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NIKOLA CREPOVIĆ.
A SERBIAN NOBLEMAN AND HIS FAMILY IN 16TH CENTURY
TRANSYLVANIA

Abstract: Nikola Crepović was one of the most representative Serbian nobles in the Kingdom of Hungary and Transylvania. In the two decades (1542–1562) in which he came to the attention of historical sources, this Serbian nobleman was involved in a series of events that marked the history of Central Europe. He built his career through working with both the Szapolyai family and the Habsburgs, and was rewarded with estates and dignities by both parties. Following the fall of Timișoara to the Ottomans (1552), Crepović fled with his family (wife Mara and daughters Jelena and Katerina) to Transylvania, where he built an estate in Hunedoara (Hunyad) and Alba (Fehér) counties. Through his daughters he was related to the ruling family of Wallachia and to important noble families in Transylvania. After his death he was buried in the Orthodox church of Bârsău (Hunedoara/Hunyad county) together with his wife and daughters. Because he had no male heirs, his estates, hard-won through faithful service to the Szapolyai or Habsburgs, came into the possession of nobles with whom he was related.

Keywords: Serbian nobility, Banat, 16th century, Nikola Crepović, Transylvania, Hunedoara county (Hunyad), Bârsău (Berekszó).

Анстракт: Никола Цреповић је био један од најрепрезентативнијих српских племића у Краљевини Угарској и Трансилванији. У две деценије (1542–1562) у којима је доспео у жижу историјских извора, тај српски племић био је укључен у низ догађаја који су обележили историју средње Европе. Своју каријеру је изградио у односима и са породицом Запоља и са Хабзбурговцима, а обе стране су га наградиле имањима и достојанствима. Након пада Темишвара под власт Османлија (1552), Цреповић је са породицом (супругом Маром и кћерима Јеленом и Катерином) побегао у Трансилванију, где је изградио имање у Хуњадској жупанији (Хуњад) и жупанији Алба (Фехер). Преко својих кћери био је у родству са владарском породицом Влашке и значајним племићким породицама у Трансилванији. После смрти сахрањен је у православној цркви у Барсау (Хуњадска жупанија), заједно са супругом и кћеркама. Будући да није имао мушке наследнике, његова имања, тешко стечена верном службом Запољама или Хабзбурговцима, дошла су у посед племића са којима је био у родству.

Кључне речи: српско племство, Банат, 16. век, Никола Цреповић, Трансилванија, Хуњадска жупанија (Хуњад), Барсау (Берексо).

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Towards the end of the first half of the 16th century, the name of a Serbian nobleman began to appear more frequently often in documents. From his first documentary mention in 1542, in the course of two decades until his death, this nobleman of South Slavic origin was part of Transylvanian history. Who is Nikola Crepović, what was his career path, what was his family life and what estates he owned? These are just some of the questions I will try to answer on the following pages. This nobleman lived in one of the most turbulent periods in Transylvanian history, so his destiny was deeply connected with the political and military events in the middle of that turbulent century.

Relatively little is known about Crepović and most of the relevant information was brought to light over 100 years ago by historian Aleksa Ivić¹. With very few exceptions, those who subsequently wrote about him took up and possibly reinterpreted the data presented by Ivić. Much attention has been paid by art historians to the church in Bârsău (Hung. Berekszó, Hunedoara county)², where this Serbian nobleman is said to have been buried, for there is no doubt that Nikola Crepović was one of the Serbian nobles whom fate brought to Transylvania, where he now rests. He is one of countless members of the Serbian elite who, by force of circumstances, had to seek a new home in the face of the Ottoman threat.

The South Slavic (in this case Serbian) migration to the Hungarian Kingdom began as early as the 14th century, and reached its peak in the second half of the following century, after the fall of Smederevo to the Turks. Historians have mostly focused on the great Serbian noble families that took refuge in the Hungarian Kingdom – the Brankovićs, Jakšićs, Belmuževićs, Bakićs – whose history could be traced over several generations³. The families

¹ Aleksa Ivić, *Istoriја Срба у Угарској од пада Смедерева до сеобе под Чарнојевићем (1459–1690)*, Zagreb 1914, reproduced in *Istoriја Срба у Војводини: од најстаријих времена до оснивања Потиско-поморишке границе (1703)*, Novi Sad 1929, but the second work was only partially accessible to me, so I will quote it in *Istoriја Срба у Угарској*.

² Károly Torma, “A berekszói régi templom Hunyad megyében”, *Archaeologiai Közlemények* 13, 1 (1879) 53–61; Virgil Vătăşianu, *Vechile biserici de piatră româneşti din judeţul Hunedoara*, Cluj 1930; Silviu Dragomir, “Ctitorii bisericii din Bârsău în judeţul Hunedoara”, *Anuarul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice. Sectia pentru Transilvania. 1930–1931* (1932) 139–148; Peana Burnichioiu, “Revenirea la un subiect fără surse: biserica din Bârsău în secolele XV–XVI”, *Medievalia Transilvanica* 5–6/1–2 (2001–2002) 97–111; Florin Dobrei, *Biserici ortodoxe hunedorene*, Reşiţa 2011, 72–76.

³ Samu Borovszky, “A nagylaki uradalom története”, in: *Értekezések a történeti tudományok köréből*, Budapest 1900, 1–50; Lajos Thallóczy & Antal Áldásy, *A Magyarország és Szerbia közti összeköttetések oklevéltára. Magyarország mellékartományainak oklevéltára II* (Monumenta Hungariae Historica, Diplomataria XXXIII), Budapest 1907; Јован Радонић, *Прилози за историју Срба у Угарској у XVI, XVII и XVIII веку*, Novi Sad 1909; А. Ивић, *Историја Срба у Угарској; Историја Срба у Војводини*; Yovan Radonitch, *Histoire des Serbes de Hongrie*,

in the second echelon, although known, remained somewhat in the shadows, on the one hand because they did not have the political and military relevance of the prominent members mentioned above, and on the other hand because sources are not as generous. In general, the Serbian nobility who took refuge in Hungary settled in the southern parts of the Kingdom, in the territory now known as Banat. The Timișoara area, the Mureș valley (around the Lipova town), the territory of the former Torontal county became home to most of them. There was the base of the estates of most of the important Serbian families, a situation that attracted other social categories from the South Slavic regions. In the first half of the 16th century, the Serbian population in the lower parts of the Hungarian Kingdom was quite significant, with Serbs actively involved in the political events of the time. These refugees also contributed to the development of an Orthodox hierarchy in these areas, who began to appear in documents in connection with the town of Lipova (Hung. Lippa, Arad county)⁴. A much smaller part of the South Slavic nobility obtained estates in Transylvania or settled there by marriage. This is the case of Lady Milica Belmužević⁵ and Lady Anna Jakšić⁶ or some persons of Croatian origin, the most representative being Juraj Utiješenović Martinuzzi⁷ and Gaspar Perušić⁸.

Paris 1919; Ненад Лемајић, *Српска елита на прелому епоха*, Сремска Митровица – Источно Сарајево 2006; Момчило Спремић, “Породица Јакшић у Банату”, у: *Банат кроз векове. Служеви култура Баната. Зборник радова*, ур. Миодраг Матицки и Видојко Јовић, Београд 2010, 33–63. Adrian Magina, “Un nobil sârb în Banatul secolului al XV-lea: Miloș Belmužević”, *Analele Banatului. Serie nouă, Arheologie – Istorie* 18 (2010) 135–142; Александар Крстић, “Нови подаци о војводи Милошу Белмужевићу и његовој породици”, *Иницијал. Часопис за средњовековне студије* 1 (2013) 161–185; Saša Iașin, *Familii nobiliare sârbești din Banat în secolele al XV-lea și al XVI-lea*, Cluj-Napoca 2015; Aleksandar Krstić & Adrian Magina, “The Belmužević family – the fate of a noble family in South East Europe during the turbulent period of the Ottoman conquest (the 15th and the first half of the 16th century)”, *Revue d’Études Sud-Est Européennes* 59 (2021) 105–123.

⁴ Adrian Magina, “The city and the church. Religious life in Lipova, the 14th–16th centuries”, in: *Common Man, Society and Religion in the 16th Century/Gemeiner Mann, Gesellschaft und Religion Im 16. Jahrhundert: Piety, Morality and Discipline in the Carpathian Basin/Frömmigkeit, Moral und Sozialdisziplinierung Im Karpatenbogen*, ed. Ulrich A. Wien et al., Göttingen 2021, 256–260.

⁵ Adrian Magina, “Milica Belmužević l’histoire d’une noble dame du XVI^e siècle”, *Иницијал. Часопис за средњовековне студије* 2 (2014) 145–162.

⁶ Livia Magina, “Ana Jakšić: A woman of her time”, *Иницијал. Часопис за средњовековне студије* 8 (2020) 101–115.

⁷ Adriano Papo & Gizella Nemeth Papo, *Nemăsurata ispită a puterii. Gheorghe Martinuzzi adevăratul rege al Transilvaniei în secolul al XVI-lea*, Ratio et Revelatio, Oradea 2019.

⁸ Florin Nicolae Ardelean & Neven Isailović, “From Croatia to Transylvania: War, Migration and Adaptive Strategies in the Case of the Perušić Family (15th–17th Centuries)”, *Povijesni prilozi* 60 (2021) 213–256.

Later on, after the present-day territory of Banat came under the rule of the High Porte (1552), a large part of the South Slavic nobility and population migrated to Transylvania, settling in various counties of the new autonomous Principality.

Origin, family and relationships

We do not have any information, at least until now, about Crepović, before the document addressed to the Emperor in 1542 by the Serbian community in the lower parts of the Hungarian Kingdom⁹. Historians have identified three noble families bearing this name – one in Herzegovina, one in Pomoravlje and one in Banat – but have not been able to find any connection between them¹⁰. At the time of his mention, Nikola must have been of a certain age (perhaps in his 30s) as he held the position of a captain and had a certain prestige as he was included among the representatives of the Serbian population in the southern areas of the Kingdom. According to the short text that mentions him in 1542, the beginnings of Crepović's career must be linked to the lower parts of the Hungarian Kingdom. In fact, Nikola's first noble title was Crepović of Radna (Nicolaus Cherepowyth of Radna¹¹ – a town in the Mureș valley, county of Arad), later he was mentioned as Crepović of Sásvár (an extinct settlement not far from Timișoara, Timiș county)¹². It is not excluded that Crepović was born in the lower parts of the Kingdom, sometime in the first decades of that century. Although there are no conclusive arguments, I believe that Nikola belonged to the generation of Serbs born and raised in the former Hungarian Kingdom, on the territory of present-day Banat, and was thus well anchored in the realities of their place of origin. This might explain his knowledge of the Hungarian language, perhaps even in writing, since the three letters, which bear his name and that of Francis Horvath (perhaps Croatian by name) as authors, were written in Hungarian¹³. His knowledge of Hungarian facilitated his integration into the Transylvanian elite, even though the area of the Hunedoara county was ethnically predominantly Romanian, but the nobility largely communicated in Hungarian¹⁴. It is not known whether he had

⁹ А. Ивић, *Историја Срба*, 147–148.

¹⁰ S. Iașin, *Familii nobiliare sârbești*, 192.

¹¹ *Acta et Documenta partes Regni Hungariae inferiores concernentia (Acta et Documenta)*, collegit et edidit Hadrianus Magina, Mega, Cluj-Napoca 2020, 215.

¹² А. Ивић, *Историја Срба*, 183; S. Dragomir, “Ctitorii bisericii din Bârsău”, 145; I. Burnichioiu, “Revenirea la un subiect fără surse”, 105.

¹³ See comments on the letters in the presentation of his career.

¹⁴ For the noble society in the Hunedoara area in the 16–17th centuries and the use of the Romanian language see Adrian Andrei Rusu, *Ctitori și biserici din Țara Hațegului până la*

any brothers or sisters, although one document records a Gaspar Crepović (*Cherepowyth*) who died in 1560 without descendants, and whose estates Padej (*Pathe*) and Zyhan in the Cenad (Csanád) county were donated to Martin Szentgothárdi, Gregor and Clement Dóczy¹⁵. One can only speculate that Nikola and Gaspar were relatives, but on this we have no certainty.

If we accept the area of present-day Banat as Nikola's birthplace, we should first consider the Lipova area in the Mureş valley, which was well populated with Serbs in the first half of the 16th century, with the nobiliary particle of Radna also suggesting this area. Stefan Zabo, who in 1542 is mentioned among the Serbian captains together with Crepović, could be identical with the mayor (*iudex*) of Lipova – *Stephanus Zabo* – mentioned in several city charters issued between 1539 and 1544¹⁶. It is just a hypothesis, but it would confirm the importance of the South Slavic element in the Mureş valley region in the first half of the 16th century. On the other hand, another possible place of Crepović's origin could be Sásvár, a town owned by voivode Miloš Belmužević, but many Serbian names can be found there in the early 16th century. It may be that the particle of Sásvár (from Sasvar, Saswar, or *sasvariensis* on Nikola's gravestone)¹⁷ indicates both the estate held and the place of origin. It would not be unusual for a family like Crepović, which had its heyday in the mid-16th century, to originate from the estates of the great Serbian aristocrats who settled in Hungary in the second half of the previous century. As family members on the estates of the Jakšićs, Belmuževićs or Brankovićs, they were able to amass a certain amount of wealth, and after the demise of these great nobles, these new families were able to assert themselves by taking over their political, military and sometimes landed inheritance. Within the bounds of our present knowledge, we must limit ourselves to these simple hypotheses, and new documents (if discovered) will confirm or refute them. Until the events of 1551–1552 the Serbian nobleman lived in the lower part of the Hungarian Kingdom, but after the Ottomans occupied the territory between the Mureş–Danube and the Tisza, he took refuge with his wife and children in Transylvania (*egregius Nicolaus Cherepywth, qui capta Temeswar in Transylvaniam cum uxore et liberis profugit*)¹⁸.

1700, Ed. Muz. Sătmărean, Satu Mare 1997.

¹⁵ Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (MNL OL), A 57, Librii regii, v. III, f. 644.

¹⁶ Adrian Magina, "Documentele autorităților urbane din Lipova (1455–1548)", *Banatica* 23 (2013) 612–616.

¹⁷ Torma, "A berekszói régi templom", 56: Hic sepultus jacet Sasvar(iensis)/ Nicolaus..... vit

Magnifi(cus dominus Ni)colaus..... vit cap(itaneus/ Alfeldien(sis serenissimi Joa)/nnis (electi regis) / consili(arius A. D.) /156.....

¹⁸ MNL OL A 57 Librii Regii, v. III, f. 198.

At least two versions about his wife have circulated in historiography. Romanian historians, among whom Nicolae Iorga stands out, considered that Crepović was married to Ursula Gârliște (Gerlestey), who came from a Romanian noble family around Caransebeș¹⁹. The information was highlighted in the mid-19th century by Anton Kurz²⁰ and then replicated in historical writings. Kurz, and after him Iorga, relied on an epitaph copied in the 18th century by József Benkő from a tomb in the church of Mureșenii de Câmpie (Hung. Omboztelke, Cluj county) and preserved in one of his manuscripts in the Aiud library²¹. However, there is a logical flaw in considering this noble lady as Crepović's wife. She does not appear in any way among the known members of the Gârliște (Gerlestey) family from Banat²², and if she was the wife of the Serbian nobleman, why did she not find her final resting place with him in Bârsău, but in a village in Transylvania, far from her husband and Banat from which she theoretically came? Romanian historian Silviu Dragomir considered that this epitaph is nothing but a forgery produced in the first half of the 19th century by count József Kemény, who was notorious for falsification of historical documents²³.

The second version was proposed by Aleksa Ivić, who on the basis of documents identified in the Hungarian archives, proved that Crepović's wife was none other than Mara (Margareta), the daughter of nobleman Petar Ovčarević. Ivić's reconstruction of Nikola family is in agreement with the content of the tombstones discovered in the Orthodox church in Bârsău, whose inscriptions, even if only partially preserved, indicate without doubt that Mara was the wife of Nikola Crepović²⁴. The Ovčarević family also had their main domains in the lower parts of the Hungarian Kingdom. Petar Ovčarević, Mara's father, was one of the most prominent Serbian nobles of the era of King John Szapolyai, and his descendants also rose to important positions. For a short time, this nobleman was married to Milica Belmužević²⁵, which was later the cause of disputes between their descendants over some of their estates.

¹⁹ Nicolae Iorga, "Elena Cherepovici, Doamna lui Petru-Vodă Mircea al Țerii-Românești", *Revista Istorică* 7–9 (1930) 154–157.

²⁰ Anton Kurz, "Elena Cherepovici socia lui Petru III Șchiopulu, care a domnit în terra Românească 1560–1567", in: *Magazinu istoricu pentru Dacia*, suptu redacția lui A. Treb. Laurianu și Nicol. Bălcescu, v. V, București, Tiparul Collegiului Național 1847, 371–383.

²¹ Hic jacet/Nobilissima ac Magnifica Domina/Ursula Gerlistei/Consors/Magnifici Viri/Nicolai Cherepovith/M. L. X. V – Ibidem, p. 379.

²² Ligia Boldea, "Tradiție și continuitate în lumea demnitarilor români ai banatului de Caransebeș și Lugoj – Gârleştenii de Rudăria", *Analele Banatului, S.N., Arheologie-Istorie* 22 (2014) 275–291.

²³ S. Dragomir, "Ctitorii bisericii din Bârsău", 146.

²⁴ I. Burnichioiu, "Revenirea la un subiect fără surse", 102.

²⁵ The marriage between these two Serbian nobles was short-lived. In 1538 Milica was mentioned only as the widow of Nicholas Kendeffy of Râu de Mori (MNL OL, F 4 Cista

Crepović lived the last decade of his life in Transylvania, where he died in the prime of his life, sometime in April 1562. In the first week of that month, he was still alive in his estate at Mănărade (Monora), where he resided, waiting for the representatives of the Wallachian ruler to discuss the marriage of his daughter Jelena. Already on 5 May, the envoy of the Wallachian voivode was on his way to his widow²⁶, which means that the death of the Serbian nobleman took place between 6 April (last mention of him alive) and 5 May. One can only speculate about the cause of death, but in the absence of concrete information any conjecture would be hazardous.

Nikola's marriage to Mara Ovčarević resulted in two daughters, Jelena and Katerina. More information has been preserved about the first one, perhaps because she had a more tumultuous destiny. Not long before his death, Crepović negotiated Jelena's marriage to Peter the Younger (Petru cel Tânăr) of Wallachia. According to a report of John Belsius to King Maximilian in June 1562, the bride-to-be was 18 years old²⁷, born around 1544. Her father's death delayed Jelena's marriage for a while, but finally, after the obligatory year of mourning, the wedding took place in Sibiu on 22 August 1563²⁸, although according to a Saxon chronicler the bride left for Wallachia as early as 8 August²⁹. The marriage between Jelena and Peter the Younger took some time to be set up, but it ended very quickly. As early as January 1564 there was some news that, thanks to her mother-in-law, Crepović's daughter would be sent back to Transylvania. However, the dissolution of the marriage between the two was a fact in 1566, when King John Sigismund took Jelena and her daughter Theodoricza under his personal protection and established their residence in Deva³⁰. After her return to Transylvania, still very young (she was

comitatum, Hunyad, cista 2-da, fasc. 5, no. 31), and on 4 March 1542 she was mentioned as the widow of Petar Ovčarević (Serviciul Județean al Arhivelor Naționale Cluj – SJAN Cluj, colecția personală Mike Sándor, no. 119: *Mylycza relicte quondam Petri Olcharovith*). A copy of the same document in the Library of the Romanian Academy, Cluj–Napoca branch [BAR Cluj], Kemény József collection, mss. KJ 288/D, v. 10, f. 72). He died sometime between February and May 1541. On 20 January he was mentioned as alive in a donation (MNL OL, F 4 Cista comitatum, Hunyad, cista 1-ma, fasc. 7, no. 5), but on 23 May he was mentioned as deceased (MNL OL, F 4 Cista comitatum, Hunyad, cista 1-ma, fasc. 6, no. 29), so the marriage may have lasted about three–four years.

²⁶ Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki, *Documente privitoare la istoria Românilor*, v. XI, 1517–1612, ed. Nicolae Iorga, București 1900, 875.

²⁷ Latin text in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, v. II/1, 1451–1575, București 1891, 429–430; Romanian translation can be found in: *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, v. II, ed. Maria Hoban et al., București 1970, 191.

²⁸ Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, v. XI, 581; A. Kurz, "Elena Cherepovici", 372.

²⁹ A. Kurz, "Elena Cherepovici", 372.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, 382–383; N. Iorga, "Elena Cherepovici, 157.

22 years old), Jelena remarried nobleman Vladimir the Muscovite³¹, probably a nobleman of Russian origin, whose epitaph was in the 19th century partially preserved in the church of Bârsău, and who seems to have died after 1580³². The last written mention of Jelena comes from 1572, in a charter in which she was mentioned with her second husband. The data about Katerina are somewhat more summary. It is known that for a short period she was married to Valentin Török of Enning, the supreme lord of the Hunedoara county³³, who after her death in 1572 contracted a new marriage with Margaret Orbai³⁴.

Mara Ovčarević lived a long life, dying a few decades after Nikola Crepović. She probably also experienced some material hardship, having to sell off her valuables. In 1575, in the inventory of Lady Zamfira, the daughter of voivode Moise of Wallachia who had settled in Transylvania, there were two gold chains belonging to Crepović's wife³⁵. After her husband's death, Mara seems to have retired to her brother Dimitrije's estate³⁶, which in this context must be the village of Bârsău. She had the misfortune to outlive even her daughters and granddaughter, being mentioned in early 1581 in the context of her ownership over the Şoimuş estate in the Hunedoara county³⁷. In September 1581 she was recorded as deceased (*generosae quondam dominae Margarethae Olchiarwyth, relictæ videlicet egregii olim Cherepowyth de Sasvar*), her son-in-law Vladimir the Muscovite also mentioned as deceased. Following their deaths, several nobles who also had shares in Şoimuş and the surrounding villages initiated a legal action to divide the possessions held by Mara and Vladimir³⁸. Mara and Dimitrije's sister Jelena Ovčarević was also married in Transylvania, to Serbian nobleman Stefan Balintitt of Teiuş (Hung. Tövis, Alba county), and this marriage produced a son Theodor³⁹. In 1530 Stefan Balintitt or Balintić was the supreme captain of the Serbs in Hungary (*Stephanus*

³¹ А. Ивић, *Историја Срба*, 183.

³² (M)agnifici d(omini) / Vladimir(i)..... moschovita(e) / Ann(o) D(omini) MDLXX.. / XVI, ano aet (atis) – K. Torma, “A berekszói régi templom”, 56; I. Burnichioiu, “Revenirea la un subiect fără surse”, 105.

³³ In 1572 she is mentioned as *magnifici Valentini Teoreok de Enning consorti* – А. Ивић, *Историја Срба*, 183.

³⁴ S. Dragomir, “Ctitorii bisericii din Bârsău”, 147.

³⁵ Andrei Veress, *Documente privitoare la Istoria Ardealului, Moldovei și Țării Românești*, vol. II, București 1930, 83.

³⁶ А. Ивић, *Историја Срба*, 182.

³⁷ *Az Erdélyi káptalan jegyzőkönyvei 1222–1599*, v. I (Erdélyi történelmi adatok VIII), ed. Zsolt Bogdándi & Emőke Gálfi, Kolozsvár 2006, no. 269; Burnichioiu, “Revenirea la un subiect fără surse”, 110.

³⁸ MNL OL, F 2 Protocolla, v. I, f. 63–65, summarised in Hungarian in *Az Erdélyi káptalan jegyzőkönyvei*, v. I, no. 303.

³⁹ S. Dragomir, “Ctitorii bisericii din Bârsău”, 147.

Balyntijth, supremus Capitaneus Rascianorum)⁴⁰, a position later held by Nikola Crepović.

The Crepović family was quickly integrated into the Transylvanian elite, but unlike other Serbian nobles who changed their religion, both Nikola and his wife and their daughters kept their Orthodox faith. It is said that, during his time as the ban of Caransebeş (1559), he contributed to the expulsion of the Franciscans from the town⁴¹. Mara and her daughters played a very important role in the restoration and painting of the Orthodox church in Bârsău, which became the final resting place for members of the Ovčarević and Crepović family. The work was carried out after Nikola's death, as evidenced by two Slavonic graffiti found inside the church. The two female characters represented in the position of the founder (ktetor) were Mara (*господжа Мара Овчаробича Петра дашерь бивша покоынога господара Мишколе Цреповича* / Lady Mara daughter of Peter Ovčarević, former wife of late nobleman Nikola Crepović) and daughter Katerina (*господжа Катаріна дъщї покоынога господара Николе Цреповича бивша Тоуркоу Балинтова господжа* / Lady Katerina daughter of late nobleman Nikola Crepović, former wife of Bálint Török). According to the art historians who analysed the painting, the church's dedication was also changed with the restoration, which has since been dedicated to St. Nicholas. The dress of the two female founders is typical of the Transylvanian/Hungarian elite of the 16th century. Katerina's costume is elegant and sober with Western analogies, as is her mother Mara's dress, but more limited in colour⁴². Given that Nikola is mentioned as deceased in those notes, the period of the church's restoration must be sought in the decades after his death (1562). Even though the wife and daughter are not mentioned as deceased in the Slavonic graffiti, their status as former ladies of Crepović and Valentin Török raises questions as to whether they were already dead when the work was completed. We know that when Katerina died in 1572, she was buried in a Romanian village near Deva, most probably Bârsău, in the very church she helped to rebuild⁴³. An epitaph copied at the end of the 18th century captures Margaret's grief at having to bury her beloved daughter:

Olczaravit moerens hoc Margaretha sepulchrum
Condiderat natae quae Catharina suae
Ista virum Kató dilexit amore, Deumque:

⁴⁰ Sándor Szilágyi, "Gritti életéhez", *Történeti Lapok*, II-dik évfolyam, 22 szám (1875) 1177.

⁴¹ János Karácsonyi, *Szt. Ferencz rendjének története Magyarországon 1711-ig*, v. II, Budapest 1924, 89.

⁴² I. Burnichioiu, "Revenirea la un subiect fără surse", 102–104.

⁴³ *Catharinam Czerepovit filiam Margarethae Olczárovitt quae 1572. obiit, et tumulata jacet in pago Valachico prope Devam* – K. Torma, "A berekszói régi templom", 58.

Hanc genus, banc pietas, nobilitatque thorus⁴⁴.

As can be seen, the members of the family maintained their attachment to the Orthodox Church and their fondness for Slavic written culture, but at the same time they interacted with Latin and Hungarian cultural formulas. All of the family's political and marital ties suggest that they were well grounded in the realities of their time, but were committed to preserving certain traditions. Serbian and Hungarian languages were certainly used in the family, and Jelena must have known basic Romanian and perhaps Slavic, given the marriages she had contracted. The use of Serbian is evidenced by the graffiti in the church, and the link between language and religion expressed a certain attachment, not only cultural but also ethnic, at the time.

The career of a Serbian nobleman. Political and military activity

In the political and military turmoil of the mid-16th century, in 1542, the name of Nikola Crepović is recorded in documents. This Serbian nobleman appears somewhat suddenly, like many others, in a record of 1 September of that year, among the captains of Serbian troops in the lower part of the Kingdom. It is a letter addressed to the Habsburg Emperor by the *capitanei Racionorum* Radić Radoza, Nikola Crepović (Chrepwyt), Petar Vračilić (Wrachylyth), Stefan Zabo, the Milola voivode, Petar Herlić (Herlyg), Jovan Dejak (Deyak), Đurađ Klinčić (Klynchyth), together with all the Serbs of the lower parts (*universi Rasciani ad partes inferiores*). Gathered at Hodoş, in the valley of the Mureş river, they wrote to the sovereign and informed him that they had sent Petar Bosić to the imperial court to discuss and negotiate their demands⁴⁵. This letter is important because it brings to light a number of persons about whom nothing more was known, including Crepović. We find Nikola in an important position, that of captain, but it is impossible to know how long he held this position. The Serbian request to negotiate with Ferdinand must be seen in the context of the death of King John Szapolyai and the events that followed⁴⁶. In the political turmoil of the fifth decade of

⁴⁴ Ibidem, 59; S. Dragomir, "Ctitorii bisericii din Bârsău", 142 proposed correcting the second verse to the logical form: *Sepulchrum condiderat natae quae Catharina suae*.

⁴⁵ Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv [=HHStA], Allgemeine Akten. Hungarica, fasz. 48, Konv. C, f. 2, edited by A. Ивић, *Истопуја Срба*, 147–148, but where the name Klinčić has been transcribed as Plinčić.

⁴⁶ For the political and military situation of the Hungarian Kingdom after Szapolyai's death see Cristina Feneşan, *Constituirea principatului autonom al Transilvaniei*, Editura Enciclopedica, Bucureşti 1997; A. Papo & G. Nemeth Papo, *Nemăsurata ispită a puterii*, 86–130.

the 16th century, the Serbs in Hungary had to choose between the Szapolyai family and Ferdinand of Habsburg⁴⁷. The House of Austria tried to obtain the former territories of the Hungarian Kingdom through negotiations, as the use of force was beyond the powers of the Habsburgs. As for the lower parts, the Emperor's envoy, Gaspar Seredi, took into account the particular ethnic and military situation. For the position of lord of the Timis county it was considered necessary to have a skilled man (*idoneum hominem*) who could reconcile the Hungarians with the Serbs and keep them under obedience (*Hungaris cum Rascianis concordare et in obedientia tenere*)⁴⁸. Another proposal concerned the remaining property of the Jakšić family, which was to be divided among the Serbs (i.e. the Serbian nobility), and in this way the property of the nobles, which the Serbs occupied and held by force (*violenter ipsi possident*), could be released from their hands⁴⁹.

It seems that after the rapprochement with the Habsburgs in 1542, the Serbs mostly chose Queen Isabella's side. This was also helped by the fact that there were two important nobles of South Slavic origin around the Queen: Juraj Utiješenić Martinuzzi and Petar Petrović, both of whom were guardians of the minor king. While the latter clearly sided with the Szapolyai family to whom he was related, Martinuzzi pursued a duplicitous policy, often oscillating between the Habsburgs and the Ottoman Porte. This policy, however, brought him into conflict with the Queen and Petrović. Each side tried to attract as many supporters as possible, and the Serbs in the southern parts of the Kingdom sided with Petrović, who was seen as one of their own⁵⁰. For a few years, Crepović did not come to the attention of the sources. In 1547, on the occasion of a trial between the Serb Petar alias Petko of Periam (Hung. Perjámos, Timiş county) (*Petrus alias Pethko vocatus, Rascianus de Peryemes*) and the nobles Thelegdi and Wesseny concerning stolen goods, among the arbitrators present in this dispute were Nikola Crepović (Cherepowyth) and Đurađ Klinčić (Klynchyth)⁵¹, two of the representative captains of the Serbs in Lower Hungary. Nikola also appears in an important position two years later. On 10 August 1549, Petar Petrović, together with Nikola Crepović, Francis Patócsi, Anton Losonczi, John Zalanczi, Peter the Literate and Michael Csáki,

⁴⁷ А. Ивић, *Историја Срба*, 135–163.

⁴⁸ HHStA, Allgemeine Akten. Hungarica, fasz. 49, konv. B, f. 60v.

⁴⁹ Ibidem, f. 70v; А. Ивић, *Историја Срба*, 146.

⁵⁰ For Petrović: Szabolcs Varga, "Péter Petrovics (1487–1557) in the service of Queen Isabella", in: *Isabella Jagiellon, Queen of Hungary (1539–1559)*, ed. Ágnes Máté & Teréy Oborni, Research Centre for the Humanities, Budapest 2020, 327–345; Adrian Magina, "Peter Petrović and Protestantism. Aspects concerning the patronage of the Reformation during its early period", *Иницијал. Часопис за средњовековне студије* 3 (2015) 139–159.

⁵¹ SJAN Cluj, fond Vécsey, Documente fasciculate, no. 5, f. 18.

concluded an agreement to support each other and serve the interests of Queen Isabella and her son⁵². It was an unequivocal position of the Serbian nobleman, visible in his actions the following year. In 1550 an open armed conflict broke out between the Queen and Martinuzzi. Fearing “Friar George’s” troops, the Queen and Petrović retreated to Alba-Iulia, defended by 2000 Serbian soldiers. Petar Petrović’s call for the Queen’s support was answered by 7000 Serbs from the area of Caransebeş and Lugoj, Srem and Transylvania, who attacked Brănişca (Hung. Branycska, Hunedoara county), Hunedoara (Hung. Hunyad) and Martinuzzi’s castle at Vinţu de Jos (Hung. Alvinc, Alba county). In the meantime, 8,000 Serbs recruited from the Timisoara and Lipova area under the command of Nikola Crepović attacked Cenad (Hung. Csanád, Cenad county), defended by the Croat Gaspar Perušić, Martinuzzi’s supporter. In trouble, Perušić desperately asked for help, as the town was burned and was about to be conquered. Thomas Várkocs set out from Oradea (Hung. Nagyvárad) to save him, and taking advantage of the indiscipline in Crepović’s camp he made a surprise attack one morning, killing 2500 Serbs and taking another 4000 prisoners, if we are to believe the sources of the time. Nikola ran away and stopped only in the arms of his wife, who received him with reproaches and insults for his defeat⁵³. The two sides were reconciled for the time being, but the dispute between the Queen, Petrović and Martinuzzi continued dormant until the following year, when Isabella, fed up with the conflicts, renounced the throne in favour of Ferdinand of Habsburg and withdrew from Transylvania.

In this context, Serbian nobles, including Crepović, turned to the Habsburgs, and the rewards were not long in coming. Ferdinand of Habsburg guaranteed on two occasions (July and August 1551) to the Serbian nobility and population around Timișoara the old rights, freedoms, privileges and exemptions obtained from the former Hungarian kings in exchange for keeping faith with the sovereign⁵⁴. For Crepović the political change was even favourable in his career, and he established himself as one of the most faithful Serbian nobles in the service of the House of Austria. This also created some problems, as not all Hungarian nobles were happy with the benefits offered to the Serbs. On 6 September 1551, the new lord of the Timiș county, Stephen

⁵² *Acta et Documenta*, 215–216.

⁵³ Main sources in presenting Crepović’s role: Ascanio Centorio de gli (Ortensi) Hortensi, *Commentarii Della Guerra Di Transilvania*, 1566, 49–50; Wolfgang Bethlen, *Historia de rebus Transsylvanicis*, t. I, Cibinii 1782, 448–450; Georgius Pray, *Epistolae procerum regni Hungariae*, pars II, Posonii 1806, 209–210. A very thorough presentation based on them: Lajos Kropf, “Castaldo Erdélyben”, *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 9 (1896) 53–55; A. Papo & G. Nemeth Papo, *Nemásurata ispitã a puterii*, 151–152; N. Isailović & Fl. N. Ardelean, “From Croatia to Transylvania”, 230.

⁵⁴ Costin Feneșan, *Diplomatarium Banaticum*, v. I, Cluj-Napoca 2016, 339–343.

Losonczi, wrote to the Emperor that the Serbs had come into possession of more than 600 (*sexingentos*) of his serfs, and asked the sovereign to return them to him⁵⁵. Losonczi's vindictive attitude towards the Serbs, as will be seen, gave rise to certain disputes in the following year. However, the annexation of Transylvania and the former lower parts of the Kingdom by the Habsburgs was not viewed favourably by the High Porte. The southern part of the Kingdom had been donated by Sultan Süleyman in 1541 to Petar Petrović with the title of sançak⁵⁶, and the appointment of Stephen Losonczi as the lord of the Timiș county could only irritate the Sultan, whose sovereign rights were thus infringed. The military events of autumn 1551 were a good opportunity for Crepović to establish himself as a good servant of the Habsburgs. In September 1551, an Ottoman army entered the territory between the Danube-Mureș and the Tisza rivers with the intention of driving out the Habsburg troops. Nikola was on the front line of this conflict. Because he was familiar with the present-day area of Banat, Crepović was sent with Francis Horvath to observe the Ottoman troop movements. On 17 September 1551, they sent two reports from Horogszeg written in Hungarian on the situation they encountered. In the first letter to Bartholomew Horvatinović and Francis Zay from Szolnok, Crepović and Horvath informed them that the Turks were moving towards Lipova and Cenad⁵⁷. On the same day, a second letter was sent to captain-in-chief Francis Bebek and Erasmus Teuffel, informing them that the siege of the Becej fortress had begun and that the next Ottoman targets were Beckserek (today Zrenjanin) and Cenad⁵⁸. The two commanders remained to monitor the progress of the Ottoman military operation, and on 19 September, from Biled (Hung. Billéd, Timiș county) they sent a new letter in Hungarian to Andrew Báthory: "We sent fifty horsemen to Galad to find out news and catch informers, and they found the Turks, but because there were so many, they did not dare to go against them", the two announced. The news was not good at all for "it is heard that the representatives of Beckserek went to the beylerbey and asked him not to go there, for they themselves would surrender to him both the city and the town with the people in it"⁵⁹. On the basis of their letter, Báthory informed general Castaldo about the military situation, which was difficult, especially in

⁵⁵ HHStA, Allgemeine Akten. Hungarica, fasz. 59, konv. B, f. 36v.

⁵⁶ Огъен Крешић, "Петровићев санџак", *Историјски часопис* 61 (2012) 129–142, especially 131–134 and 140–141; Cr. Feneșan, *Constituirea principatului autonom*, 19.

⁵⁷ HHStA, Allgemeine Akten. Hungarica, fasz. 60 konv. A, f. 149.

⁵⁸ *Acta et Documenta*, 228.

⁵⁹ HHStA, Allgemeine Akten. Hungarica, fasz. 59 konv. B, f. 134, published by Lajos Szádeczky, "Magyar levelek a XVI. sz. közepéről", *Történelmi Tár*, 598.

Beckerek, where the Serbs of the town and the island (*Rascianos ex civitate et ex insulae*) were ready to betray⁶⁰.

The Ottoman troops conquered a good part of what is now the Banat region in the autumn of 1551, but well-organised defences and bad weather prevented them from occupying Timișoara, which the Christians took advantage of. The counter-attack of the imperial troops led the Ottomans to leave the urban centres they had initially conquered⁶¹. Crepović was again in the thick of the fighting to drive out the Turkish troops, this time alongside his old enemy Gaspar Perušić, and together they were involved in the battle of Lipova⁶². On the evening of 4 December, by moonlight, Ullama Pasha and his 1,200 men marched in massive lines out of the fortress of Lipova. The Ottoman troops were to be escorted to the Timiș river by 300 Serbian horsemen under the command of Nikola Crepović⁶³. The Christians did not respect the agreement made with the Turks and attacked them, Ullama barely escaping to the Ottoman territory. This episode would have a negative impact in the following year, when after the conquest of Timisoara, the Ottomans would slaughter the Christian garrison that had surrendered.

Despite the participation in the military campaign, there were some disagreements between the Serbian nobles and the Stephen Losonczi, the lord of the Timiș county. In order to solve the problems, Losonczi summoned the nobles from Timiș and neighbouring counties as well as the Serbian commanders to a meeting on 15 December, where he convinced them to remain loyal to the Emperor by returning their property. As a gesture of goodwill, the Serbs offered the necessary food and goods to the Timișoara garrison, with Losonczi investing Crepović with the task of supplying the town⁶⁴. A few days later, the Timiș county lord wrote to Castaldo and informed him that he had managed to reach an agreement with the Serbs regarding the supply of the fortress that Crepović was in charge of⁶⁵.

At first glance, the situation of the Serbs in southern Hungary, and of Nikola Crepović in particular, seemed to be very good at the beginning of 1552. Appearances were deceptive, however, as the conflict with Losonczi was far from over. The county lord continued to put pressure on the Serbian

⁶⁰ HHStA, Allgemeine Akten. Hungarica, fasz. 59 konv. B, f. 135v–136.

⁶¹ Florin Nicolae Ardelean, “Mercenarii străini și inovațiile militare moderne timpurii în Europa central-răsăriteană. Armata lui Castaldo în Transilvania și Banat”, *Banatica* 25 (2015) 46–47.

⁶² Károly Czimer, “Temesvár megvétele 1551–1552”, *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 6 (1893) 197; N. Isailović & Fl. N. Ardelean, “From Croatia to Transylvania”, 231.

⁶³ K. Czimer, “Temesvár megvétele 1551–1552”, 208.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, 212.

⁶⁵ Frigyes Pesty, *Krassó vármegye története*, v. IV, Budapest 1883, 59.

nobles through his supporters. Thus, Benedict Kosár, the castellan of Timișoara (*praefectus arcis Themesiensis*)⁶⁶, occupied certain Serbian possessions around the city. Serbian nobles complained to Bernardo de Aldana about Kosár's attitude, and Crepović wrote personally to the Spanish commander to describe the situation⁶⁷. Aldana notes that the Hungarian nobles occupied the Serbian possessions with great fury and began to plunder their goods – grain, herds etc.⁶⁸ Nikola Crepović was directly affected by Losonczi's measures because, as general Castaldo informed the Emperor, the lord of the Timiș county personally occupied Crepović's property under the pretext that it belonged to his predecessors. Therefore, he warned, if the problem was not resolved, many of the Serbian inhabitants could switch to the Turks (*maior pars populorum illorum ad Turcas deficient*)⁶⁹. The case was brought to the country's assembly, but in a diet held in Turda (Hung. Torda, Cluj county) on 22 May, it was decided that the issues of Crepović and John Kende should be postponed until a future meeting⁷⁰.

Following the sovereign's reaction in favour of Serbs, towards the end of May Losonczi wrote to him and informed him of the conflict with Nikola Crepović and the other Serbs. He mentioned that Serbs under his command had plundered goods, possessions and peasants of the Emperor. He informed Ferdinand that the two representatives of the Serbs Nikola Crepović (*Nicolaus Screpwuyth, qui est supremus inter ipsos*) and Stepan Zabo had come to him and asked for clemency for the Serbs' reprehensible deeds. The two also demanded the return of property taken by force by a servant of Losonczi (i.e. Benedict Kosár). Therefore, in order to please Crepović, Losonczi gave him the requested goods from his own property, including four wagons of grain⁷¹. As can be seen, Nikola was considered the main leader of the Serbs, and it is in this context that the information on his tombstone that he held the dignity of *capitaneus Alfeldiensis* should be placed. I believe that this position could have been held by Crepović only before the occupation of the lower parts of the Kingdom by the Ottomans, sometime between 1542 and 1552, certainly in the latter year. A few days after the agreement between the county lord and

⁶⁶ HHStA, Allgemeine Akten. Hungarica fasz. 62 konv. A, f. 121.

⁶⁷ Ibidem, fasz. 63, Konv. B, f. 107, 113, published by A. Ивић, *Историја Срба у Угарској*, 164–165.

⁶⁸ HHStA, Allgemeine Akten. Hungarica, fasz. 63, Konv. B, f. 108–109, partly printed in A. Ивић, *Историја Срба у Угарској*, 165–166.

⁶⁹ HHStA, Allgemeine Akten. Hungarica, fasz. 63 konv. B, f. 49v.

⁷⁰ *Monumenta Comititalia Regni Transilvaniae (MCRT)*, v. I, ed. Sándor Szilágyi, Budapest 1875, 413.

⁷¹ HHStA, Allgemeine Akten. Hungarica fasz. 64, konv. A, f. 112v-113; A. Ивић, *Историја Срба у Угарској*, 166.

the Serbian nobles, on 3 June 1552, Losonczi wrote again to the Emperor. He announced that Crepović had presented himself with a sovereign's warrant to settle the question of his property. The Serbian nobleman also told him that he knew of a letter in Hungarian that had been sent to the Emperor. In that letter, John Kendi, John Leway and John Forgach expressed their opposition to Crepović's ownership of certain estates. Losonczi stated that if the Serbs were not satisfied, they would not participate in the fighting. He then asked the Emperor to write to Castaldo to confirm Crepović's possession of his property⁷².

The return of the Ottoman troops in the summer of 1552 ended the conflict between the Serbian nobles and Losonczi. By the end of June, the Ottomans reached Timișoara and began the siege of the city. Both Timișoara and Lipova were well-supplied: "where the Serb Nikola Crepović managed to put so much wheat and oats that he was able to reach for a long time beyond what was left of the monk"⁷³. Despite good supplies, the situation was not favourable, neither to the besieged, nor to the Serb population in the surrounding area. On 8 July general Castaldo informed Maximilian that he had received a letter from Crepović in which he mentioned that two thousand Serbs with their families had left for Lipova, but since they were not much help in fortifying the town, he asked him to allow them to settle elsewhere in the Kingdom. So that there could be no doubt about who was making the request, Castaldo reminded the sovereign that it was the nobleman who in the previous year contributed a lot to the supply of Timișoara and Lipova⁷⁴. Already in mid-July the situation was very unfavourable for those besieged in the city on the Bega river. However, Castaldo was hopeful that it would be possible to intervene to their aid – among those expected to participate in the breaking of the encirclement of Timișoara and Lipova, along with the troops of Hungarian nobles or Petar Bakić's horsemen, a number of Serbs under Nikola Crepović (*aliquem numerum Rascianorum cum Nicolao Kerepovith*) were expected⁷⁵. The Serbian nobleman, together with 4,000 soldiers, was to

⁷² HHStA, Allgemeine Akten. Hungarica, fasz. 64, konv. B, f. 25-25v; A. Ивић, *Историја Срба у Угарској*, 166–167.

⁷³ HHStA, Allgemeine Akten. Hungarica, fasz. 64, konv. B, f. 163: adonde Nicolao Cherepuit Rasciano bizo poner tanto trigo y avena que bien podiera bastar para mucho tiempo allende de lo que quedo del frayle.

⁷⁴ HHStA, Allgemeine Akten. Hungarica, fasz. 66, konv. A, f. 58v: Nicolaus Cherepuith mihi scribit circa duo Rascianorum millia cum uxoribus et familiis servasse et versus Lippam duxisse, ubi munitionem arcis illius non parum adiuvant, pro quibus petit aliquem locum in regno isto ubi habitare possunt. Iste vero Nicolaus est qui hoc anno multa victualia Temesvario et Lippae subministravit.

⁷⁵ Ibidem, f. 156; Imre Szántó, "A Temesvidék és Maros-völgy várainak török uralom alá jutása 1552-ben", *Századok* 1 (1971) 50.

direct his efforts towards driving the Turks out of Lipova (*esta Strepuith con mas de quatromil Rascianos recogidos y cada dya van a correr y lo que ganan ostros lo cosen*)⁷⁶, but the task was never fulfilled because Bernardo de Aldana shamefully abandoned the fortress, despite having a defensive force of about 3,000 men⁷⁷.

At the end of July 1552, the territory between the Mureş–Danube and Tisza was in the hands of the Ottomans, who had established the Timișoara vilayet there. Following these events, Nikola Crepović and his family fled to Transylvania, but continued to be active in the service of the Habsburgs. Castaldo's attention was focused on the betrayal of Aldana, who was the target of many accusations. Among other things, the Spaniard was accused of having sold the provisions gathered to support the fortresses of Lipova, Cenad, Șoimoș (Hung. Solymos, Arad county) and Nădlac (Hung. Nagylak, Arad county). To these accusations were added those made by Crepović himself, that Aldana took many carts of grain that were intended for his wife's maintenance and took them to the Báthor town where he sold them (*Nicolaus Kerepovith presertim de hac re informationem habet, cui ipse Aldane multos currus tritici quos pro victu eius uxoris ad arcem Bathor miltibat, ademit et vendidit*)⁷⁸.

Once established in Transylvania, Nikola continued to be involved in the military action, as the Ottoman threat was looming. According to a report of vice-voivode Paul Bánk of Deva, the Serbs settled in Transylvania could amass more than 6,000 horsemen⁷⁹, but Castaldo considered that this number could rise to 11,000, without counting the infantrymen⁸⁰. Nikola personally sent 50 horsemen for the garrisons of the Kingdom, who on 20 February 1553 were in Deva⁸¹. A week later, Castaldo wrote to treasurer Peter Haller about the money for the soldiers, and the latter agreed with Crepović on the amounts to be paid⁸². The Serbian nobleman and his men initially served without pay, and it was only in March 1553 that Castaldo allocated the money to pay for 50 horsemen. On Crepović's advice, the Italian general agreed to hire another hundred Serbian horsemen to be sent to the Deva area, towards the frontiers⁸³.

⁷⁶ HHStA, Allgemeine Akten. Hungarica, fasz. 66 konv. A, f. 160.

⁷⁷ I. Szántó, "A Temesvidék és Maros-völgy", 50.

⁷⁸ HHStA, Allgemeine Akten. Hungarica, fasz. 66 konv. B, f. 138v.

⁷⁹ Endre Veress, "Déva és környéke Castaldo idejében. (Adalékok Hunyadmegye 1551-53 közti történetéhez)," *A Hunyadmegyei történelmi és régészeti társulat évkönyve* 9 (1896–1898) 44.

⁸⁰ HHStA, Allgemeine Akten. Hungarica, fasz. 68 konv. B, f. 11.

⁸¹ E. Veress, "Déva és környéke Castaldo idejében", 60.

⁸² Ilie Minea, "Note și interpretări", *Cercetări istorice* 10–12/1 (1934–1936) 354–355; A. Kurz, "Elena Cherepovici", 376.

⁸³ E. Veress, "Déva és környéke Castaldo idejében", 61.

Supply difficulties and the lack of an efficient system for collecting the necessary funds affected the army and, consequently, the Habsburg rule in Transylvania. Already in 1553, general Castaldo's control over the province began to weaken. The new political and military situation could not escape the Serbian nobility, especially someone like Crepović. As early as March that year, the Serbs of Srem sent two of their representatives to talk to Petar Petrović⁸⁴, a sign that they were ready to return to the old loyalty of the Szapolyai family. Moreover, the Szapolyai family party also believed that Serbian nobles should be attracted to the cause of the Queen and her son, one of those targeted being precisely Crepović. In August 1553 Anton Kendi, Francis Patocsy, Christopher Hagymasi, Wolfgang Bornemisza and Nicholas Orban wrote to Petar Petrović to contact Nikola: "Your lordship writes to Crepović with kind words, for he is indignant that neither Our Lady (the Queen) nor your lordship has written to him"⁸⁵. Even if he was in the service of the Habsburgs, it seems that Crepović did not forget his old ties with the all-powerful Petrović, from whom he expected a sign.

The information about the Serbian nobleman's career is noticeably reduced in the following years, as he concentrated on obtaining estates in the county of Hunedoara from Emperor Ferdinand. He returned to the foreground after Queen Isabella and her son John Sigismund returned to Transylvania for good (1556). The change of sides proved beneficial for Crepović's career, as in the short period before his death (1562), the Serbian nobleman attained the highest dignities. Between 1556 and 1558 he was a member of the Princely Council⁸⁶, a position mentioned on his tombstone (*serenissimi Joannis – electi regis – consiliarius*). In the diet of Turda, several members of the Princely Council, including Crepović, were to be paid from the Kingdom's revenues, so that they could act on behalf of the Queen and her son⁸⁷. Nikola's most important position was that of the ban of Caransebeş-Lugoj, which he held for a short time in 1559. From the time when he exercised his authority over the highland territory of present-day Banat, only two charters are known. In the first, from April 1559, Queen Isabella asked him to set a new trial date in the lawsuit between John Fiat, Jacob Békés, Francis Morsynay, Peter de Thwsta, Ladislaus Békés against George and Peter Gârlişte (Gerlestyey)⁸⁸. In the second

⁸⁴ HHStA, Allgemeine Akten. Hungarica, fasz. 70 konv. A, f. 53.

⁸⁵ *MCRT*, v. I, 498: *Dominatio vestra scribat ad Cherepowyth pulchros verbis, nam indignatur, quod nec domina nostra, nec dominatio vestra quicque ipsi scripserit.*

⁸⁶ Zsolt Trócsányi, *Erdély központi kormányzata 1540–1690*, Budapest 1980, 26.

⁸⁷ *MCRT* II, Budapest 1876, 88.

⁸⁸ Frigyes Pesty, *A szörényi bánság és Szörény vármegye története*, v. III, Budapest 1878, 278–279.

document, in June of the same year, the Queen addressed the officials of the Banat of Caransebeş and asked them to decide on an estate perambulation in their area of competence, which the authorities did, except for ban Crepović (*excepto domino bano*)⁸⁹. This is the last mention of the Serbian nobleman in an official position in the Principality of Transylvania. In the last years of his life, Crepović retired to his estate at Mănărade (Monora), where he most likely died. As his gravestone shows, his body was laid to rest in the church or cemetery in Bârsău, where his wife and daughters would also be buried, which is a necropolis for the two related Serbian families Ovčarević and Crepović.

Family estates

In the Middle Ages and the early modern period, noble estates fluctuated according to various factors: political choice, sovereigns' good will, conflicts, etc. We do not have much data about the estates owned by Crepović before he settled in Transylvania. Certainly, the participle of Radna indicates that at some point his family had some property there, which did not necessarily have to be a large estate, but just a house or a piece of land. In 1545 Queen Isabella donated Sásvár, Ianova (Yenew), Giarmata (Kys Gyarmath), Orţişoara (Kakath) in the Timiş county, as well as Munar (Monar) in the Cenad county. The donation probably followed faithful service to the crown, but was possibly also related to Crepović and Ovčarević's kinship with Belmužević, the four localities being part of Milica Belmužević's inheritance. John Kendeffy of Râu de Mori (Hung. Malomviz), Milica's son, immediately opposed this donation, as the villages belonged to him (inherited from his mother and grandfather)⁹⁰. We do not know whether Nikola succeeded in obtaining the former possessions of voivode Miloš Belmužević in Timiş the county at that time, or at least part of them, but in 1549 he was still using the noble participle of Radna, which may indicate that only after that date he came into the possession of the Sásvár estate, unless the formula of Sásvár in the documents and *sasvariensis* on his tombstone indicates, as we have said, his place of origin. However, even if he held Sásvár, it was for a very short period of time, because in 1552 the Ottomans occupied the entire territory between the Mureş-Danube and Tisza. His domain was certainly concentrated around the town of Târgovişte/ Thergowysthe (Hung. Vásáros, Timiş county), located not far from Lugoj (Lugas, Timiş county). In 1548, when Petar Petrović, the lord of the Timiş county was put in the

⁸⁹ F. Pesty, *Krassó*, v. IV, 77–79.

⁹⁰ *Acta et Documenta*, 195–196.

possession of some estates, among the witnesses present was Lazić Saya, Crepović's reeve from Târgoviște⁹¹. The Serbian nobleman's estates, which in 1551 accounted for one third of the 31 villages on the Târgoviște domain⁹², were lost after the occupation of the area by the Ottomans. The large number of villages should not mislead us, most of them were small, with little human potential.

Immediately after the loss of Timișoara and its surroundings to the Turks, Crepović and his family fled to Transylvania, probably to the estate left by his father-in-law. The latter had obtained parts of the estate of Șoimuș (Marossolymos, Hunedoara county) which included the homonymous town and several villages, including Bârsău, where we saw that the church preserved the memory of the Crepović family. When Șoimuș and Bârsău came into Ovčarević's possession is difficult to know. In 1530 the estate was confiscated from Gaspar Horvath of Vingard and donated to Milica Belmužević, Ankonina and John, the widow and son of Michael Sărăcin de Sălaș (a village in the Hunedoara county)⁹³. Could these estates have come into Petar's possession following his marriage to Milica? Or maybe they were bought from the nobles of Sălaș? Sources do not yet allow us to draw definitive conclusions. In 1542, Milica and her son John Kendeffy asked Martinuzzi to intervene with the Chapter of Alba-Iulia in order to provide them with the documents found in the archives concerning the estate of Șoimuș and the surrounding villages⁹⁴. I believe that the request of the two came in the context of the death of Petar Ovčarević, when at least a part of his domain was handed over to his children. Neither Milica nor Ovčarević owned the entire Șoimuș estate, but only parts of it. This explains the fact that in 1537 nobleman John Dekul was introduced into the possession of Bârsău and the manorial house there⁹⁵. What is certain is that around 1540 a part of Bârsău was in the hands of Petar Ovčarević. Not long after his death, in May 1541, John Kut of Bârsău (*de Beregso*) asked captain Bathasar Bornemisza, on the basis of a donation letter received from late Petar Ovčarević (*Olcharowyth*), to be introduced in the possession of a piece of land (*sessio nobiliaris*) in Bârsău, which was in the appurtenances of the Șoimuș town⁹⁶. Although the estate passed from Petar to his descendants, the dispute

⁹¹ F. Pesty, *Krassó*, v. IV, 48.

⁹² *Acta et Documenta*, 232–233.

⁹³ SJAN Cluj, colecția personală Mike Sándor, nr. 119; Slovenský národný archív, Bratislava, Rodu Révay, škat. 87, Doc. Fam. Kende, fasc. II, no. 2.

⁹⁴ SJAN Cluj, colecția personală Mike Sándor, nr. 119; BAR Cluj, colecția Kemény József, mss. KJ 288/D, v. 10, f. 72v.

⁹⁵ MNL OL, F 4 Cista comitatuum, Hunyad, cista 1-ma, fasc. 6, no. 21.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, no. 29.

with Milica Belmužević and her son John Kendeffy over the ownership of the Şoimuş domain did not end. Being one of Emperor Ferdinand's loyalists, John Kendeffy received as a new donation in 1551 the town of Şoimuş with the surrounding villages, including Bârsău. Among the witnesses present at the transfer of the estate possession were Ladislaus Makray, Blasius Rada, John Sztoika, Simon Cseh, Jacob Janka and George Haczaki, the serfs of Nikola Crepović from Şoimuş. When officials wanted to introduce Kendeffy in his right of ownership, at a late evening hour (*tarda et vesperina*), Crepović appeared and contested the whole procedure⁹⁷. As can be seen, there is no mention of Nikola's ownership in Bârsău, but only in Şoimuş. Unfortunately, the documents do not give a glimpse of how this conflict evolved, but it is likely that each of the families kept the parts of the estate they had owned until then.

As the estates he owned in present-day Banat were lost, Crepović turned his attention to establishing a domain in Transylvania, mainly in the Hunedoara county, where he already owned parts of the Şoimuş estate. As a reward for Nikola's military services, who served with 50 horsemen without pay, general Castaldo proposed to Emperor Ferdinand, on 16 February 1553, that certain villages of the Catholic diocese of Cenad, two of which were under the administration of the vicar of Alba Iulia, be given to the Serbian nobleman⁹⁸. On 17 March the general sent a new letter to the Emperor, informing him that he was dealing with the vicar of Alba Iulia and Crepović regarding certain payments⁹⁹, probably related to these properties. As the villages were administered by the magistrate of Sibiu (Germ. Hermanstadt, Sibiu county), Ferdinand asked the town official if he was interested in those possessions. The Sibiu town had to settle and pay a sum of money to the vicar of Alba-Iulia, Francis Megyesi, but if the magistrate was not interested in the offer, then the respective villages were to be handed over to Crepović for a sum of money¹⁰⁰. The next day, on 28 March, the king wrote to Francis

⁹⁷ MNL OL, F 4 Cista comitatum, Hunyad, cista 2-da, fasc. 5, no. 3.

⁹⁸ HHStA fasc. 69, konv. B, f. 94: Quatuor villas sub episcopatu Chianadiensi existentes, quas restituere parati erunt quando episcopus Chianadiensis crearet, nunc istarum villarum due domino Kerepowith sunt comendate, cum quo certae maximae considerationem haberi oportet quia continue quinquaginta equitibus maiestati vestrae servivit, et sine solutione nunc servit et illi duae villae exigui sunt momenti alie due administrant per vicarium Albensis ad rationem maiestati vestrae.

⁹⁹ E. Veress, "Déva és környéke Castaldo idejében", 63.

¹⁰⁰ MNL OL, A 57, Librii regii, v. III, f. 125–126 (March 27 1553); Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem (ELTE) Könyvtár és Levéltár, Kézirattár, Collectio Hevenessiana, t. XXXVI, 109–110; an analysis of these villages donated to Crepović in: Egyed Bósz, *Az egresi ciszterci apátság története* (Művelődéstörténeti értekezések 49), Budapest 1911, 46–48.

Megyesi and Nikola Crepović that they could be granted the villages of Țapu (Hodwylagh – Sibiu county), Soroștin (Sorozthel – Sibiu county), Mănărade (Monora – Alba county) and Cenade (Chanad – Alba county) if they paid a certain amount of money¹⁰¹. On 8 August 1553 the Emperor informed the Sibiu magistrate that following their negative response to pledge the four villages, they were registered in the Serbian nobleman's possession¹⁰². At the same time, the sovereign asked the urban magistrate to release the villages in favour of Crepović. After more than a year, on 18 April 1554, Ferdinand donated the villages of Țapu, Soroștin and Mănărade, which had belonged to the Catholic diocese of Cenad, to Crepović for two years, in return for his loyalty and for the sum of 1000 florins. The fourth village, Cenade, which was in the hands of Francis, the abbot of Cluj-Mănăștur (and vicar of Alba Iulia), was given to the Serbian nobleman for the same two-year period, in exchange for three thousand florins. Crepović also acquired the right to build a house in any of his possessions, made of any kind of material, worth up to two hundred florins. He could settle wherever he preferred, in any of these localities, with his wife, brothers and brothers in arms (*conpluribus suis viris militaribus*). If in two years Crepović did not receive the 4,000 florins, plus another two hundred invested in the construction of the house, then the four properties were registered as his pledge until their redemption by the sovereign or someone else (*sive per nos, sive per alios redemi et eliberari facere possumus*).¹⁰³

The Serbian nobleman profited even more from his good relations with the imperial authorities, especially as there was an acute shortage of funds among the Habsburgs, and Crepović seems to have had some cash which he invested in estates. On 27 June 1553, for the sum of 1000 florins, the Emperor pledged the castle of Branișca with all the villages and lands belonging to it, on the condition that Nikola would take care and maintain them as they should be, and if any of Ferdinand's descendants wanted the fortress back, he would pay the aforementioned sum to the descendants of the Serbian nobleman.¹⁰⁴ A week later, on 3 July, Ferdinand ordered the arsenal in Sibiu to give Crepović a certain quantity of gun powder, necessary for the castle in Branișca.¹⁰⁵

After the return of the Szapolyai family in Transylvania, Nikola asked Queen Isabella to recognise his right of possession over the four former villages

¹⁰¹ SJAN Sibiu, Documente medievale U IV, no. 655.

¹⁰² Ibidem, no. 676..

¹⁰³ MNL OL, A 57 Librii Regii, v. III, f. 197–199; ELTE Könyvtár és Levéltár, Kézirattár, Collectio Hevenessiana, t. XXXVI, III–114; A. Ивић, *Историја Срба*, 171.

¹⁰⁴ MNL OL, A 57, Librii regii, vol. III, f. 159–160, published after a copy preserved in Vienna by E. Veress, “Déva és környéke Castaldo idejében”, 65.

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem, 65–66.

of the bishopric of Cenad. Even though the Saxon Community (*Universitas Saxonum*) refused to pay for these villages, it was not satisfied with losing them to Crepović. The Serbian nobleman's request to have his ownership reconfirmed in those areas provoked the Saxon Community's reaction. On 17 August 1557, Peter Haller, the royal judge of Sibiu, on behalf of the city and the entire Community, protested to the Queen against Crepović's donation or ownership of the four villages.¹⁰⁶ In fact, the protocols of the Saxon Community mention the opening of a lawsuit against Crepović as early as August 1557, which lasted until the end of 1558.¹⁰⁷ Despite all the opposition of the Saxons, the four villages remained in the hands of the Serbian nobleman. On Nikola's death (1562), his wife remained in possession of these disputed settlements, but problems soon arose. In 1572, Gaspar Békés de Kornyat, one of the most important noblemen of Romanian origin in the Timiș county, summoned to court Mara Ovčarević (*Margaretha Olchyarint*), the widow of Nikola Crepović, in relation to the ownership of those four villages. Accordingly, Mara's two daughters, together with their husbands, requested the release of the necessary documents in the trial.¹⁰⁸ At the court hearings, the widow's legal representative stated that those possessions were given to Crepović as a pledge for the initial sum of 4000 florins, to which King John Sigismund and Queen Isabella added another 5000 florins, which must have happened before 1559 when the Queen died. The expenses were even higher because the Serbian nobleman invested in the restoration of houses, ponds and other buildings on these estates. However, King John Sigismund donated them to Gaspar Békés, much to the detriment of Lady Mara. Noble Békés declared that he had paid 5,000 florins through bailiff George Dengelegi (*providus Georgius Dengelegi villicus*), including the sums invested to restore the buildings on the estate, which is why he occupied those villages and did not want to vacate them. Crepović's widow declared that she had not received the money, and at the princely court it was decided that if Mara Ovčarević was not given the 5000 florins, then she would be able to regain the rights of possession of the four villages.¹⁰⁹ Eventually the estate came into the hands of Békés, who in a letter to Emperor Maximilian dated 26 May 1574 complained that he had been extorted by Crepović's widow and had to pay much more than the 5000 florins: "As for Mănărade (Monora) and the contributions there, the people of the voivode say that the widow of late Nikola Crepović had a lawsuit against me and that the voivode now wants to satisfy the widow and pay her the five thousand florins, which the voivode owes her.

¹⁰⁶ SJAN Sibiu, Documente medievale U IV, no. 757.

¹⁰⁷ Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, v. XI, 868–870.

¹⁰⁸ А. Ивић, *Историја Срба*, 183.

¹⁰⁹ MNL OL, F 4 Cista comitatum, Albensis, cista 3-tia, fasc. 2, no. 47.

Most gracious Emperor, I have already humbly reported to your Majesty in my previous letter the title under which the lands of the named Crepović were registered. And when my late prince wished to redeem them and made an inquiry about them, it turned out that Crepović's widow had unjustly extorted more than five thousand florins from me and that the prince was not obliged to pay the five thousand florins according to law and justice. Then, Your Highness, I do not understand at all why the prince wants to make me share with anyone. And Mănărade (Monora) and its contributions cost me eleven thousand florins. So let the voivode pay me the contributions of my estates, and then, if anyone has any claim against me, he can take me to court. For I have never hesitated to take legal action, and I shall never hesitate to do so".¹¹⁰

Only the estates in the Hunedoara county remained in the hands of Crepović's widow in the last years of her life. In 1581 she died, and her possessions on the Şoimuş estate became the object of dispute between the nobles who held a share there. It seems that Mara had long lawsuits with the nobles who also had ownership rights there, with whom she was reconciled by means of arbitrating judges (*iudices arbitri, fogott bírák*).¹¹¹ The dispute was carried out for the town of Şoimuş and the villages *Bosfalwa vel Bohfaw vel Boholt*, Toplicza, Kechkedagh/Kechikedagh, Nyawalyasfalwa, Nagaagh, Bwryanfalwa, Fyzesd, Vyfalw (*alio nomine Chierkez/Cherkez*).¹¹² Of these, Boholt, Toplița Mureşului, Bălata and Nojag, all in the county of Hunedoara are currently identified. Nowhere is there any mention of a property in Bârsău, precisely where Mara was represented in the church. The explanation is to be found in the fact that the village was not in the direct control of Crepović, but remained throughout this period in the hands of the Ovčarević family, including Mara, where she retired after the death of her husband together with her daughters and one of her sons-in-law. She probably lived there with her brothers' descendants, among whom another Mara/Margareta Ovčarević¹¹³ was known at the end of the 16th century, to whom the old lady of the same name had left a carnation-coloured damask dress.¹¹⁴ Left alone, with no surviving children or grandchildren, Mara left her fortune to her relatives, her grandson Theodor Balintitt receiving the share she owned in the village of Bârsău.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ The Hungarian text of this extract in: László Szalay, *Erdély és a Porta 1567–1578*, Pest 1862, 164.

¹¹¹ *Az Erdélyi káptalan jegyzőkönyvei*, v. I, no. 414.

¹¹² MNL OL, F 2 Protocolla, v. I, f. 63, summarized in Hungarian in *Az Erdélyi káptalan jegyzőkönyvei*, v. I, no. 303.

¹¹³ *Az Erdélyi káptalan jegyzőkönyvei*, v. I, nos. 608, 811, 851, 852.

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*, no. 851: "egy zeokfwzinkamuka zeoknyat, amit Cherepwtitné asszonytól kapott".

¹¹⁵ S. Dragomir, "Ctitorii bisericii din Bârsău", 147.

As early as 1552, this nephew asked Emperor Ferdinand to return a number of estates to him, including Bârsău,¹¹⁶ which was no doubt his maternal inheritance. The Transylvanian estates of the Crepović family were integrated into the domains of other nobles of the autonomous Principality from the second half of the 16th century. Except for Bârsău, whose Orthodox church preserved the memory of Serbian nobles, no trace of the Transylvanian tradition was preserved in these former Serbian estates.

Nikola Crepović was in a way the man of his time. Can he be considered an opportunist? No more so than other noblemen of the time. In a world in constant flux, this Serbian nobleman chose the best way to assert himself socially, knowing how to adapt to the course of events he had to take. He lived through the turmoil of the great changes of the mid-16th century, establishing himself as one of the most representative captains of the Serbian population in Hungary. Once the lower parts of the Hungarian Kingdom came under the Crescent rule, he lost his estates and had to leave his (probably) native territory, having to flee with his family to Transylvania. Far from being an impediment, the refuge offered him new opportunities for social mobility. Loyal to the Habsburgs for a time, Crepović managed to acquire a significant domain in Transylvania, consisting of villages in Hunedoara and Alba counties, with the latter ones previously belonging to the Catholic diocese of Cenad. He returned to the good graces of the Szapolyai family and built a successful career, eventually obtaining the dignity of the ban of Caransebeş-Lugoj. His social importance can be seen in his marriage alliances with the ruling family of Wallachia and the powerful family Török of Enning. After his death, his wife and two daughters continued to live in the area of the Hunedoara county, where the church in the village of Bârsău perpetuated their image until late in modern times.

¹¹⁶ SJAN Cluj, fond familial Bálintitt, Documente medievale, no. 14.

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Адриан Мађина

**НИКОЛА ЦРЕПОВИЋ.
СРПСКИ ПЛЕМИЋ И ЊЕГОВА ПОРОДИЦА У
ТРАНСИЛВАНИЈИ У 16. ВЕКУ**

Резиме

Акцент овог рада стављен је на личност коме историчари нису посветили велику пажњу. Реч је о Николи Цреповићу, српском племићу који је живео у 16. веку и учествовао у низу догађаја који су имали велики утицај на историју Краљевине Угарске уопште и Трансилваније посебно. Пореклом вероватно из нижих крајева Краљевине (данашњи Банат), Цреповић се у историјским изворима бележи од 1542. године. Све до своје смрти 1562. године, овај српски племић био је активно укључен у политичке и војне послове Краљевине Угарске. Политички је осцилирао између Хабзбурговаца и породице Запоља, а и једни и други наградили су га имањима и достојанствима. Најактивнији је био у периоду 1551–1552. године у контексту сукоба Османлија и Хабзбурговаца који су се борили за контролу над доњим деловима Краљевине. После пада Темишвара под власт Османлија, склонио се у Трансилванију, где је по повратку на власт породице Запоља постао члан кнежевског већа и бан Карансебеш-Лугоша 1559. Умро је 1562. и сахрањен у православној цркви у Барсау (Хуњадска жупанија). Био је ожењен Маром Овчаревић и имао је две кћерке: Јелену и Катерину. Јелена је имала буран живот, удавала се два пута: прво за влашког кнеза Петра Млађег, затим за властелина руског порекла. Катерина је била у кратком браку са племићем Валентином Тороком од Енинга, који је био господар Хуњадске жупаније. Обе кћерке су умрле прилично младе, а последњи преживели члан породице била је Мара, која је умрла 1581. године. Након што су Османлије заузеле област између Мориша–Дунава и Тисе, Цреповић је ту изгубио своја имања. Захваљујући верној служби цару Фердинанду Хабзбуршком успео је да изгради значајно имање у Трансилванији, у Хуњадској жупанији и жупанији Алба (Фехер). Након његове смрти и смрти осталих чланова породице, тешко стечена имања дошла су у посед његових рођака. Никола Цреповић је био човек свог времена, јер је у свету у сталном метежу бирао најбољи начин друштвене афирмације, умејући да се прилагоди току догађаја кроз које је пролазио. Иако историјско памћење Трансилваније

није сачувало његов идентитет у многим записима, црква у селу Барсау (Хуњадска жупанија) овековечила је његово наслеђе и наслеђе његове породице све до касног модерног доба.

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