

# A Defter Entry from 1489 about the Fortress of Tešanj in Bosnia

Michael Ursinus

## Author:

Faculty Member, Department of Islamic Studies (Ottoman Studies), University of Heidelberg.

[michael.ursinus@ori.uni-heidelberg.de](mailto:michael.ursinus@ori.uni-heidelberg.de)

## Keywords:

Tešanj, Bosansko Kraljevstvo, Christian timar-holder, tax exemption, Mehmed II, Bayezid II, *yiğit*, *yoldaşlık*, 15<sup>th</sup> century

## Cite this article:

Ursinus, Michael. "A Defter Entry from 1489 about the Fortress of Tešanj in Bosnia" *Keshif: E-Journal for Ottoman-Turkish Micro Editions* 2/2 (Summer 2024): 92-101. Available under <https://doi.org/10.25365/kshf-24-02-12>.

---

Article DOI [10.25365/kshf-24-02-12](https://doi.org/10.25365/kshf-24-02-12)

Published online September 30, 2024

© 2024 Michael Ursinus, published by *Keshif: E-Journal for Ottoman-Turkish Micro Editions*.

This is an Open Access article licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0. International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## Context

The earliest Ottoman evidence for the fortress of Tešan<sup>1</sup> can be found in BOA TD 24 (p. 870). The significance of this *defter* entry for the early history of this fortress and the question of the “Bosansko Kraljevstvo” (the Ottoman-installed “Kingdom of Bosnia”) has recently been emphasized by Aladin Husić.<sup>2</sup> The relevant text (like TD 24 as a whole still unpublished) contains information about the time and circumstances when this fortress was apparently put under siege (*kapanub*) while being bravely defended by a certain Dobrešin<sup>3</sup> who, in recognition of his (defensive) *yoldaşlık* or fortress duties, had been awarded an imperial decree by Sultan Mehmed II, exempting him from the poll-tax (*haraç*), the field-tax (*ispençe*), the sheep-tax (*koyun adeti*) as well as all extraordinary taxes (*avarız-i divaniye*). This bravery award can be dated to the time before Muhiyuddin Efendi (alias Mevlâna Vildan), the official responsible for the survey (*tahrir*) of Herzegovina,<sup>4</sup> had completed work on the survey of the sanjak of Bosna by the autumn of 1477 (neither the detailed [*mufassal*] nor the corresponding synoptical [*icmal*] register appear to have survived, but are referred to repeatedly in BOA TD 24 as the “old register” [*defter-i atik*] or even “Mevlâna Vildan’s defter”).<sup>5</sup> The (retrospect) mentioning, in BOA TD 24 (dated *evail* Ramazan 894/ 29 July - 7 August 1489), of Mevlâna Vildan as having recorded Dobrešin’s sultanic exemption in his survey register for Bosnia, and having handed him a *hüccet* enabling him to further document his exemption status, makes it clear that the bravery episode must pre-date the autumn of 1477, if not the summer of 1475 when Vildan’s new survey of Bosnia had just begun or was about to begin.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Here spelt “Tišan” instead of the usual “Teşne”, probably as the result of *ikavica* influence.

<sup>2</sup> “Tešan<sup>1</sup> u XVI. stoljeću”, *Prilozi za orijentalnu filologiju* 61 (Sarajevo, 2012), 301 – 318.

<sup>3</sup> Written “Dûbrâšin”, from the village of Ričica near Kraljeva Sutjeska.

<sup>4</sup> Resulting in *defter* BOA TD 5 dated *evail* Ramazan 882/ 7 – 16 December 1477.

<sup>5</sup> A copy of it had apparently arrived in Istanbul by 18 November 1477. This is supported by a note in O.76, edited in translation by Ahmed S. Aličić entitled *Sumarni popis sandžaka Bosna iz 1468/69. godine* (Mostar, 2008), p. 200, which makes it quite clear that the new survey of Bosnia had been completed by then: “sada je u novom defteru ovoj timar upisan u iznosu od 4.163 akče” - “now this timar was recorded in the new register with a *hasil* figure of 4,163 aspres”.

<sup>6</sup> See Ćiro Truhelka, “Tursko-slovenski spomenici dubrovačke arhive”, in *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja Bosni i Hercegovini XXIII* [Sarajevo, 1911], p.1-484; here: 319.

At least a decade later, probably by about 1485, Dobrešin had petitioned the new ruler, Sultan Bayezid II, to confirm Mehmed Fatih's exemption act, but Bayezid declined. Dobrešin's tax exemptions were not to be renewed, so in the survey of 1489 he was recorded, under the name of *Dobrašin veled-i Golubik* (Golubić), as the first householder among the taxpaying inhabitants of Ričica village.<sup>7</sup> At this time, Ričica near Kraljeva Sutjeska formed the fiefdom (*timar*) of *bölükbaşı* Yusuf from Yeleč, one of the personnel of Bobovac fortress nearby. Ričica had already been in his hands by 1485,<sup>8</sup> having been transferred from (*an tahvil-i*) Veli Beğ. At the same time, in 1485, we find a certain *Dobrašin birader-i Hasan Ağa* holding the village of *Tișine* (Tišina near Zenica) as his *timar* with a revenue (*hasıl*) of 11,528 *akçe* – the same village which, by 1489, was to be in the hands of two joint occupants (*müşterek*), Dama[d] Halil and *Mehmedî veled-i Dobrašin*,<sup>9</sup> again with a revenue of 11,528 *akçe*. Husić assumes the identity of these Dobrešins without further discussion.<sup>10</sup> If correct, we would be able to argue, as does Husić, that “our” Dobrešin was rewarded not only with tax exemptions for his bravery at Tešanj, but with a (for a Christian unusually) sizable *timar*, a sign of considerable advancement within the Ottoman system, which *Mehmedî veled-i Dobrašin* (his son?) was to partly ‘inherit’. This Tišina *timar*, albeit with less than half of its later revenue, can be traced back to the late 1460s/early 1470s.<sup>11</sup> As the *timar* of a certain *Mehmedî veled-i Şeyh* it was passed on to *aşçı* Ali on 4 – 13 March 1470; to be handed over to Ali, son of the *dizdar*, on 31 December 1472. It was then recorded as being in possession of Radoja Krajčinović, from whom it was transferred to the brave youth (*hrabri mladić*) Hamza on 12 September 1476, who is likely to have held it for a number of years. No word of *Dobrašin birader-i Hasan Ağa* until the end of the defter's recording span,<sup>12</sup> which suggests that he was awarded the Tišina *timar* only at some point during the late 1470s or early 1480s.

---

<sup>7</sup> BOA TD 24, p. 868-9.

<sup>8</sup> BOA TD 18, p. 183.

<sup>9</sup> BOA TD 24, p. 356-7.

<sup>10</sup> Husić, “Tešanj”, p. 301.

<sup>11</sup> Aličić, *Sumarni popis*, p. 79.

<sup>12</sup> The latest *derkenar* entry in O.76 dates from 10 – 19 June 1478; see Aličić, *Sumarni popis*, p. 97: evasit Rebiyülevvel 883.

While any exact date cannot be established with certainty, we can say with confidence that *Dobrašin birader-i Hasan Ağa* must have lost his Tišina timar at some point between 1485 and 1489, by which later date it was already in the joint hands of Halil and Mehmedî. This is the same period during which “our” Dobrešin (Golubić) lost his tax exemption status and was recorded as tax-paying inhabitant of Ričica, apparently his native village near Kraljeva Sutjeska, not far from Bobovac, the old residence of the kings of Bosnia. If “our” Dobrešin were to be identical with *Dobrašin birader-i Hasan Ağa*, he would have experienced a kind of “free-fall” demotion from being the recipient of a bravery award for gallantry at the frontier with Hungary, then being granted a prestigious and substantial timar unrivalled by most other Christian-held assignments, before being reduced to a tax-paying *reaya* duly recorded under his native village “back home”. Or was it merely a case of demobilisation, of old-age retirement? The untimely and rather laconic rejection of his appeal, submitted to Sultan Bayezid II with the intention of having his tax exemptions confirmed, makes this rather unlikely.

The answer may lie hidden in the *defter* entry itself (see below). It opens with the information that Dobrešin, a Christian “man of the sword” from Ričica village, had fought bravely while being put under siege by the enemy in the fortress of Tešanj “together with his lord of hero warriors (*yiğit beğiyle*)”. This seems a rather unusual expression to refer to what in effect must have been the chief commanding officer of Tešanj fortress at the time. One would perhaps expect the term “*yiğit başı*” (head hero warrior) or, less poetically, “*kale dizdari*” (fortress commander) when allusion is made to his superior rank. Yet the entry leaves little doubt as to its correct interpretation: “*yiğit beği*”. Why use such a colourful expression in a matter-of-fact *defter* entry? Interestingly, Ottoman archival sources, when referring to Venetian military or civil potentates or officials, sometimes employ equally vivid expressions such as “*derya beğleri*” (Lords of the Sea). Usages of this type appear to carry the notion of sovereignty and/or allied status in the Christian person or group of persons thus entitled, and it shows once again that in Ottoman chancery practice, the title “*beğ*” is not restricted to Muslims. Might perhaps the chief commander of Tešanj fortress, in the run-up to Mevlâna Vildan’s land survey

(*il yazısı*) of 1475-77, have been a Christian lord, with the Christian “man of the sword” by the name of Dobrešin (Golubić) under his command bravely defending his fortress?

According to Aladin Husić, several reasons can be quoted for suggesting that the residence of the Ottoman-installed King of Bosnia, like that of the voivode Radivoj Ostojić (Kotromanić, died 1463), the anti-king of Bosnia from 1432 until 1435 before him, was situated in Tešanj during the years 1465 – 1476, before the fortress was taken by the Hungarians in 1476, possibly together with the fortress of Dobož.<sup>13</sup> It is therefore possible that the expression “*yiğit beği*” alludes to Matija (Matthias), the Ottoman-installed King of Bosnia and lord over Tešanj fortress during these years, or his deputy (*kethüda*).<sup>14</sup> With the end of this era, and the disappearance of the Ottoman-installed ‘Kingdom of Bosnia’ from history, “our” Dobrešin (Golubić) must have looked elsewhere for his livelihood, intensifying his efforts to make his fortune in the Ottoman system “proper”. But it must be remembered that Sultan Mehmed Fatih had evidently already considered the Tešanj warriors sufficiently integrated into the Ottoman military organisation to grant one of them a bravery award by tax exemption, being confirmed by means of a *hüccet* and recorded in his defter by Mevlâna Vildan, the *il yazıcı*. If Husić is correct, he was to prove very successful indeed – at least for as long as Mehmed Fatih lived!

Because of the importance of the defter entry for any wider discussion of our topic, the full text of the relevant entry and the corresponding facsimiles are given below:

---

<sup>13</sup> Husić, op.cit., p. 302-3

<sup>14</sup> For a map of what is presently considered the territorial extent of the ‘Bosansko Kraljevstvo’ see. Dubravko Lovrenović, *Na klizištu povijesti (sveta kruna ugarska i sveta kruna bosanska) 1387-1463* (Synopsis: Zagreb – Sarajevo, 2006), karta 13. This map shows the fortresses of Dobož, Tešanj, Maglaj and Žepče as part of the ‘Bosansko Kraljevstvo’. For the king’s deputy see. Aličić, *Sumarni popis*, pp. 82, 99, 104, 106, 108, 172, 173.

## Transcription

- 1) *ķarye-i mezbūre iķinde Dobrařin nām kāfir Tiřan ķal'asında yigid begiyle ķapanub emānet*
- 2) *ve istiķāmetiyle yoldařluk itdūgi sebebden řābika merķūm maġfūr Sulķān Meķemmed Ħan*
- 3) *tābe serāhu ĥazretleri mezkūrī ĥarācdan ve ispenceden ve ķoyun 'ādetinden ve 'avārız-i*
- 4) *divāniyeden mu'āf ve müsellemed ķilub ĥükme-i ĥümāyūn virilmiř min ba'd Mevlānā Vildān*
- 5) *daķı bu ūzre deftere sebt edüb eline ĥüccet virdükden řoņra pādiřāhumuz ĥalide ĥilāfetuhu*
- 6) *ķazretlerine daķı 'arż olunub evvelden mu'āf ve müsellemed olıġeldi gerü virmiye*
- 7) *diyü ĥükme-i ĥümāyūn virilmiř gerü emre-i pādiřāhī ūzre bu ķarār deftere sebt olındı.*

## Translation

Because the unbeliever by the name of Dobreřin [who is recorded] in the aforementioned village [Ričica near Kraljeva Sutjeska] had fulfilled [his] comradeship (*yoldařlık*) [= fortress duties] with trustworthiness and righteousness [while being] shut up (besieged?) together with his lord of hero warriors (*yiġit beġiyle*) in the fortress of Teřanj, His Majesty the late Sultan Mehmed Khan whose sins are forgiven (may his grave be pleasant!) had previously (*sabika*) made the aforementioned privileged and exempt from the poll-tax, field-tax, sheep-tax and [all] extraordinary taxes, and an imperial decree was issued [to this effect]. Hereafter, Mevlāna Vildan had accordingly recorded this in the survey register [of 1475-77] and, having handed him a *ĥüccet*, His Majesty our Padišah (may his caliphate be eternal!), was also petitioned [to renew his tax privileges]. An imperial decree was issued, saying: “He used to be exempt and free beforehand. One shall not give [the privilege] again!” This decision was, in accordance with the imperial decree, again recorded in the survey register [now that of 1489].

## **Bibliography**

BOA TD 5

BOA TD 18

BOA TD 24

Aličić, Ahmed S. *Sumarni popis sandžaka Bosna iz 1468/69. godine* (Mostar, 2008).

Handžić, Adem. "Nahija Brod krajem XV i početkom XVI vijeka", *Radovi III*, Muzej grada Zenice (Zenica, 1973), 383 – 391.

Husić, Aladin. "Tešanj u XVI. stoljeću", *Prilozi za orijentalnu filologiju* 61 (Sarajevo, 2012), 301 – 318.

Lovrenović, Dubravko. *Na klizištu povijesti (sveta kruna ugarska i sveta kruna bosanska) 1387-1463* (Synopsis: Zagreb – Sarajevo, 2006).

Truhelka, Ćiro. "Tursko-slovenski spomenici dubrovačke arhive", in *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzej Bosni i Hercegovini XXIII* (Sarajevo, 1911), p.1-484.





442

840

قره نوبر. اصدا. اکتبر نام کذا  
ضلعی و در در عفت و در...  
عزیز و بر...  
اصدا



قره نوبر. اصدا. اکتبر نام کذا  
ضلعی و در در عفت و در...  
عزیز و بر...  
اصدا

تجدید باقی می ماند و در در عفت و در...  
اصدا

اصدا

اصدا

اصدا

اصدا

اصدا

اصدا

اصدا

اصدا

اصدا

869

اصدا

اصدا

اصدا

اصدا

اصدا

اصدا

اصدا

اصدا

اصدا

اصدا

اصدا

اصدا

اصدا

اصدا

اصدا

اصدا

اصدا

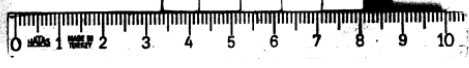
اصدا

اصدا

اصدا

اصدا

T. T. - 0024



Detail from BOA TD 24, p. 870:

- و تبه بریدر. ایزد. و در شهر نام کافر تیشان تعلق شد یکدیگر کجای فجا نوب امانت  
 و استقامتیم بعد اشلن زده و یک سببه ن سابقا و هووم مغفور سلطان محمد خان  
 طاب ثوان حضرتان مذکور می خواهدن و اسبهدن و قیون عالته ن و عوررض  
 و بولیدن معاف و مستم قلوب کم ممالیک و پولش من بعد مولانا ولد لسن  
 و فی بو زر. و هنر. ثبت لب لاله جن و در هر کزن حکم. بال سأمور خله خلاصه  
 حضرتان معنی عرض اولمویب اوله ن معاف و مسلم اوج کلدب کرو و برید  
 می حکم ممالیک و برین کرو لری بال شای از ر. بر قرار دفتر ثبت اوله کم