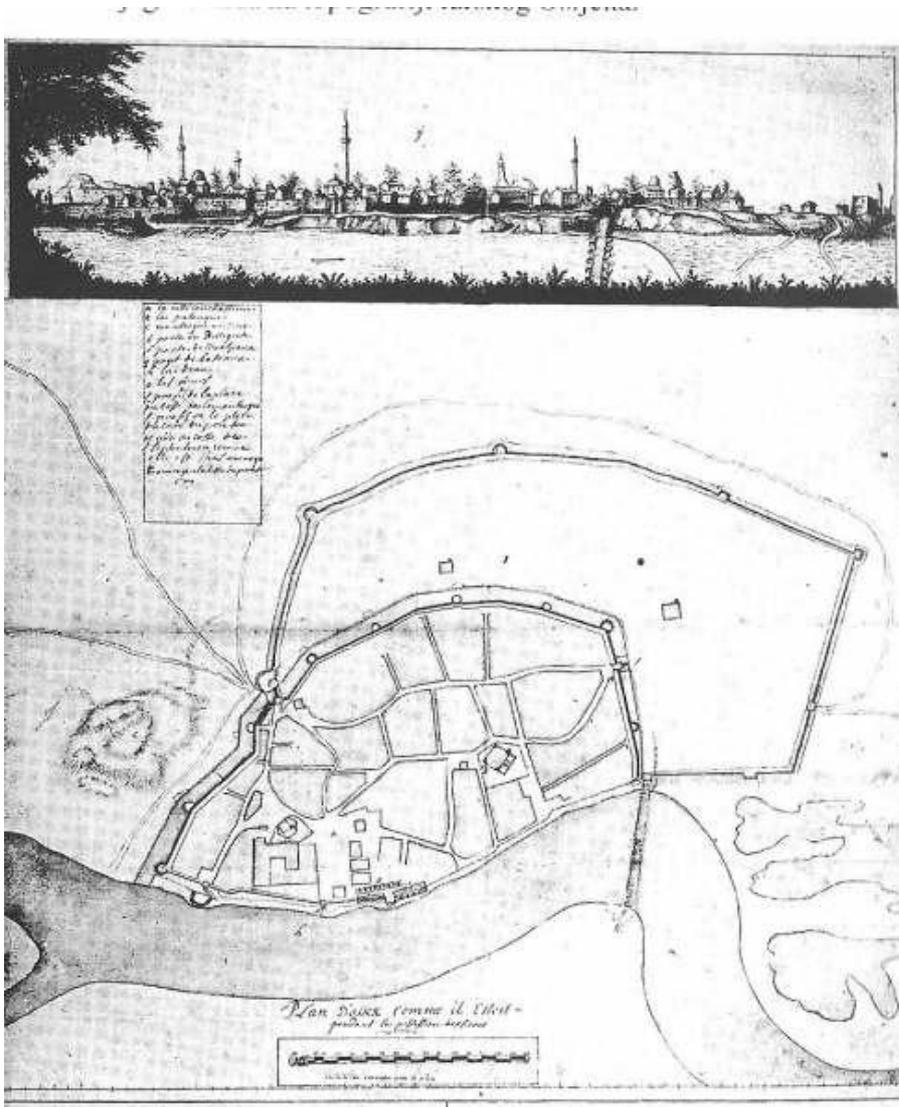


ILL-2- 17th century drawing, probably from the book ‘Anon.: *Origine e corso del Danubio con la cronica Ungaro e Turchesca...*, 1685’



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ILL-3- Osijek in 1688. From: Ive Mažuran, *Hrvati i Osmansko Carstvo* (Croats and the Ottoman Empire). (Zagreb: 1998), p. 212.



END NOTES

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¹ Balkapan Hanı and Un Kapanı around the Golden Horn were buildings still extant until the early twentieth century.

² In the mid-16th century Matrakçı Nasuh displays the open area of the bazaar. This reminds that the vaulted ceiling was added in a later period; see: Nasuhü's-Silahi (Matrakçı), *Beyan-i Menazil-i Sefer-i 'Irakeyn* Edited by: Hüseyin Yurtaydın, (facsimile copy of the original manuscript, in: Istanbul University Library, cod. 5964), (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1976), fol. 8b.

³ For later Ottoman fairs in Anatolia: Ömer Şen: *Osmanlı Panayırları (18. - 19. yüzyıl)*. (Istanbul: Eren, 1996), 8

⁴ Hungarian towns became area of commerce between Central Europe and the Black Sea Region. As partly based on the German, e.g. Ottonian, settlement pattern, the towns in Hungary were established according to the emerging trade, routes and cultural relations (Lazar, 1996).

⁵ Coaches (*Kutsche, cocchio*) were improved by Hungarian craftsmen in the late fifteenth century. On the technical characteristics of the 17th century coaches see: Lay, 1994: 141-143.

⁶ Stoianovich points out that the number of fairs between Save and Danube gradually increased in the 15th century, and the Ottoman fairs in the late 18th century reached up to the four hundred. Stoianovich, *ibid*.

⁷ The chequer board plan could be observed at some Ottoman fortifications, such as in Kanizsa in Hungary. An illustration belongs to 1664 clearly reflects the chequerboard plan within the inner part of the fortification; in: *Endre Marosi, XVI. Századi Váraink (1521-1606)* (16th century fortresses). (Budapest-Miskolc: 1991), fig. 19.

⁸ For Osijek see: Evliya Çelebi, 5-6: 524f. A contemporary investigation on Osijek: Ivo Mažuran, *Hrvati i Osmansko Carstvo* (Croats and the Ottoman Empire). (Zagreb: 1998). I thank Dr. Mažuran for his kind support.

⁹ 1 pace= 0,80 metres. Evliya Çelebi, *ibid*.

¹⁰ Heinrich Ottendorf, "Der Weg von Ofen auff Griechisch Weissenburg" Vienna 1665. Austrian National Library, Manuscript Codex: 8481, fol. 55.

¹¹ 'gegen mittag und abend liegenden seyten'

¹² Ottendorf, *ibid.* "... und gewisse Kauffleüthe vermüetet sein, bey welchen zu endt un nahendt dem Thor eine grosse Hannen stehet."

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