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IVÁN SZÁNTÓ  
Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest  
Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna  
e-mail: szanto.ivan@btk.elte.hu

## Two Islamic Strongholds in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Styria

### Abstract

This study examines the evolution and lasting impact of a section of the Habsburg-Ottoman borderlands which was established in 1664 along the Raab river and existed until the 1680s. Although it was short, the upcoming events that led to this period and the contrasting fates of the two sides of the river during the era were to leave a profound mark on the cultural memory of local communities as well as those living in the hinterlands. It will be shown in the article how the river delineated and imprinted the sense of West and East in both popular consciousness and historiography. In particular, the study will contextualise two castles (Hainfeld and Bertholdstein) on the Styrian, i.e., western, part of the area, pointing out the continuity of their development between the Ottoman through the Post-Ottoman periods. Among the Post-Ottoman personages who ensured the Islamic continuity of these two castles, Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall and Władysław Kościelski will be highlighted in the essay.

**Keywords:** Austria, frontier, Habsburgs, Hainfeld, historiography, Hungary, Ottomans, Raab, rivers, Styria, Szentgotthárd

Rising at an altitude of 1250 metres in the upper valleys of the Styrian Alps, the river Raab (Rába in Hungarian), a tributary of the Danube, constitutes one of the chief fluvial arteries of Styria in Austria and Transdanubia in Hungary.<sup>1</sup> Its character in the two countries is sharply different: the speedy rush of the river through deep gorges and valleys in Eastern Styria gives way to a lazy meandering across the low hills and plains of Hungary until it flows into the Danube at the town of Győr, which in German is called eponymously Raab. Unlike the other major rivers which originate from or pass through the region (such as the Drava, the Mur, or the Sava), the Raab does not follow a south-westerly course; instead, it gradually turns northwards after crossing the current border and keeps a northerly direction until its mouth, demarcating a small section from the larger

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Sibylle Wentker (ÖAW, Vienna), for her suggestions and assistance in tracing the sources.

eastern expanses of Transdanubia. Geographically and culturally speaking, the two banks of the river do not differ in a significant degree and it can be said that once it steps forth from the Styrian mountains, the Raab offers few prominent landmarks along its remaining route. For the same reason, it never formed an ethnic or a political boundary between Austrian and Hungarian lands (this role having assumed by its left tributary, the Lafnitz, which runs along Austria's easternmost mountain range). Yet, the Raab, inconspicuous as it may be, marked for a short time the frontline between the Islamic and Christian worlds towards the end of the Ottoman period in Hungary.

For most of the fifteen decades of Ottoman rule, the border (which was never formally defined during the period) lay further to the east. The Ottomans succeeded in taking hold of the Danubian confluence of the Raab at Győr in 1529 and 1594–1598, but each time these gains proved short-lived. While signs of a major offensive on the Raab valley constantly loomed, the attack would not be launched until 1663 when grand vizier Ahmed Köprülü (in office 1661–1676) decided to invade Austria in response to disputes over Transylvania. He managed to move his troops from the Ottoman territories of Buda, Székesfehérvár, and Nagykanizsa as far as the banks of the Raab, but there, at the town of Szentgotthárd, the hurriedly summoned imperial army under the lead of Raimondo Montecuccoli (1609–1680) inflicted a heavy defeat on the Turks on 1 August, 1664. Despite the Austrian victory, the truce which was concluded in Vasvár on the Raab (10<sup>th</sup> August, 1664) showed an unusual generosity towards the Ottomans to keep them at bay in Transylvania. Thus, the Ottomans could hold sway over the eastern hinterland of the Raab and the residents became subject to a devastating dual taxation. Tax-collecting often involved raids: plundering troops remained a persistent threat which drove a significant portion of the population to safer areas on the opposite bank of the river, leading to a quick and irreversible decline of towns on the east bank, including the former regional seat Vasvár, where the 1664 treaty was signed. The local estates of the landed nobility were turned into military zones, and the landlords, members of the Nádasdy, Batthyány, and Zrínyi families, often found themselves caught in crossfire. Further upstream, the Alps formed a natural defence line for Styria, but Turkish onslaughts were not uncommon even there.<sup>2</sup> Ottoman weaponry which was found in Styria, for example an inscribed sabre from a rural farmstead at Risola, south of the Raab, bears witness to the extent of these skirmishes and their profound and lasting imprint on historical memory.<sup>3</sup>

Despite their proximity to the main theatres of war, the subalpine and alpine castles of the upper Raab valley enjoyed an incomparably greater degree of security than their lowland counterparts in Hungary. In wartime, they provided safe havens for the local people, while in peaceful periods they were vantage points

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<sup>2</sup> L. Toifl, H. Leitgeb, *Die Türkeneinfälle in der Steiermark und in Kärnten vom 15. bis zum 17. Jahrhundert*, Vienna 1991.

<sup>3</sup> Feldbach, Museum am Tabor, see museum notes by Anni Gamerith. For Turkish influences in the agriculture of East Styria, see A. Gamerith, *Bäuerliche Sachkultur; 1. Acker und Frucht in Bezirk und Museum Feldbach*, [in:] *Blätter für Heimatgeschichte des Bezirkes Feldbach*, vol. 3/4, Feldbach 1974, p. 29.

to observe and reflect upon the events which unfolded downriver. The chain of castles includes Sturmberg on the upper Raab, Kornberg on the southern edge of the mountains, and Riegersburg, the most formidable redoubt.<sup>4</sup> Hainfeld castle, on the floodplain of the Raab, was closer to Turkish activities. Between the later 16<sup>th</sup> to the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century it was the hereditary property of the Freiherren von Zwickel (Khiszl), the last male member of which, Johann Jakob Bartholomäus von Zwickel (d. 1691), having married a daughter of Montecuccoli, the victor of Szentgotthárd. Due to frequent reconstructions and, in the case of Sturmberg, gradual abandonment, we have little precise information concerning the 17<sup>th</sup>-century furnishings of these strongholds, but we may well suppose that they included Orientalia as well, originating from wars, diplomacy, and commerce with the Ottomans. Ottoman and Persian objects are known from the castle of Güssing (Németújvár), near Riegersburg but on the (pre-1920) Hungarian side, while Forchtenstein (Fraknó) castle, outside but not far from the Raab valley, still preserves a rich collection of Persian and Turkish material.<sup>5</sup> Overlooking the entire valley, Riegersburg, like most of the aforementioned strongholds, remained far beyond the reach of the Ottomans, but one of its lords, Detlef von Kapell, was slain at Szentgotthárd in 1664.<sup>6</sup> Married three times, the chatelaine of Riegersburg and widow of von Kapell, Katharina Elisabeth von Galler (1607–1672), developed it into an impenetrable refuge which could accommodate, if necessary, virtually the entire population of her estates. After von Galler's death, Riegersburg and its accessories passed to the Purgstall family, which, in turn would bestow a portion of it, notably Hainfeld, on the orientalist Joseph von Hammer, henceforth Hammer-Purgstall (1774–1856).<sup>7</sup> He fictionalised von Galler in a Walter Scottian romantic novel, not uninfluenced by the fact that he himself had meanwhile become the landlord of Hainfeld castle on the south bank of the Raab, opposite Riegersburg.<sup>8</sup> Here, where the Ottoman past still feels palpable and the distance to the Hungarian East walkable, it is hard to overestimate the effect of the genius loci on Hammer-Purgstall, a native of Styria, whether as a young daydreamer, a romantic writer, or a leading orientalist of his age.

Little is known about his daily life at, and redevelopment plans for, Hainfeld which he used as a summer retreat from the capital for a few weeks every summer. What is clear, however, that he intended to keep the castle largely in the state as it had been when it had come to his possession, and implement a few confined but accentuated additions, in order to imbue the building with a sense of his own presence. Nowhere else this could be made with greater economy, i.e., with minimal

<sup>4</sup> For a general outline of the monuments in the region, see K. Woisetschläger, P. Krenn (eds.), *Die Kunstdenkmäler Österreichs. Steiermark (ohne Graz). Dehio-Handbuch*, Vienna 1982.

<sup>5</sup> I. Szántó, *Safavid Art in Hungary. The Esterházy Appliqué in Context*, Piliscsaba 2010, pp. 46–51.

<sup>6</sup> Ch. Schönast, *Die Gallerin und die Riegersburg*, Graz 1985.

<sup>7</sup> J. von Hammer-Purgstall, *Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben, 1774–1852*, ed. R. Bachofen von Echt, Vienna–Leipzig 1940, p. 303. According to his recollections, he was at a soirée at the Viennese salon of Countess Rzewuska when he received a letter about the terminal illness of her patroness Countess Purgstall from Basil Hall, on 24 March, 1835, whereupon he immediately rode to Hainfeld.

<sup>8</sup> *Idem*, *Die Gallerin auf der Riegersburg. Historischer Roman mit Urkunden* vol. 1–3, Darmstadt 1845; cf. J. von Hammer-Purgstall, *Erinnerungen...*, pp. 311, 318.

intervention for maximum effect, than on the keystone of the main gate, beneath the original Purgstall coat-of-arms, where he composed an Arabic inscription in *thulth* script (*Allah yuhraş majdaka al-'ali faşr fi-hafzahu / f-allahu khayrun hafizan* [Qur'an S. 12, a. 64]: *God guard your reputation, your greatest goodness, take shelter in his protection, / God is the greatest protector*), dated 1252 h. q. (1836). Apart from this inscription, Hammer's reorientation of the castle is manifest in the Egyptianizing cenotaph which he commissioned for her benefactor, Countess Johanna von Purgstall, as well as the tombs for her own mother and himself (both in Arabo-Persian style, the latter originally in Weidling, Lower Austria).<sup>9</sup> Unlike these tombs, which are visible only for those few visitors who enter the castle chapel, the inscription strikes the eye from afar, and keeps puzzling unprepared passengers for nearly two centuries.<sup>10</sup> One may ask whether for Hammer-Purgstall his own Arabo-Persian epigraphy was the representation of a boundless and timeless "Orient" or was it for him also a late-born flower of the "local East"? Can the scholarly and the literary be separated in this monument?<sup>11</sup> Though Hammer-Purgstall was a celebrated Orientalist all over Europe and beyond, it can be suggested that the Hainfeld inscription is as much a product of Post-Ottoman Styria than that of international orientalism. Arabic inscriptions in Styria are scant, yet their history goes back to a past far more ancient than not only the Ottoman conquest of Central Europe but the beginnings of the Ottoman Empire at large, as shown by the frescoes of the Chapel of St. John in Pürgg (ca. 1160).<sup>12</sup> For an even more rich trove of Turkish, Arabic, and Persian epigraphy, one needed to venture beyond the northwardly curve of the Raab, into Hungary. There were still plenty of inscriptions in the Hungarian hinterlands of the river from the Ottoman period, and among the first who drew attention to their importance was none other than Hammer-Purgstall. What makes this little-known segment of his output particularly significant is that some of the texts he had mentioned were soon to be destroyed or covered by new constructions.<sup>13</sup> Constituting an organic part of the antiquities of the Habsburg Empire, yet also representing the poetic "Orient", the Ottoman patrimony of Hungary had a strong appeal for him. In addition, he maintained good working contacts with Hungarian colleagues; one of his publishers was based in Pest and he had become a corresponding member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (founded in 1825) before he would establish its Austrian counterpart (in 1847). His articles about the Ottoman inscriptions of Pécs and Szigetvár were published only in Hungarian in the 1840s, making them

<sup>9</sup> W. Dornik, R. Grasmug, P. Wiesflecker (eds.), *Projekt Hainfeld: Beiträge zur Geschichte von Schloss Hainfeld, der Familie Hammer-Purgstall und der gesellschaftspolitischen Situation der Südoststeiermark im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Innsbruck–Vienna–Bolzano 2010, p. 119.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 69.

<sup>11</sup> He quotes the poem in his scholarly essays, e.g., J. von Hammer-Purgstall, *Das Pferd bei der Arabern*, Vienna 1855, p. 227; *idem*, *Literaturgeschichte der Araber*, Vienna 1850, vol. 1, p. 424.

<sup>12</sup> K. Woisetschläger, P. Krenn, *op. cit.*, p. 382.

<sup>13</sup> J. von Hammer-Purgstall, *A pécsi főtemplom keleti felirásai*, "Magyar Academiai Értesítő" 1844, no. 4, pp. 55–59; *idem*, *Némelly Pécs környékén találtató török, arab és perzsa feliratokról*, "Magyar Academiai Értesítő" 1847, no. 7, pp. 365–369; cf. B. Sudár, *Megjegyzések a pécsi dzsámik történetéhez*, [in:] *Pécs a hódoltság korában*, eds. F. Szakály, J. Vonyó, Pécs 2012, pp. 74–84.

early examples of the study of Islamic epigraphy, a subject which had been present in the research portfolio of Hammer-Purgstall since the very first issue of his *Fundgruben des Orients* (1809).<sup>14</sup> He identified several Arabic, Turkish, and Persian texts, including one referring to 17<sup>th</sup>-century construction works undertaken at Pécs cathedral during the time when it had served as the town's Friday mosque, and he spotted even a couplet by Sa'adi.<sup>15</sup>

Despite his interest in the native Ottoman epigraphy of the Habsburg Empire, he relied on handwritten copies and transcriptions to translate and interpret them – he did not visit the actual sites in person. He never seems to have travelled deep into the Hungarian lands east of his “antemurale” fortress during his stays at Hainfeld, or at least he did not document any such journey. Just a few months before Hammer's inheritance, Captain Basil Hall (1788–1844) did so while he enjoyed the hospitality of fellow Scottish Countess von Purgstall, the last titular holder of Hainfeld, and his account may explain Hammer's reluctance to undertake such an expedition.<sup>16</sup> In Hall's mocking description, the twenty-mile trip between the castle and Szentgotthárd transforms into an arduous Oriental journey. It is worth quoting:

[The Countess] gave us instructions how best to see a celebrated field of battle near St. Gothard [sic], between the Turks and Austrians, in the year of 1665 [sic], “which,” continued she, “you have doubtless heard of?” We certainly had never heard a word of the matter, but away we went, in compliance with her ladyship's wishes, crossing the Hungarian frontier, and having climbed the steeple of the village of St. Gothard, which lies at the confluence of the Raab and Feistritz, were instructed by our guide in the details of the great fight alluded to. I confess I took more interest in the wild, indeed half-savage costume and looks of the Hungarians, most of whom were dressed in long, flowing, white cloaks. The language, manners, and appearance in every respect of these people differed essentially from those of the Styrians whom we had left but a few miles behind. This seems the more strange, as the boundary between the two countries is nothing but an imaginary line. [...] I cannot better describe St Gothard to those who have been in the East than by comparing it to an Indian town on a market day; and those who have not been in the East may derive some notion of it from Daniell's exquisite drawings, or those of less remote scenes from the graphic pencil of Horace Vernet, whose pictures of African manners are so admirably true to nature. What we heard of Hungary did not very much tempt us to go far into that still half-savage region.<sup>17</sup>

Hall's sardonic description in fact strangely echoes Ottoman-period notions of the same area: Roman and Austrian Jesuit fathers expressly advertised missionary work in Ottoman Hungary as a chance to work in a “proximate India” where proselytising offered an equally straight path towards salvation than going to the real India or other distant lands of paganism, such as Japan.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> N. a., *Iscrizione sepolcrale araba scritta con caratteri cufici trovata a Malta e deciffrata da Sigr. Cavaliere d'Italinzky*, “Fundgruben des Orients” 1809, no 1, pp. 393–397. For some other early publications on Islamic epigraphy, see Sh.S. Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, Edinburgh 1998, pp. 12–13.

<sup>15</sup> J. von Hammer-Purgstall, *A pécsi...*, pp. 57–58.

<sup>16</sup> B. Hall, *Schloss Hainfeld, or a Winter in Lower Styria*, Edinburgh 1836.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 67–68.

<sup>18</sup> A. Molnár, *Jezsuiták a hódolt Pécssett*, [in:] *Pécs a törökörkorban. Tanulmányok Pécs történetéből*, 7, ed. F. Szakály, Pécs 1999, p. 217.

One would think that Hammer's oriental dream-world at Hainfeld was a unique and isolated case in the post-Ottoman landscape of the Raab valley. The castle of Bertholdstein, located within a few hours of walk from Hainfeld but far less well-known than the former, proves that it was not. Several reasons can be suggested for its relative obscurity, among them its out-of-the-way location and the limited role which it played in wider regional history.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, this castle does not reveal any outward sign of its "Oriental" past. Unlike riparian Hainfeld, Bertholdstein is nestled on a densely-forested cliff above the valley, with expansive hunting grounds around the complex. But similarly to Hainfeld, Bertholdstein also went through two "Ottomanesque" periods: one when it was a successful bulwark against Turkish expansionism and another one when it was successfully captured by a modern Turcophile. In the case of Bertholdstein, this person was Władysław Kościelski alias Sefer Pasha (1819–1895).<sup>20</sup> As opposed to Hammer, the Polish nobleman and revolutionary hero had no personal connection to Styria; in fact, he ended up in the Ottoman Empire because in his youth he took up arms against Austria. More than twenty years later, he acquired the estate from Count Karl Nordberg-Noé (1789–1885). The exact circumstances that led him purchasing this particular castle in 1873 are not entirely clear to this author, similarly to many other details of Kościelski's colourful life which sometimes bear more semblance to the clichés of romantic fiction than to a factual biography. Indeed, there are claims – Kościelski himself claimed so – that he had already entered literature as the real-life model of Armand Duval in the *Lady of the Camélias* (1848) by Alexandre Dumas,  *fils*, before he would become Sefer Pasha in 1857, following his successes in the Ottoman army. We read about this claim in a feuilleton by Stephanie Wohl (1848–1889) who visited Kościelski at Bertholdstein in 1879.<sup>21</sup> The same allegation is repeated by Kálmán Mikszáth (1847–1910), a leading Hungarian writer of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the postscript to his novel, entitled *The Siege of Beszterce* (1894–1895).<sup>22</sup> Being the lord of Nedec castle (then in northern Hungary, today Niedzica in Poland), the main character of this novel believes that he lives not in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but in the Ottoman period, and he enforces his household to take part in his military schemes. Nobody can gauge the extent to which Mikszáth based his literary hero on the elderly Sefer Pasha and nobody can tell whether Dumas based his character on the young Kościelski, but it remains true that when Sefer Pasha moved to Styria he brought there more Islamic arms and armour than anybody since the battle of Szentgotthárd. Having retired from the service of Isma'il Pasha of Egypt, he furnished his new Austrian home with a huge collection of Persian, Turkish, Egyptian, Sudanese, Bosnian, and even Japanese weaponry, in addition to an impressive range of European fine

<sup>19</sup> On the history of Bertholdstein, see R. Grasmug, *Von Bertholdstein nach Pertlstein. Die Entwicklung der Herrschaft und Abtei Bertholdstein sowie der Gemeinde Pertlstein*, Pertlstein 1995.

<sup>20</sup> H. Kaczmarek, *Sefer Pasha – Władysław Kościelski*, [in:] *War and Peace. Ottoman–Polish Relations in the 15–19<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, eds. T. Majda, S. Kangal, Istanbul 1999, pp. 95–101.

<sup>21</sup> S. Wohl, *Wohl Stephanie hátrahagyott iratai*, ed. J. Wohl, vol. 1–2, Budapest 1891, pp. 122–127.

<sup>22</sup> K. Mikszáth, *Beszterce ostroma*, Budapest 1895; German edition as *idem, Der Alte Gauner; Der Kavalier Der Graf und die Zirkusreiterin*, Berlin 1982.

and decorative arts.<sup>23</sup> Without doubt, Berchtoldstein became the greatest sensation of eastern Styria during his residence. When he died and was buried there in 1895, his estates were auctioned for the total value of six million Imperial Marks, except for those parts which he bequeathed to the National Museum in Kraków.<sup>24</sup> It appears that the majority of the Oriental arms collection went there, while a significant portion, as well as the castle itself, was obtained by Sámuel Freiberger (1846–1920), an industrialist and real estate magnate based in Budapest and later the United States, who planned to establish a private museum in the Hungarian capital and display Kościelski's objects there.<sup>25</sup> His plan seems to have failed but the Budapest Museum of Applied Arts still preserves items, for example an Italian Renaissance floor tile originating in Fano (1501), which the museum acquired from Freiberger, who, in turn, probably brought it from Bertholdstein.<sup>26</sup>

Zdzysław Żygułski Jr. considered Kościelski's Islamic weaponry heterogeneous in value and opined that the cumulative effect of the collection may have overshadowed the mediocrity of many individual examples.<sup>27</sup> In his judgement, King John Sobieski's Ottoman war-booty from Vienna (1683), now in the Kraków National Museum, far surpasses the splendour of the Kościelski collection. This may well be, but it includes some genuinely fine objects, especially the Safavid *šamšīrs*, *tabars*, and *bāzūbands*, in addition to what may have been the body armour of Shah Sulayman (r. 1666–1694); this latter ranks among the pinnacles of Persian steel craftsmanship.<sup>28</sup>

The castles along the Raab have seen things like that before. Did Sefer Pasha know that Count Pál Esterházy (1635–1713), a protagonist of the battle of Szentgotthárd and an opponent of the truce of Vasvár, had boasted a Safavid sword which may have been made for Shah Isma'íl I (r. 1501–1524) and may have been in the collection of Hungarian king Louis II (r. 1516–1526)?<sup>29</sup> And did he know that Count Miklós Zrínyi, a possible victim of the same truce, had held an extraordinary straight sword which belongs to a type attributable to the workshops of Shah Tahmasp I (r. 1524–1576)?<sup>30</sup> Probably he had never heard a word of the matter, and we also can be certain that there are yet more to discover about the Raab valley and the untold chapters of its Islamic past.

<sup>23</sup> A. Soós, *Sefer pasa kincsei*, "Vasárnapi Újság" 1899, no 46(8), pp. 122–123; T. Majda (ed.), *Arcydziela sztuki perskiej ze zbiorów polskich*, Warszawa 2002, cat. nos. 123–126, 145–146, 163, 183, 225, 231, 235–236, 244–245; *idem* (ed.), *Sztuka perska 1779–1924*, Kozłówka 1996, p. 175, 180, 186, 194, 199, 201, 204.

<sup>24</sup> *Pesti Hirlap*, 17/90 (8 April, 1895).

<sup>25</sup> *Pesti Hirlap*, 21/12 (12 January, 1899); *Országos Hirlap* (12, 1899), p. 6; B. Kelényi, I. Szántó (eds.), *Artisans at the Crossroads. Persian Arts of the Qajar Period, 1796–1925*, Budapest 2010, p. 142.

<sup>26</sup> G. Balla (ed.), *The Dowry of Beatrice. Italian Maiolica Art and the Court of King Matthias*, Budapest 2008, cat. no. 2.75/A.

<sup>27</sup> Z. Żygułski, Jr, *Remarks on the weapons collection of Władysław Koscielski – Alias Sefer Pasa*, [in:] *War and Peace...*, pp. 103–104.

<sup>28</sup> T. Majda, *Arcydziela sztuki perskiej...*, cat. nos. 123–127.

<sup>29</sup> Unpublished, currently in the Esterházy castle at Fertőd.

<sup>30</sup> M. Moshtagh Khorasani, I. Szántó, *Straight Swords in Iran. A Continuing Tradition*, [in:] *Persian Treasures, Hungarian Collections*, ed. I. Szántó, Budapest 2012, p. 44.

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The gate of Hainfeld Castle, Styria (photograph: Iván Szántó)



View of Bertholdstein Castle (photograph: Iván Szántó)



Persian armor "Four mirrors", 17<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century, MNK V-334 in the collection of the National Museum in Krakow (MNK Photography Studio)