

Jason Michael Snider

**A MILITARY ANALYSIS OF KEY RIVER FORTIFICATIONS
GIVEN TO THE TEUTONIC ORDER IN THE BANAT OF
SEVERIN**

MA Thesis in Comparative History, with a specialization
in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies.

Central European University

Budapest

June 2019

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Chair, Examination Committee

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I, the undersigned, **Jason Michael Snider**, candidate for the MA degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Budapest, 01 May 2019


Signature

Abstract

Castles are pieces of material culture that reflect meanings for their builders in terms of function and take on further meanings and functions for their users throughout the lengths of their individual biographies. The Danuban castles of the Iron Gates region of Caraş-Severin and Mehedinţi Counties in modern day Romania were built at separate times for separate defensive purposes. However, during the course of the 1420's and into the 1430's, these fortifications took on a more cohesive meaning for their inhabitants (which became the Teutonic Order from 1429 to about 1435), and for their overall sovereign, King Sigismund of Hungary (r. 1387-1437). During these two decades, these castles took on the function of a castle chain meant to be used as a combined protective wall on the Kingdom of Hungary's Danube frontier against encroaching Ottoman forces. This work proposes to examine the quality of this chain by focusing on the military characteristics of selected individual links. Given the success of the Ottoman invasion of 1432, it becomes necessary to see if there is a "weakest link".

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I would like to thank my supervisor József Laszlovszky for his guidance and advice while I have been making my way through the difficult and sometimes confusing graduate level of my education. I would also like to thank him for his great patience for my quirky and solitary working habits. I am in further debt to Cristian-Nicolae Gaşpar because of his help in exposing me to excellent sources in Romanian which I would have overlooked, yet have become significant for this thesis, as well as his advice in dealing with the baffling public transportation systems between Hungary and the Iron Gates region of Romania. Finally, I would be completely mistaken if I did not thank my mother for supporting my effort to go back to school as an older adult and follow a path in learning that others have rarely understood in me.

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List of Abbreviations

Archival Collections:

Altmann = *Regesta Imperii II. Die Urkunden Kaiser Sigmunds*, ed. Wilhelm Altmann
(Innsbruck: Wagner, 1896-1900), 2 vols

OBA = *Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin (Dahlem), XX.
Hauptabteilung, Ordensbriefarchiv.*

MOL = *Magyar Országos Levéltár* (Hungarian National Archives), Budapest.

StA Königsberg = *Staatsarchiv Königsberg.*

Publications:

CDPRHA = *Codex Diplomaticus Partium Regno Hungariae Adnexarum*, ed. Lajos Thallóczy,
and Antal Aldasy (Budapest: Tudományos Akadémia, 1907)

CEV = *Codex Epistolaris Vitoldi Magni Ducis Lithuaniae, 1376-1430*, ed. Anton Prochaska
(Krakow: Akademia Umiejetnosci, 1882).

ZKO = *Zsigmondkori Oklevéltár*, ed. Elemér Mályusz, Iván Borsa et al. (Budapest: Magyar
Országos Levéltár, 1951-2013), 12 vols.

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to conduct a military analysis of a sampling of the Danuban castles in the Iron Gates region of the Banat of Severin.¹ Their command was given to the Teutonic Order by the Hungarian King, Sigismund of Luxemburg (r. 1387-1437), between 1429 to approximately 1432, or as late as 1435.² They were to be used together as a system of defense against the northward encroachment of Ottoman forces into the Kingdom of Hungary and eventually beyond. The reasoning for this analysis, the methodology for it, and historical context in which the events took place will be discussed below.

Regarding contexts in general, education provides a framework which forms how the student or apprentice organizes information and comprehends concepts- shaped by the perspective of the specific educational system in which they are taught. Following secondary school, I received my first practical education from the United States Army. The system of comprehension ingrained into me beginning with training continued all the way through the experience of deployment into foreign zones of conflict. This has shaped my personal

¹ As these castles have been possessed throughout their histories by at least three cultures with similar names for them in three languages (Hungarian, German, and Romanian), I will try to consistently use the spellings for the castles from the original sources. However, for the name *Severyn*, the modern Romanian spelling for the city in which it is located is *Severin*. As in all cases, I have no choice but to use the modern spelling for the current political municipalities in which each castle still exists; but I will try and keep these references limited. For a list of castle name spellings, and those of their modern Romanian municipal locations, see Table 1. For a map of this region, see Figs. 3-5 in the Appendix. Also, I will use the terms castle, fortress, and fortification interchangeably to mean a piece of architecture with defensive features and garrisoned by soldiers.

² Mark Whelan believes that Sigismund “relieved the Teutonic Knights of their command in 1432.” However, I believe this to be a mistake based on the fact that the commander of Belgrade was forced to defend the Iron Gates as the Order’s overall commander left the region to seek help directly from Sigismund. This situation will be discussed further below. See: Mark Whelan, *Sigismund of Luxemburg and the Imperial Response to the Ottoman Turkish Threat*, c. 1410, PhD diss., University of London, 2014, 59. Further, in a letter dated two years later in January 2, 1434, the Order’s Grandmaster, Paul von Rußdorf (r. 1422 to 1441), responds to a request from the expedition’s commander for permission to permanently abandon the castles in the Iron Gates. Rußdorf states that he cannot provide the expedition any help, and that aid should be sought from the Emperor himself. See: StA Königsberg, HM Registeramt, 13, p. 203, transcribed in: Erich Joachim, “König Sigmund und der Deutsche Ritterorden in Ungarn 1429-1432 (Mitteilungen aus dem Staatsarchiv zu Königsberg),” in *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* Bd. 33 (Innsbruck: Universitäts-Buchdruckerei, 1912), 118-119.

perspective which I automatically (or even subconsciously) apply to all matters concerning warfare- even historical warfare.

For example, when I see a castle, my initial conception of it is not of a romantic setting or a reflection of nostalgia for a long-gone past, but a base of military operations. This is because my education has taught me that any “locality from which operations are projected or supported,” or, “an area or locality containing installations which provide logistic or other support,” is to be interpreted in this way.³ This is not a concept unique to modern soldiers or military leaders, for historian Stephen Morillo states in his chapter on the function of castles that, “[t]he central role of castles was to act as a base for the operations of field forces. This involves two things: the establishment in the castle of stores of supplies, so that the castle could act as a depot; and use of the castle as safe housing for troops not on campaign...”⁴ Reginald Allen Brown concurs with this, but further defines the basic objective of a castle’s operations as controlling the landscape in which it has been built.⁵ This is generally done through the deployment of armed forces based within the fortification, either infantry or cavalry.⁶

As for the Teutonic Order itself, a military order with its own theocratic state (known as the *Deutschordensstaat* or more simply the *Ordensstaat*) encompassing about one hundred eighty thousand square kilometers at its height, castles were erected in chains along the frontier and were replaced by newer lines of castles as further territory was conquered.⁷ At its

³ The US Department of Defense defines any site which serves these purposes as operational bases. See: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington DC: The Joint Staff, 2018), 25.

⁴ Stephen Morillo, *Warfare Under the Anglo-Norman Kings, 1066-1135* (Martlesham, UK: Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 1997), 94.

⁵ Reginald Allen Brown, *Allen Brown's English Castles* (London, Boydell Press, 2004), 123.

⁶ The limits of this area of control are usually delineated by a radius created by the maximum distance from the fortified base in which armed forces can travel and then safely return in one day. According to Christopher Gravett, this is approximately sixteen kilometers. Of course, terrain and obstacles can affect this. See: Christopher Gravett, *Norman Stone Castles (2): Europe 950–1204* (London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), 37.

⁷ Stephen Turnbull, *Crusader Castles of the Teutonic Knights (1): The red-brick castles of Prussia 1230-1466* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 2003), 5.

greatest extent in 1410, the lands under the control of the Teutonic Order contained a total of two hundred sixty-six castles in both Prussia and Livonia.⁸ Further, the Order had a long tradition of constructing and using a specific type of fortification- riverine castles (*Flussburgen* in German Castle Typology) for defense in war and trade in peace.⁹ Of the eight *Konventsburgen* (the largest category of castles in the *Ordensstaat* that served as individual seats for its eleven highest officers) in Prussia, all were constructed in the thirteenth century, and all are still located on the banks of rivers, with the exception of *Löchstadt* whose ruins are located on the shore of the Vistula Lagoon.¹⁰

Consequently, twenty out of the twenty-four castles given to the Teutonic Order in the Iron Gates were of the very familiar Flussburgen type.¹¹ Under the oversight of one of Sigismund's most trusted advisors and military general, Filippo di Stefano Scolari (c. 1369-1426),¹² these castles were constructed or renovated during the 1420's, and were made the

⁸ Friedrich Benninghoven, "Die Burgen als Grundpfeiler des spätmittelalterlichen Wehrwesens im preußisch-livländischen DeutschordensStaat," *Vorträge und Forschungen* Vol. 19, no. 1 (1976), 567. Further, this territory encompassed the areas of modern East and West Prussia, Latvia, Estonia, and a small portion of Lithuania and the Russia Oblast of Kaliningrad. The year 1410 marked the apogee of the Order's political power just before the forfeiture of territory as an outcome of losing the Battle of Tannenberg on July 15, 1410. The immediate result was the loss of the province of *Samogitia*. See: William Urban, *Tannenberg and After: Lithuania, Poland, and the Teutonic Order in search of immortality* (Chicago: Lithuanian Research and Studies Center, 1999), 176; also: Stephen Turnbull, *Tannenberg 1410: Disaster for the Teutonic Knights* (London: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 2003), 78. For a comprehensive map of castles under the control of the Teutonic Order in Prussia and Livonia, see Fig. 1. in the Appendix.

⁹ According to this typology, a *Flussburg* (castle located on a river) is a subset of *Wasserburgen* (castles located on bodies of water), which all fall under the heading of *Niederungsburgen* (lowland castles). This is opposed to *Höhenburgen* (castles located on high ground- i.e. mountainsides, spurs, summits, ridges, etc.). This will be discussed further in the beginning of Chapter Four. See: Philipp Reclam, *Wörterbuch der Burgen, Schlösser und Festungen* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun. GmbH & Co., 2004), 260.

¹⁰ These *Konventburgen* (and their WGS 84 coordinates) are: Thorn (53.009444°N, 18.610833°E), Christburg (53.924139°N, 19.344594°E), Zantir (53.946255°N, 18.910309°E), Marienburg (54.039729°N, 19.027763°E), Königsberg (54.710217°N, 20.510789°E), Löchstadt (54.707271°N, 19.951605°E), Elbing (54.156708°N, 19.395077°E), and Danzig (54.353707°N, 18.659283°E).

¹¹ The name, Iron Gates, comes directly from an 1853 article in the *London Times* referring to a bridge built there during one of the most famous invasions in the second century CE, calling the entire region "the Iron Gate, or the Gate of Trajan." See: "The Seat of War on the Danube," *The Times* (December 29, 1853), 8. This is in reference to the events of 105 CE, when the Roman Emperor Trajan ordered his architect Apollodorus of Damascus to construct a segmented bridge spanning over half a mile across the Danube near Dobreta Turnu-Severin, during his Danubian campaign of the Second Dacian War. This bridge is attested to pictorially in one of the scenes portrayed on Trajan's Column in the Roman Forum. See: Joseph Gies, *Bridges and Men* (Sevenoaks, UK: Pickle Partners, 2017), 19.

¹² Known in Hungarian by the nickname, *Pipo Spano*, this son of a poor Florentine noble was given many honors such as one of the founding members of the *Societas Draconistarum* (the chivalric Order of the Dragon), titles such as *comes Temesiensis* (Count of Temesvár- i.e. modern Timișoara), and major court responsibilities within

central lynchpin of the Kingdom of Hungary's defensive frontier- holding the line together at the strategic point between the Despotate of Serbia and the Voivodeship of Wallachia.¹³ King Sigismund made the castles an important part of his offer to the Order to entice them to come and defend the strategically important territory of the Iron Gates. In turn, the Teutonic Order agreed to continue to repair, supply, and maintain a garrison within them as bases of operation.

Methodology

Methodological Organization

To provide a beneficial grounding for the reader, two general contexts will be presented before the analysis. These are: historical (to be found in Chapter One), and geographical (located in Chapter Two). This is because our conception of history understands historical events as not only existing at a specific chronological time, but also in a definite geographic space. Both of these contexts helped to shape the events as they occurred, and they should therefore be used as a framework to ground our interpretations.

Chapter One will discuss these castles beginning with the political environment two and a half decades before the time that the entire castle chain was put together in the 1420's, and progress until the end of the Teutonic Order's mission to the Iron Gates in the mid-1430's. This will be an important basis for the analysis found in Chapter Three in particular, as the information garnered from documentary sources must be placed in a larger historical context to fully understand it. Then, a short section on historiography will sketch out how this topic has

the Kingdom of Hungary like *comes camerarum salium regalium* (count of the treasuries of the royal salt). His role in the building and repair of these castles will be discussed below in Chapter One. See: Katalin Prajda, "The Florentine Scolari Family at the Court of Sigismund of Luxemburg in Buda," *Journal of Early Modern History* 14 (2010), 513-533.

¹³ See: Engel, Pál. *The Realm of St. Stephen: A History of Medieval Hungary, 895-1526* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), 236-237. Also: Mark Whelan, *Sigismund of Luxemburg and the Imperial Response to the Ottoman Turkish Threat, c. 1410*, PhD diss., University of London, 2014, 33-34.

been treated academically to this point, to try and understand the ever-adjusting focus upon the expedition and these castles- in order to, once again, help provide a framework to ground interpretation.

Chapter Two will illustrate the physical realities in which these castles were (and still are in some form) located. It will include a survey of the geographical features of the Iron Gates. This will be crucial for the analysis portion found in Chapter Four, which concentrates on a military assessment of a sample set of these castles (defined and rationalized in the next section), and requires the examination of these in the context of their immediate landscapes in which they were built to guard, and into which operations were conducted.

As mentioned above, Chapter Three will involve an analysis of the sampled castles from within the documentary sources. This will concern key aspects of these castles beyond their defensive architecture, focusing on their garrisons and command structure. An analysis of this aspect is important as these soldiers are the means by which offensive and defensive operations are performed.

Chapter Four deals with an examination of the selected castles as objects within a landscape through a military lens. This will be done partially using maps, satellite images, photos, drawings, and illustrations. It will also be accomplished using archaeological analyses of each of the chosen castles, as well as the results of a personal inspection of each of the selected sites over the course of two trips to the Iron Gates. All of this will be an attempt to provide as accurate a picture as is currently possible concerning multiple issues including, but not limited to: their relationships to their physical surroundings, the military soundness of their locations in terms of fulfilling their individual roles within a defensive chain, the particulars of logistical support needed to sustain their garrisons, and the feasibility for executing effective offensive operations from them. Answers to issues like these are vital to form a multi-

dimensional picture of the Order's activities in this region, and to provide a template for my proposed subsequent work at the doctoral level.

The Sample Set

In practical terms, the work that would be required to examine all twenty-four fortifications transferred to the Teutonic Order in September 1429 could not be contained in a work for a master's degree. It could only be properly treated in a far larger, monographic study. Therefore, it is not feasible to perform a complete military analysis of them all here. A culling is needed to produce a manageable, yet meaningful sample set.

The table directly below lists all twenty-four castles, shaded to show exclusions due to abandonment (grey), no garrison listed (blue), and locations in the mountain passes (green). Erich Joachim was the first academic to try and identify the locations of these fortresses in 1912, but the most recent scholarship on the matter of locations has been published in 2015 by Costin Feneşan. I will henceforth be utilizing Feneşan's locations alone, though both scholars agree on many places, as they are the most recent theories and have drawn off more academic and archaeological scholarship since Joachim.

Table 1. All castles listed as transferred to the Teutonic Order in Oct./Nov. 1429.

Name in Source	Guards Danube or Mountain Pass	Garrison size from Source	Joachim's Identification	Feneşan's Identification
Severyn	Danube	200 men, 40 bowmen	Severin	Severin (in the modern city of Drobeta-Turnu Severin)
Insyl Saan	Danube	216 men	Ade-Kale Island near Orşova, or Simianu Island near Drobeta-Turnu Severin	Ade-Kale (now submerged below the Danube's surface)
Vaskapu	Danube	Abandoned	Eisernes Tor bei Orşova	La Porțile de Fier (on the left bank of the Danube, between Severin and Orşova)
Sente Peters	Joachim-Mountain Pass, Feneşan-Danube	Abandoned	Szent-Peter (located in the region of Timisoara, or near the town of Kovin in Serbia)	Sf. Petru (on the left bank of the Danube, close to Ada Kale Island)
Unnamed (above Severyn)	Danube	Abandoned	Not identified	Not identified

Goryn	Joachim-Mountain Pass, Feneșan-Danube	60 men	Goreny (presumed to be near Mehadia)	Goryn (probably located near Vârciorova, on the left bank of the Danube)
Orsua	Danube	60 men, 30 bowmen, 260 "fighting servants"	Orșova	Orșova (now submerged below the Danube's surface)
Unnamed (upriver from Orsua)	Danube	Abandoned	Not identified	Not identified
Peczsche	Danube	32 men, 20 bowmen	Pecz (either near Dubova, or upriver from Orșova)	Peczsche (probably ruins near Dubova)
Unnamed (above Peczsche)	Danube	Abandoned	Not identified	Not identified
Lybko	Joachim-Mountain Pass, Feneșan-Danube	No garrison listed	Lybko (probably in the town of Lugo)	Lybko (most likely Liubcova)
Zynicze	Danube	40 men, 6 bowmen	Szvinicza (upriver from Orșova)	Svinița
Staniloucz	Danube	32 men, 4 bowmen	Stanislowcz (somewhere between the castles of Szvinicza and Drenkova)	Staniloucz (somewhere between Svinița and Drencova)
Dranko	Danube	24 men, 4 bowmen	Drenkova	Drencova (somewhere on the left bank of the Danube, between Drencova and Omoldova)
Ybrasd	Danube	24 men, 4 bowmen	Librasd (between Drenkova and Omoldova on the Danube bank)	Lybrasd (also somewhere on the left bank of the Danube, between Drencova and Omoldova)
Soel	Joachim-unknown, Feneșan-Danube	No garrison listed	Soel (unknown location)	Soel (probably near Liborajdea)
Ander Peczsche	Danube	20 men, 4 bowmen	Pecz (near Omoldova)	Peczsche (probably near <i>Sand Ladislaen</i>)
Sand Ladislaen	Danube	400 men, 56 bowmen	Szent-Lasslo (across the Danube from Galambocz)	Sf. Ladislau (on the above Coronini)
Possesin	Danube	200 men, 30 bowmen	Poczesena	Pojejena
Unnamed (upriver from Possesin)	Danube	Abandoned	Unknown location	Unnamed
Rybes	Joachim-unknown, Feneșan-Danube	40 men	Rybes (unknown location)	Rybes (probably downstream of Moldova Noua, on the left bank of the Danube)
Myhalt	Mountain Pass	294 village officials, 1112 peasants, 30 who guard the roads, 20 couriers	Mehadia	Mehadia
Halmas	Mountain Pass	223 (knesien) village officials, 504 peasants,	Halmas (to the west of Mehadia)	Almăj (most likely on the outskirts of the village of Dalboșeț)

		32 who guard the roads, 26 couriers		
Ylied	Mountain Pass	126 (knesien) village officials, 450 peasants	Illadia	Ilidia

Sources: Feneşan, Costin. *Cavalerii Teutoni în Banatul Severinului și la Dunărea de jos în prima jumătate a secolului al XV-lea*. Timisoara: Cosmopolitan Art, 2015; and Joachim, Erich. “König Sigmund und der deutsche Ritterorden in Ungarn 1429-1432.” In *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, vol. XXXII (1912), nr. 1, doc. III, 109-113.

A quick examination will show that three, *Myhalt*, *Halmas*, and *Ylied* are not located on the Danube and are therefore not part of this analysis of castles belonging to the chain on the river frontier. Six- *Vaskapu*, *Sente Peters*, an unnamed fortress above *Severyn*, an unnamed fortress upriver from *Orsua*, an unnamed fortress above *Peczsch*, and an unnamed fortress upriver from *Possesin*- were listed as abandoned upon arrival and are never mentioned again in any later documents concerning garrisons.¹⁴ Two, *Lybko* and *Soel*, have no garrisons listed at all, and also do not reappear in subsequent documents. This leaves eleven.

To meaningfully fit in the scope of a master’s thesis, a group of four key fortresses have been selected from the remaining eleven. These are from east to west: *Severyn*, *Zynicze*, *Dranko*, and *Sand Ladislaen*.¹⁵

Table 2. List of sampled castles to be used in this study.

Name in Source	Garrison size from source	Military Objectives that it Protects
Severyn	240	Located on the chain’s eastern flank, guards urban center, and multiple entry points into the interior
Zynicze	46	Guards major bend in river

¹⁴ For both the original German transcriptions, and translations into modern Romanian of almost all the primary documents related to the expedition, see: Costin Feneşan, *Cavalerii Teutoni în Banatul Severinului și la Dunărea de jos în prima jumătate a secolului al XV-lea* [The Teutonic Knights in the Banat of Severin and the Lower Danube in the First Half of the 15th Century] (Timisoara: Cosmopolitan Art, 2015), 85-274

¹⁵ See the map found in Fig. 3, located in the Appendix.

Dranko	28	Guards a major bend in river, and a road to the interior
Sand Ladislaen	456	Observes enemy castle of <i>Golubac</i> , guards chain's western flank

The criteria used for this selection was based on a number of qualities possessed by these particular fortresses. The first is geographical. I have attempted to make them a sample of the entire chain, spanning as much of its length as possible. However, this is tempered by the next criterion which is that these fortresses must have had archaeological excavations or physical survey conducted upon them. Again, this will be very important for the analysis contained in Chapter Four that will evaluate their physical military properties and uses.¹⁶ This means that the more logical choice of *Orsua*- which would have made the sample set closer to equidistant geographically- had to be discounted because it has been completely submerged since the 1970's, following the construction of the two hydroelectric dams downriver (to be discussed in Chapter 2), and no archaeological work was conducted prior.

The next criterion will also be important for the analysis contained in the fourth chapter- the relationship of each fortress to the immediate landscape. Briefly, this refers to the reasons why each one had been built in its particular spot- in order to control a characteristic of the terrain that an opposing force could use to complete an aggressive raid or larger campaign. This could be the control of a land-based objective, like command of a major road or pathway leading from the river into the interior of the region, or something far more basic to military philosophy- control of an extreme flank of the castle system itself. It could also be a river objective, from an easy crossing point, to a strategic location that can monitor all river traffic at major changes in the direction of the Danube.

¹⁶ A description of the methodology used in the physical analysis in Chapter Four will be discussed at that chapter's beginning.

The final criterion is important for the fourth chapter- the garrison size. A military analysis of a castle must include an examination of its manpower to determine if it was capable of defending its surroundings, or if it had enough resources to sustain its men. Logically, a more representative sample set should include a consistent sampling of large, medium, and small garrisons, as the differences in troop strength dictate military capabilities and use (such as small patrols or large offensive campaigns), as well as reflect the architectural characteristics of the castles in which these men are posted- ranging from a simple watchtower maintained by twenty-five men, to a castle complex made of multiple rings of defensive walls guarded by hundreds. Therefore, I have chosen the smaller Dranko and Zynicze housing 28 and 46 men respectively, the larger *Severyn* with 240 men, and the enormous Sand Ladislaen populated with 456 (a greater garrison size than the other castles put together).

Sources

A recent publication by Costin Feneșan, (titled: *Cavalerii Teutoni în Banatul Severinului și la Dunărea de jos în prima jumătate a secolului al XV-lea*), provides the most complete collection of primary sourced documents directly related to the Iron Gates castles and the Teutonic Order's expedition.¹⁷ He has garnered these documents from six different archival collections- most importantly giving their transcriptions in the original Latin or Late Medieval German, as well as their translations into modern Romanian. Most of these are correspondences between officials such as King Sigismund or the Grandmaster of the Teutonic Order, Paul von Rußdorf, or participants in the expedition itself. These are either requests for specific experts or workers needed in the Iron Gates, or reports from the region back to the King or Grandmaster. This group makes up the majority of the documents and comes from the

¹⁷ See: Feneșan, *Cavalerii Teutoni în Banatul Severinului*, 85-274.

Ordensbriefarchiv collection of the larger *Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz*, in *Berlin*.¹⁸ Specific documents will be discussed further below.

These thirty-four correspondences (out of Feneșan's total of forty-eight documents) have also been reprinted over the past century in six unrelated publications. These are: Wilhelm Altmann's *Die Urkunden Kaiser Sigmunds (1410-1437)*,¹⁹ Erich Joachim's *König Sigmund und der deutsche Ritterorden in Ungarn 1429-1432*,²⁰ Erich Joachim and Walther Hubatsch's *Regesta historico-diplomatica Ordinis S. Mariae Theutonicorum 1198-1525*,²¹ Friedrich George von Bunge's *Liv-, Est- und Curländisches Urkundenbuch*,²² Șerban Papacostea's *Știri noi cu privire la istoria husitismului în Moldova în timpul lui Alexandru cel Bun*,²³ Eduard Raczynski's *Codex diplomaticus Lithuaniae e codicibus manuscriptis in Archivo secreto Regiomontano asservatis*,²⁴ and Gustav Gündisch's *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen*.²⁵

The next largest group of documents come from the *Magyar Országos Levéltár* (Hungarian National Archives) in Budapest. These are nine documents in total.²⁶ Two are dated prior to the expedition, and one after. They are either reports to or from King Sigismund and will also be discussed further in Chapter Three.

¹⁸ Within Feneșan's work, these documents are numbers 3, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14-25, 28, 30-43, 46, and 48. See: Feneșan, *Cavalerii Teutoni în Banatul Severinului*, 99-273.

¹⁹ *Regesta Imperii II, Die Urkunden Kaiser Sigmunds*, 2 vols., ed. Wilhelm Altmann (Innsbruck: Wagner, 1896-1900).

²⁰ Erich Joachim, "König Sigmund und der Deutsche Ritterorden in Ungarn 1429-1432 (Mitteilungen aus dem Staatsarchiv zu Königsberg)," in *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* Bd. 33 (Innsbruck: Universitäts-Buchdruckerei, 1912).

²¹ Erich Joachim, and Walter Hubatsch, ed. *Regesta Historica-Diplomatica Ordinis S. Mariae Theutonicorum, 1198-1525*, vols. 1-3 (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1948).

²² *Liv-, Est-, und Curländisches Urkundenbuch nebst Regesten*, vols. 4-7. 1093-1300., ed. Friedrich George von Bunge (Dorpat: Kluge und Ströhm, 1853 - 1914).

²³ Șerban Papacostea, "Știri noi cu privire la istoria husitismului în Moldova în timpul lui Alexandru cel Bun," in *Studii și Cercetări Științifice-Istorie, Iași*, vol. 13, part 2 (1962), 253-258.

²⁴ *Codex diplomaticus Lithuaniae e codicibus manuscriptis in archivo secreto Regiomontano asservatis*, ed. Edward Raczynski (Bratislava: Sigismund Schletter, 1845).

²⁵ *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen*, vols. 1-7, ed. Gustav Gündisch, Franz Zimmermann, and C. Werner (Köln: 1892 - 1991).

²⁶ This group includes documents 2, 9, 26, 27, 29, 41, 44, 45, and 47.

Of the remaining five, two come from the *Codex Epistolaris Vitoldi Magni Ducis Lithuaniae, 1376-1430*, one a letter from Sigismund to Lithuanian King Vytautas (c. 1350-1430), and the second from Vytautas to the Grandmaster (von Rußdorf).²⁷ The earliest dated of all the documents collected in Feneşan's work was written by General Scolari, which discusses land disputes among major holders in the region and has been printed in Pesty Frigyes' third volume of his *Krassó vármegye története*.²⁸ Another document was originally held in the archives of the monastic chapter of Cluj Monastery (*Arhiva Capitulului Cluj-Mănăştur*). This one suffered serious damage in the first half of the nineteenth century but whose text was preserved in Joseph Kemény's periodical publication: "Die durch König Sigmund im Jahre 1426 beabsichtigte Wiederansiedlung des deutschen Ordens in Siebenbürgen," in the *Magazin für Geschichte, Literatur und alle Denk- und Merkwürdigkeiten Siebenbürgens*. Incidentally, this article appears to be the first academic treatment of the topic of Sigismund's defense for the Iron Gates which includes the transcription of one primary source document. In the document, Sigismund announces to Loránd Lépés, the Vice-Voivode of Transylvania, that he is bringing the Teutonic Order to defend the southern border of Transylvania in the Iron Gates due to the uninterrupted attacks of the Turks.²⁹ The last document comes from the *Stadtarchiv Frankfurt am Main*, and has been published in J. Aschbach's *Geschichte Kaiser Sigmunds*,³⁰

There are a few other relevant, but scattered, documents not present in Feneşan's work. One of these collections is volume four of Franz Zimmermann and Carl Werner's *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen*,³¹ and another is the

²⁷ These are document numbers five and six.

²⁸ Pesty Frigyes, *Krassó vármegye története*, vol. 3 (Budapest: 1882), doc. 245, 343-344.

²⁹ Joseph Kemény, "Die durch König Sigmund im Jahre 1426 beabsichtigte Wiederansiedlung des deutschen Ordens in Siebenbürgen," in *Magazin für Geschichte, Literatur und alle Denk- und Merkwürdigkeiten Siebenbürgens*, ed. A. Kurz, vol. 2, part 1 (Braşov, 1846), 98-99.

³⁰ J. Aschbach, *Geschichte Kaiser Sigmunds*, vol. 3 (Hamburg: 1841), doc. XII, 412-413.

³¹ Franz Zimmermann, and Carl Werner, ed. *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen*, vol. 4 (Hermannstadt: Franz Michaelis, 1892), doc. 1864.

Zsigmondkori Oklevéltár, twelve volumes edited by a number of scholars such as Elemér Mályusz and Iván Borsa.³² These documents deal mainly with the overall political situation and indirectly touch upon the circumstances of the Teutonic Order's expedition.

Finally, three chronicle sources are pertinent to overlying international matters surrounding the Teutonic Order's expedition and the castles of the Iron Gates. The first is by Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (the future Pope Pius II, 1405-1464), and deals with the life and career of Filippo Scolari, the general in charge of building and repairing these castles, and predecessor to Nikolaus von Redwitz (fl. 1422-1436), the Order's preceptor for the entire expedition- who will be discussed throughout.³³ The other two chronicles offer insights into the reign of Sigismund. These are from Johannes Thuróczy (c. 1435-1490), and Jan Długosz (1415-1480).³⁴

³² *Zsigmondkori Oklevéltár*, 12 vols., ed. Elemér Mályusz, Iván Borsa et al. (Budapest: Magyar Országos Levéltár, 1951-2013).

³³ Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, *Historica Bohemica*, ed. Joseph Hejnic, 3 vols. (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005).

³⁴ János Thuróczy, *Chronicle of the Hungarians*, trans. Frank Mantello (Bloomington, VT: Indiana University Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1991). Also: Maurice Michael, trans., *The Annals of Jan Długosz: An English Abridgement* (Charlton, West Sussex: IM Publications, 1997).

was forced to support an unsuccessful rebellion within Bulgaria as an attempt to slow the advance. This was partially due to an inability for the local Orthodox Christian population to work with their Roman Catholic neighbors because of sectarian differences, despite facing a common foe.³⁸

In a bid to finally take control of the situation himself, King Sigismund organized a crusade of multinational fighters made of Burgundian, Bulgarian, Croatian, English, French, German, Hungarian, and Wallachian fighters, along with about seventy hired river vessels from the Venetian navy. Following a war council held in Buda in the late summer of 1396, the crusading forces followed the left bank of the Danube River until they reached the royal castle of Orsua in the Iron Gates.³⁹ It was from this castle that the crusaders crossed over to the southern shore and moved along the river until it reached the fortress at Nicopolis on September 12. Two weeks later, Sigismund had fled the field in a route, barely escaping with his life aboard one of the Venetian ships.⁴⁰

Sigismund learned immediately that it would be almost impossible to achieve a single, decisive, large-scale victory due to his sound defeat at Nicopolis. So, he used the *Diet of Temesvár* the following year to announce one of his many new strategies in his ever-developing overall plan. This first piece involved the creation of a peasant levy to build a force with which to defend the frontier where, “all landowners among the barons and noblemen of our realm must equip and lead to war ... from twenty peasant tenants, one archer in soldierly fashion and to make them fight during the present war.”⁴¹ Finding manpower would always be key to most of Sigismund’s plans.

³⁸ David Nicolle, *Nicopolis 1396: The Last Crusade* (London: Osprey Publishing Limited, 1999), 6-7.

³⁹ At this location would be built one of the original fortresses of the castle chain, first constructed by Sigismund under the oversight of Scolari two and a half decades later; and then handed over to the Teutonic Order’s expedition in 1429. See: Barbara W. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 560.

⁴⁰ Nicolle, *Nicopolis 1396*, 38-40.

⁴¹ This diet was held in the city of *Temesvár* (modern *Timișoara* in Romania) in October 1397. See: *The Laws of the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary (Decreta Regni Mediaevalis Hungariae)*, trans. and ed. János M. Bak, Pal

The second and third decade of the fifteenth century was punctuated by periods of peace and then unexpected conflict. For example, a peace treaty agreed between the Ottomans and Sigismund in 1419 was already broken by a Turkish invasion force within the Iron Gates the following year, and was successfully repulsed by the summer of 1420.⁴² A second treaty in 1424 was swiftly broken by further Ottoman incursions.⁴³ With a repeated background for easily broken peace, it is surprising that the Order's expedition to the Iron Gates was able to settle from 1429 to 1432 under almost three years of a successfully observed peace treaty.⁴⁴

Yet this fact brings important questions. Why did the expedition fail so miserably by losing three of the castles when the peace was broken in the early summer of 1432- after almost three years of preparation?⁴⁵ Was the castle chain in the Iron Gates flawed in any way? Were there enough men to perform the task? Were these the right men to defend the frontier? This study will discuss the questions on the manpower in Chapters Three and Four. It also proposes a way to test each individual fortress of the chain- as demonstrated in the final chapter on the four chosen representative castles as a sample set. It is then intended for this test to be applied to the entire castle chain in a larger, later work at the doctoral level.

As discussed in the Introduction, the king had appointed General Scolari as the overseer of his huge castle-building project all along the Danube frontier in the 1420's, with the Iron Gates as the keystone of his frontier defense. To the west, all the way to Belgrade,

Engel, and J. R. Sweeney (Idyllwild, CA: Charles Schlacks, 1999), II, 22, cited in: Whelan, "Catastrophe or Consolidation," 216.

⁴² The repulse of the attack was reported to Sigismund in a letter from Sigismund Losoncz, the commander of the castles of *Myhalt*, *Severyn*, *Orsua*, and *Hermanstadt* dated July 25, 1420. See: ZKO, VII. Nr. 2010. Cited in Whelan, *Sigismund of Luxemburg*, 34.

⁴³ This is related by one of Sigismund's chroniclers, Eberhard Windecke. See: Whelan, *Sigismund of Luxemburg*, 38.

⁴⁴ The conclusion of the treaty was reported to Grandmaster Rußdorf in a letter from Sigismund dated February 18, 1429. See: OBA, Nr. 5050. Printed in: Altmann, Nr. 7171.

⁴⁵ A report to Rußdorf from the Commander of Osterode, Wolfram von Saunsheim, dated December 12, 1432, tells of the loss of three unnamed castles in the Iron Gates (*drey slosser haben vorhert*). See: OBA, Nr. 6276, transcribed in: Feneşan, *Cavalerii Teutoni în Banatul Severinului*, 255.

the Despotate of Serbia had completed fourteen new fortresses for its protection, by the time of the Order's expedition in 1429.⁴⁶ In fact, in a letter to the Teutonic Order's Grandmaster, Paul von Rußdorf, dated October 9, 1428, Sigismund tells of his recent conquest of Belgrade, and the building of these "many good castles" (*von den gnaden gotes vil guter Slosz haben*).⁴⁷ The territory falling to the east of the Iron Gates was ostensibly protected through alliance, and its overall defense was left to the Voivode of Wallachia, whoever that might be at any given time.

Within the Iron Gates, Severyn was the first castle to be mentioned in a report to Sigismund regarding the local situation written by *György Laczk of Zanthow* (fl. 1424-1438), the Lord of *Bálványos* Castle (located in northern *Kovászna* county of Romania), which is dated October 16, 1424. In it, it is stated that this fortification is currently under repairs by *Scolari*, along with an unspecified number of other fortresses in the region.⁴⁸ The next mention of castle Severyn occurs in a letter written from Sigismund to King Vytautas of Lithuania, dated May 15, 1426, in which the Hungarian King is happy to announce an upcoming visit to the imperial fortress- to begin on the feast of St. John the Baptist when he will meet with Wallachian Voivode Dan II.⁴⁹

It is from this very fortress that the expedition's procurator, Redwitz, will make his most urgent plea for help from his grandmaster in 1432, because Sigismund has not given the help he had promised. Redwitz feels so strongly about the situation, the he will immediately after writing the report leave the Iron Gates to seek the King's help. In the letter, he complains to Rußdorf that Sigismund has not respected his promises made before they came to the Iron Gates, and that the fortifications that were entrusted to them can no longer be

⁴⁶ Whelan, "Catastrophe or Consolidation," 218.

⁴⁷ OBA, Nr. 4989, transcribed in: Feneşan, *Cavalerii Teutoni în Banatul Severinului*, 149.

⁴⁸ *Arhiva Națională Maghiară (Magyar Országos Levéltár)* Budapesta, Dl. 48.752, transcribed in: Feneşan, *Cavalerii Teutoni în Banatul Severinului*, 106.

⁴⁹ OBA, Nr. 4586, transcribed in: Feneşan, *Cavalerii Teutoni în Banatul Severinului*, 111.

defended against attacks by the Turks. He ends by imploring the Grandmaster to intervene with Sigismund, in order to finally be provided with all the financial and material means necessary to bring about the proper defense of the area under their jurisdiction.⁵⁰

The initial planning phase of Sigismund's proposal to the Teutonic Knights seems to have become concretized between 1427 when he announced to the Grand Master of the Order, von Rußdorf of his choice of Redwitz as the mission's leader,⁵¹ and September of 1429- when the expedition set out from *Preßburg* (Bratislava) to enter into the Kingdom of Hungary.⁵² By that time, Ottoman forces had control of the southern shore of the Danube directly across from the *Szörény* area of the Hungarian Kingdom (to include the Iron Gates).⁵³ Sigismund therefore, gave the Teutonic order a number of castles in that region to aid them in their defense. However, as seen in Table 1, a full physical accounting of these castles has never been done seriously, and the ones that have been suggested in earlier research have not been confirmed.

Further, during his planning phase, Sigismund had reorganized this border region by recreating the *Banat of Szörény* (Hungarian: *Szörényi Bánság*), a territory that was first established by King Béla IV of Hungary (1206- 1270) in a charter dated 2 June 1247 for the Knights Hospitaller to defend against the Cumans.⁵⁴ The newly recreated title, *Ban of Szörény*, seems to have been bestowed upon Redwitz after the expedition's settling into the region during the spring or summer of 1430. He is also given the title of the Count of *Szeben*,

⁵⁰ OBA, Nr. 5999, transcribed in: Feneşan, *Cavalerii Teutoni in Banatul Severinului*, 240-246.

⁵¹ This was done in a letter issued from the royal court in Würzburg Germany. See: Sigismund von Luxemburg, *Urkunde Nr. 9023 aus Band IX*, letter, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, from Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen Online, Berlin.

⁵² Aschbach, *Geschichte Kaiser Sigmunds*, 279.

⁵³ Viorel Achim, "LOCUL ORDINULUI TEUTON ÎN ISTORIA BANATULUI DE SEVERIN," *Banatica* 24, no. 2 (2014), 42.

⁵⁴ Şerban Papacostea, "Between the Crusade and the Mongol Empire: The Romanians in the 13th Century," in *Bibliotheca rerum Transsilvaniae*, vol. 22 (Center for Transylvanian Studies, Romanian Cultural Foundation, 1998), 230.

and Steward of the salt mines and Royal Mints in the region.⁵⁵ These personal titles bring in another element to the research of the mission to the Iron Gates. The Preceptor must now, not only answer directly to the Grand Master, but also to the King because of these new titles. They also provide a glimpse into Sigismund's military strategy by integrating the Order into the local landscape: diplomatically, bureaucratically, and financially.

Sand Ladislaen was another major fortress, besides Severyn, to have a very large garrison. It was built for one single purpose, to monitor the Turkish garrison directly across the river at the castle of Golubac. Golubac in turn, was very important because of its close proximity to the western end of the Iron Gates and now, the Ottomans had it. Whoever controlled it could control western access into the system of gorges that ran all the way to the castle of Severyn. That is, until Sand Ladislaen was built to counteract Golubac's Turkish presence.

The problem began in July 1427, seven months after the death of Scolari, when another important death occurred- that of Stefan Lazarević, the Despot of Serbia. Lazarević was a nominal vassal of Sigismund who was in charge of the defense of the Serbia on the southwestern flank of Hungary. In a personal agreement with Sigismund, Lazarević had agreed to transfer direct control of many of the Danuban castles to the Hungarian King upon his death, especially Golubac. However, because negotiations with Lazarević's heir took several weeks, the Turks seized a number of castles in the interim, including Golubac, which was handed over to them by its Serbian castellan. Sigismund immediately attempted a siege to win this castle back in April 1428, which ended in another failure, and like at Nicopolis in 1396, the King yet again barely escaped with his life via a river ship.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Redwitz first refers to these titles in a documentary signature dated July 18, 1430. This is ten months after he led the expeditionary force into Hungary in September 1429. The original Latin is: "*frater Nicolaus de Radewitz, Ordinis beate marie virginis domus ierosolimitani preceptor ceterorum fratrum predicti Ordinis in Regnum Hungarie missorum Banus Zewriniensis, necnon camararum monete regalis Cibiniensis comes.*" See: Achim, "LOCUL ORDINULUI TEUTON," 42.

⁵⁶ Whelan, *Sigismund of Luxemburg*, 48-49.

Plans to build a fortress on the escarpment directly across the river- whose major purpose was to monitor the Ottoman garrison of Golubac- was begun that autumn of that same year.⁵⁷ On November 18, 1428, Sigismund's chancellor, Kaspar Schlick sent a letter to the Margrave of Brandenburg asking for more workers to complete the building of Sand Ladislaen.⁵⁸ The first document showing Sand Ladislaen under the expedition's direct control is in a report from Redwitz to Rußdorf which Feneşan has dated to a year later in October or November 1429, upon the expedition's arrival to the Iron Gates or immediately thereafter. It is listed as being garrisoned at that time.⁵⁹ What histories we have from within only a few documents concerning the remaining two castles in the sample set will be discussed as each is presented in Chapter Four.

1.2. Historiography

1.2.1. Academic Interest in the Historical Events

Historiographically speaking, interest in, and research around the Order's expedition has been conducted sporadically within the past century, usually as a smaller part of a larger discussion. It begins with Joseph Kemény's article: "Die durch König Sigmund im Jahre 1426 beabsichtigte Wiederansiedelung des deutschen Ordens in Siebenbürgen," written in 1846. It deals with the four years of planning and negotiations prior to the expedition.⁶⁰ Erich Joachim's 1912 article, "*König Sigmund und der Deutsche Ritterorden in Ungarn 1429-1432*," was the first to mention and discuss the castles by name through further sources beyond Kemény's single document. It explores and interprets information contained within primary sourced documents concerning the Teutonic Order's role in the military mission to

⁵⁷ According to the measuring tool on the Google Maps webpage displaying *Golubac* and *Sand Ladislaen*, the total distance via direct line of sight between the two castles is 1.38 km (4,526.20 ft).

⁵⁸ Altmann, nr. 7136.

⁵⁹ OBA, Nr. 27837, transcribed in: Feneşan, *Cavalerii Teutoni în Banatul Severinului*, 189.

⁶⁰ Kemény, "Die durch König Sigmund," 96-101.

the Danube frontier, using diplomatic correspondences, for the most part, written between members of the Order and Sigismund, the King of Hungary. Joachim's publication has been cited by later works on this topic, from Ottokar Israel's 1952 examination of the Teutonic Order's overall connection with the Imperial Court throughout the fifteenth century,⁶¹ through Pál Engel's 1996 archontological work concerning the important officeholders within the Kingdom of Hungary from 1301 to 1457,⁶² to the 2013 article by Mark Whelan countering the traditional view of Sigismund's grand strategy held by historians.⁶³

Perhaps most significant for this thesis, Whelan's more recent doctoral dissertation examines Sigismund's strategy far more in depth. In it, he discusses the King's relationship with the Order throughout, placing its function within the framework of the Sigismund's overall stratagem. He also quite thoroughly examines Redwitz's role within this endeavor- to the extent that the scant amount of source material about this figure allows. In connection with the Teutonic Order, Whelan works from the starting point of Joachim's article by using the same primary source documents, and integrates these into his larger examination of Sigismund's sudden use of new monetary and human resources from the Holy Roman Empire- in order to counter the Ottomans- once he was proclaimed King of the Romans in 1410.⁶⁴ Due to the macro/international scope of his dissertation, Whelan was not able to focus too particularly on one very important aspect of the expedition: the castles gifted to the Order within the Iron Gates region.⁶⁵ Further, once again, all secondary sources that I am aware of interpret the castles in terms of being tools of a grand strategy- from Sigismund's international standpoint. This thesis will attempt to examine them at their own face value, on

⁶¹ Ottokar Israel, "Das Verhältnis des Hochmeisters des Deutschen Ordens zum Reich im 15. Jahrhundert," *Wissenschaftliche Beiträge zur Geschichte und Landeskunde Ost-Mitteleuropas*, 4 (Marburg, 1952).

⁶² Pál Engel, *Magyarország világi archontológiája 1301-1457*, (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézet, 1996).

⁶³ Whelan, "Catastrophe or Consolidation," 215-227.

⁶⁴ Whelan, *Sigismund of Luxemburg*, 3.

⁶⁵ In fact, Whelan is only able to devote three out of two hundred eighteen pages on the castles donated to the Teutonic Order on the Danube, dealing only with how they are treated in the source documents. See: Whelan, *Sigismund of Luxemburg*, 160-163.

a more local level, within the Iron Gates. That is, to interpret them in a manner that a conscientious soldier or commander of the expedition might do as they are garrisoned in one on this frontier.

1.2.2. Academic Interest in the Castles (Archaeology)

The Archaeological and Ethnological Patrimony of the Region of Banat (*Patrimoniul Arheologic și Etnologic al Banatului*) has produced the most complete collection of archaeological and survey material concerning all castles within the Banat region (the larger geographical region in which the Iron Gates now exists) of Romania. It compiled all of this information in a published work by Dumitru Țeicu in 2009, titled, *Cetăți medievale din Banat* (*Medieval fortifications in Banat*). It also relies on primary sourced documents concerning the names and basic information for the castles of the area, first collected by Pesty Friges and published between 1878-1883, and by Theodor Ortway-Ortmayr in 1896, and then adds information about the castles of the region from travel journals and drawings (to include Turkish sources) from the sixteenth through early twentieth centuries. It then includes the archaeological work which only began in the nineteen seventies due to the politics of the mid to later twentieth century. It incorporates Ștefan Matei's work at *Ilidia* (one of the mountain castles give to the Order) in 1972, and later excavations at the fortresses of *Mehadia* (another of the Order's mountain castles) and Sand Ladislaen. The work for the castle of Zynicze (another of the Danuban castles in this study) was conducted in the fall of 1970. The dams discussed in Chapter Two halted all archaeological work on the river castles in 1972.⁶⁶

For studies of specific castles not covered in Țeicu's publication, such as Severyn, I have chosen to use Teodor Octavian Gheorghiu's "*Drobeta-Turnu Severin. Ipoteză de*

⁶⁶ Dumitru Țeicu, *Cetăți medievale din Banat* (Medieval fortifications in Banat) (Reșița: Muzeul Banatului Montan, 2009), 11-16.

evoluție urbanistică” for this castle.⁶⁷ For castle Dranko: Ákos Karczag’s: “A Dunába süllyedt vár- Drankó. Várak, Kastélyok, Templomok.”⁶⁸ I will also use Theodor Trâpcea’s “Despre unele cetăți medievale din Banat.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Teodor Octavian Gheorghiu. “Drobeta-Turnu Severin. Ipoteză de evoluție urbanistică,” *Historia Urbana*, vols. 1 and 2 (2001), 145-154.

⁶⁸ Ákos Karczag, “A Dunába süllyedt vár- Drankó. Várak, Kastélyok, Templomok,” *Krónika*, vol. 8, no. 2. (2012), 22–24.

⁶⁹ Theodor Trâpcea, “Despre unele cetăți medievale din Banat,” *StIB*, vol. I (1969), 23-82.

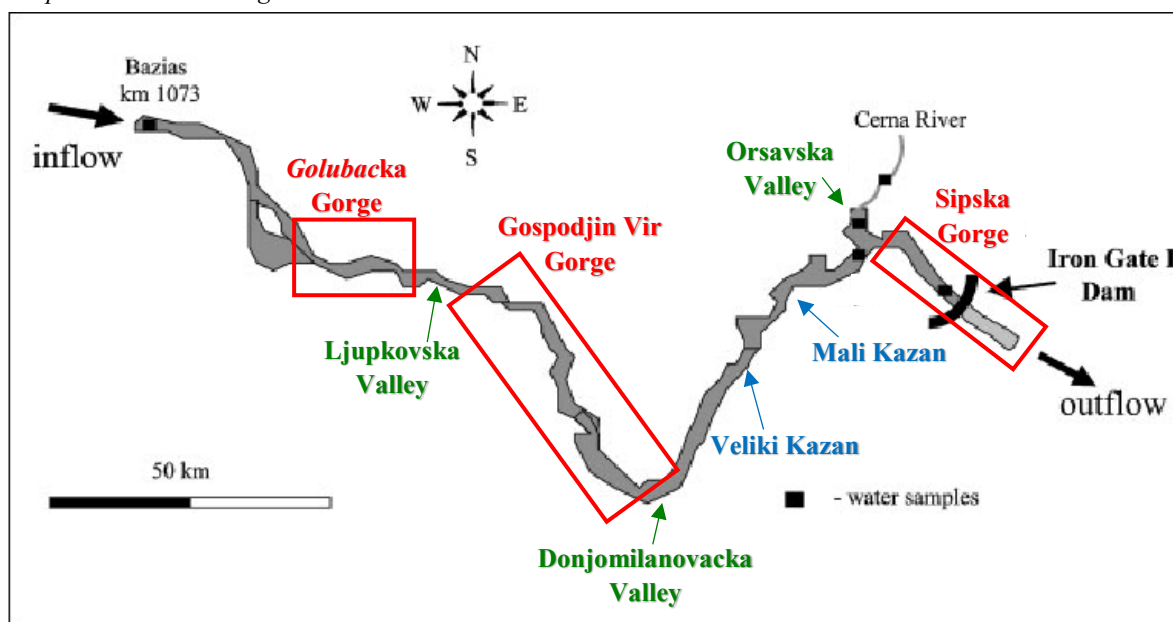
Chapter Two - Basic Geography of the Iron Gates and Castle Locations

2.1. Basic Geography of the Region and Strategic Importance

2.1.1. Topographical Features

Geographically speaking, this region on the Danube is known as the Iron Gates in English.⁷⁰ It consists of a stretch of the river extending about one hundred thirty-four kilometers- bracketed between the modern Romanian city of *Drobeta-Turnu Severin* at its easternmost part, and the village of *Moldova Veche* (or *Omoldova*), in the west.⁷¹ In actuality, it is made of a system of three distinct gorges (*Golubacka*, *Gospodjin Vir*, and *Sipska*), separated by three valleys (*Orsavska*, *Donjomilanovacka*, and *Ljupkovska*), and two canyons (*Mali Kazan*, and *Veliki Kazan*). See the map below.

Map 1. Iron Gates Gorges



⁷⁰ In Romanian, it is known as *Porțile de Fier*; Serbian: *Đerdapska klisura*; German: *Eisernes Tor*; and Hungarian: *Vaskapu*.

⁷¹ This ancient village (with history reaching back into the Neolithic) was absorbed by the larger township of *Moldova Nouă*, which is also known by a number of other names in other languages, such as in Hungarian: *Újmoldova*; German: *Neumoldova*; Czech: *Nová Moldava* or *Bošňák*; and in Serbian: *Нова Молдава*. See: Aleksandra Djurić-Milovanović, "Serbs in Romania: Relationship between Ethnic and Religious Identity," *Balkanica* 43 (2012): 120.

On a larger geographic scale, this system of gorges marks the downstream end of the stretch of the river called the “middle Danube” (which began upriver at the confluence of the *Rába* river near *Győr* in Hungary), becoming the “lower Danube” beyond the Iron Gates all the way to the delta at the Black Sea.⁷² At the Iron Gates themselves, the Danube divides the Southern Carpathian Mountains from the northern Balkan Mountain Range.⁷³ Here, the river is a major artery through the difficult mountainous terrain. As a result of this, this particular geographical location has been a vital trade route,⁷⁴ as well as a strategically important objective in the military struggle between defenders of the Hungarian Plain immediately to the north-west (as well as the rest of Central and Northern Europe beyond it), and all armies intent on invading these regions throughout history.

2.1.2. Geology

The general geological landscape of the Iron Gates is folded sedimentary rocks with extremely large limestone outcroppings that have become exposed due to the erosional processes of the Danube River.⁷⁵ According to Dumitru Țeicu’s survey of the castles of the Banat, the majority of the medieval fortifications in the area were constructed of limestone. In fact, the outcropping located near the castle of Zynicze provided a good quarry of the chalky limestone for the Danuban castles constructed and repaired by Scolari, and eventually given to the Order.⁷⁶

⁷² Günter Schobesberger, et al. ed. *Waterway Transport on Europe is Lifeline, the Danube* (Vienna, WWF 2002), 17.

⁷³ Biljana Macura, et al., “Local Communities and Management of the Djerdap Protected Area in Serbia,” in *Ecological Economics from the Ground Up*, ed. Hali Healy, Joan Martínez-Alier, Leah Temper, Mariana Walter, and Julien-François Gerber (London: Routledge, 2013), 368.

⁷⁴ Due to a number of places in this part of the Danube where cataracts threatened river traffic, local navigators were hired to guide boats through them. See: “Да ли знате: Како су некада звали спроводнике лађа на Ђердапу?” [Do you know: how the Đerdap navigators were used to be called?], *Politika* (January 2018), 32. Further, paths had been cut into the steep, rocky sides of the three gorges—from which animals connected to ropes could tow river boats through the worst parts of the river—from the Roman times onwards. See: Norman John Greville Pounds, *An Economic History of Medieval Europe* (London: Routledge, 2014), 28.

⁷⁵ Mihai Popa, et al. “Geological heritage of Iron Gates Natural Park: between preservation and destruction,” *Drobeta, Seria Stiintele Naturii*. 14 (2004), 8.

⁷⁶ Țeicu, *Cetăți medievale din Banat*, 30.

The 2003 final report conducted by a United Nations Development Programme Global Environmental Finance (UNDP-GEF) study, found that within the river itself (whose width through the Iron Gates averages to about seven hundred fifty meters, and whose mean depth is approximately five and a half meters), “the dominant main channel substrates are represented by large cobbles, boulders and bedrocks (numerous rocks are situated directly under the water surface), and frequent coarse, medium and partial fine gravel interspersed with sand and mud in the slow-flowing parts.”⁷⁷ Prior to the construction of the dams, there were a number of cataracts along the main river channel which were made completely submerged once it became permanently flooded upriver.⁷⁸ Three places were still marked on the First Military Survey Maps of the Hungarian Kingdom (1763-1787).⁷⁹ One was between the fortresses of Severyn and Orsua, one between Zynicze and Dranko labelled “a difficult ride” (*eine gefährliche fahrt*), and one almost at the foot of Sand Ladislaen called “*Papooayer Felsen*” (now called *Baba Caia rock*).⁸⁰ In fact, the last was still visible during my last visit to the Iron Gates in May 2019.

⁷⁷ Mario Sommerhäuser, et al., “Developing the Typology of Surface Waters and Defining the Relevant Reference Conditions,” *UNDP/GEF Danube Regional Project* (2003), 38.

⁷⁸ “Да ли знате,” 32.

⁷⁹ This collection of maps consisted of 21 individual surveys, yielding 3,245 manuscript sheets that measured 63 by 42 cm. each. See: “The Military Surveys of the Hungarian Kingdom 1763–1950,” *Jankó Annamária: Magyarország Katonai Felmérései | Kézikönyvtár*, accessed February 12, 2019, <https://www.arcanum.hu/hu/online-kiadvanyok/Janko-janko-annamaria-magyarorszag-katonai-felmeresei-1/the-military-surveys-of-the-hungarian-kingdom-17631950-5BB/>.

⁸⁰ “Europe in the XVIII. Century | Mapire - The Historical Map Portal,” *Mapire*, accessed February 12, 2019, <https://mapire.eu/en/map/europe-18century-firstsurvey>.

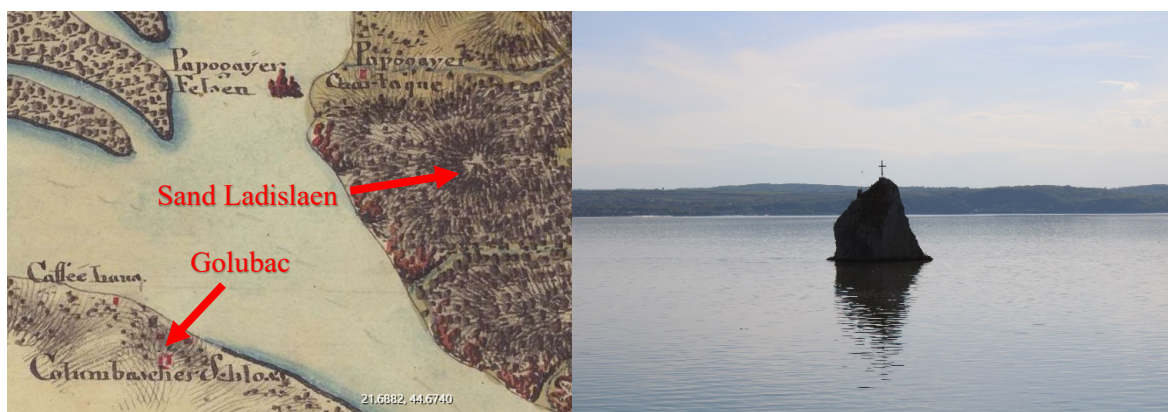


Figure 1. Papooayer Felsen in the 18th Century Survey, and as it appears today.

2.1.3. The Dams

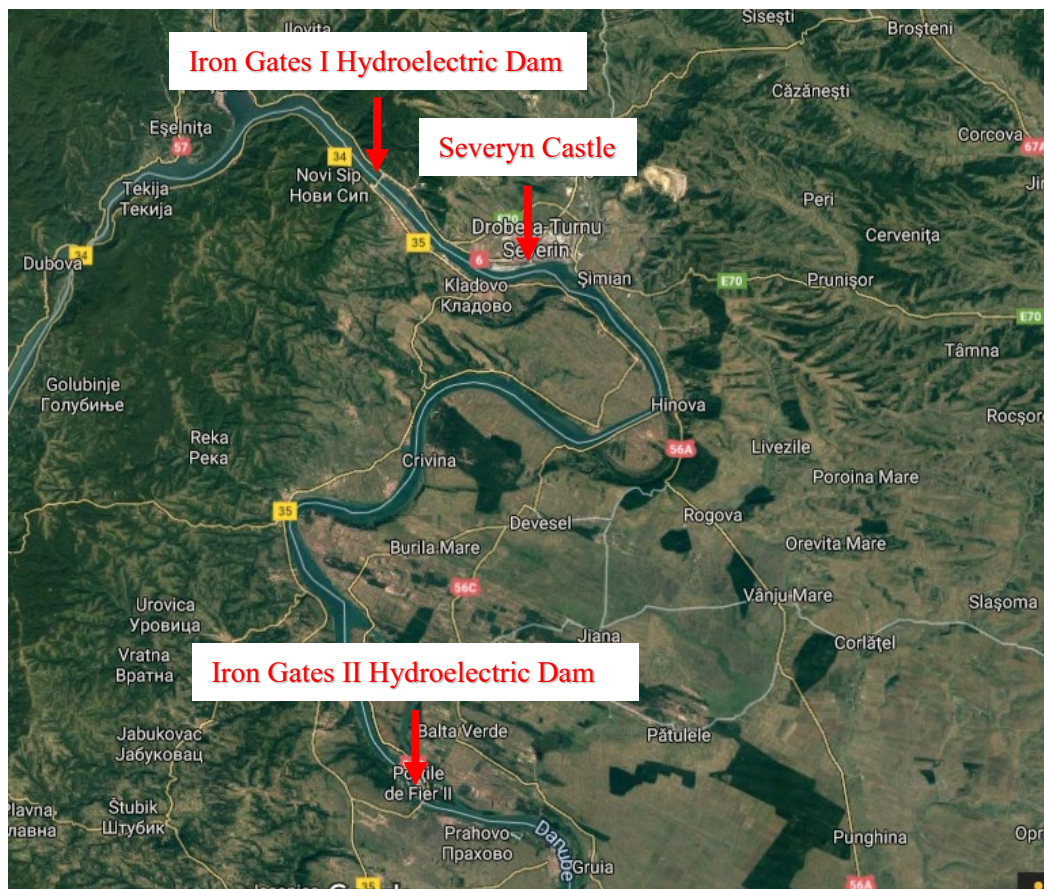
One set of modern man-made features which has had the greatest effect upon a study of the castles in the Iron Gates region is a pair of hydroelectrical building projects. This has resulted in the building of two dams: Iron Gates I (completed in 1972), and Iron Gates II (finished a little over a decade later, in 1984). The former in particular has had the largest impact on the Danubian castles located in the Iron Gates gorges as it has led to the partial and complete submersion of several castle sites. In fact, this has happened to the entire island of *Ade Kale* (where the Teutonic Order's river navy is believed to have been docked).⁸¹ It has completely disappeared beneath the water, ruins and all.⁸² The impact of this dam on these historical locations played little part in the decision to construct it. However, more recently, due to the impact of extremely high volumes of sediment erosion and deposition on local aquatic plant and animal life behind the two dams, there have been new calls for their removal.⁸³ Of course, this would also have a positive effect on the archaeology of these sites,

⁸¹ Jürgen Sarnowsky, "The Military Orders and their Navies," in *The Military Orders*, vol. 4, *On Land and By Sea*, ed. Malcom Barber, and Judi Upton-Ward (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 115.

⁸² The dimensions of this island are 1.7 kilometers long and about 500 meters at its widest. Today, its ownership—despite being completely under water—is under dispute between three nations: Serbia, Romania, and Bulgaria. Once again, this speaks to the ever-strategic position of this region. See: Monica Bercovici, "La deuxième vie d'Ada-Kaleh ou Le potentiel culturel de la mémoire d'une île disparue," in *Migration In, From, and to Southeastern Europe: Historical and Cultural Aspects*, ed. Klaus Roth, and Robert Hayden (Münster: LIT Verlag Münster, 2011), 170.

⁸³ David E. Reisner, and T. Pradeep, ed. *Aquananotechnology: Global Prospects* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2014), 1178.

as they become accessible to excavation. See the map below for the location of both of the Iron Gates Hydroelectric dams- in relation to Severyn Castle.



Map 2. Location of both of the Iron Gates Hydroelectric dams.

Chapter Three - Garrison Analysis from the Sources

3.1. Troop Strength of Individual Castles.

According to Redwitz's 1429 report, there is a clear division in garrison types between the fortresses located on the river, and those in the interior passes. The castles on the Danube contain mainly two types of personnel: fighters (*person*),⁸⁴ and bowmen (*schutczen*). The entries for the final three fortresses listed—Myhalt, Halmas, and Ylied—show neither of these types of military fighters, but rather three categories of civilians. These include *kniesen* (nobles or village officials), *freyen* (freemen), and *puwern* (peasants).⁸⁵ This seems to speak to the role of these interior, land-based castles as support bases for supply, equipment repair, and tax revenues. This makes sense, as the communities surrounding these castles do not lie directly in the hazardous zone on the “front-line”, which is the Danube itself.⁸⁶

The largest garrison on the Danube frontier border is at Sand Ladislaen with 400 fighters, and 56 bowmen. Again, it is a large garrison is because this castle was built as result of the loss of the key fortress of Golubac directly across the river in Moravian Serbia. This meant that this new castle was state of the art for this region at the time of its transfer to the Teutonic Order two years later.

⁸⁴ This term (*person*) is specifically used in the original document, yet it has an extremely vague meaning to modern readers. Given that in the report for the castle at Orsua, Redwitz distinguishes this group from *sulcher knechte, di do thun müssen alles das man sie heisset, und sien ouch weerhaftig* (servants who must do all that is commanded, yet they are truly able to defend themselves), indicates that the first group- *personen*- have been brought to the Iron Gates for the express purpose of fighting, while the second have been assigned other duties, but can fight when necessary. Both can fill in the capacity of either cavalry or infantry troops. See: William Urban, *Teutonic Order: A Military History* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Books, 2003), 298.

⁸⁵ However, Myhalt and Halmas do also list the number of men whose specific job is to guard the passes (*die der wege hawten*) and carry messages as couriers (*brieffuwrer*). See: XX. HA, OBA, Nr. 27837, transcribed in: Joachim, “König Sigmund und der deutsche Ritterorden in Ungarn,” 109-113.

⁸⁶ By this time, Ottoman forces have control of the southern shore of the Danube directly across from all the castles given to the Teutonic Order in the chain. See: Achim, “LOCUL ORDINULUI TEUTON,” 42.

All remaining river castles with garrisons larger than one hundred fighters and bowmen lie within or adjacent to the major towns and settlements along the Danube in the Iron Gates, presumably to protect them directly. Orsua has a total of 350 men (to include the 260 “fighting Servants”, and 30 bowmen), Severyn has an overall total of 240, Possesin has 230, and the naval garrison on the Insyl Saan has 216. It is unclear if this last garrison was comprised of reserve troops, sailors, or marines (naval fighters).⁸⁷

What may be far more interesting, is the size of the garrisons at the smaller fortifications. For example, the second Peczsche (“Ander Peczsche” in Table 1), which both Joachim and Feneşan agree lies somewhere between the immense garrison of Sand Ladislaen and the village of Moldova Veche, is listed with only twenty fighters and four bowmen—a grand total of twenty-four souls to defend it in a time of siege. It is justifiable to assume that due to the huge size of its castle neighbor, this fortification served as a kind of observation post for a particular feature in the terrain which could not be properly watched from Sand Ladislaen. This would most likely be the case, as the Redwitz document states in the entry for Possesin that, “...und czwuschen den beiden hewsern, als Sand Ladislaen und Possesin, ist eyn gute feere” (...and between the two fortresses of Sand Ladislaen and Possesin, is a good ferry).⁸⁸ If Moldova Veche lies between Sand Ladislaen and Possesin, the ferry also lies between Sand Ladislaen and Possesin, and Ander Peczsche lies between Moldova Veche and Sand Ladislaen, it seems possible that Ander Peczsche would be near the ferry given that it would make sound military sense to place a modestly garrisoned watch tower directly next to an access point like a ferry to observe and control the people who use it. Analyses of this type of smaller fortresses will also be examined in Chapter 3, below.

⁸⁷ This document from the order’s correspondence archives has no date either, but its composition definitely falls within the timeframe of this expedition. See: OBA, Nr. 27838, transcribed in: Joachim, “König Sigmund und der deutsche Ritterorden in Ungarn,” 109-113.

⁸⁸ OBA, Nr. 27837, transcribed in: Joachim, “König Sigmund und der deutsche Ritterorden in Ungarn,” 109-113.

3.2. Command Structure Within These Castles

Another primary source document provided by Redwitz makes it possible to draw some conclusions concerning the command and control structure of the castle system within the Iron Gates region. This document is dated to March 7, 1432, and provides the names of twelve individuals, but more importantly, it lists their titles and responsibilities within five of these castles.⁸⁹ A little less importantly, it gives alternate spellings for these places at the time of the expedition. A simple, straightforward comparative analysis between this correspondence to the Grandmaster and other documents of the Teutonic Order from the *Ordensstaat* dealing with these topics of command and responsibilities can be conducted. These other documents include *Die Statuten des Deutschen Ordens* (The Statutes of the Teutonic Order),⁹⁰ and the *Namen-Codex der Deutschen Ordens* (The Book of Names of the Teutonic Order).⁹¹ The 7 March correspondence from Redwitz lists the names and titles in the signature as follows:

Johann von Wedraw Hauptmann zu Severin, Erben Hawg von Heiligenberge
Hauptmann zu Urswan, Caspar Gocz Hauptmann zu Joryn, Niclas
Priesterbruder von Preußen, Priesterbruder Niclas Behem, Oswalt Weyler,
Cunrad Kaffensteyner Küchenmeister zu Severin, Mathes Kyczka
Kellermeister, Jost von Gundilfinghen Tormeister, Niclas Mochburger
Kompan des Hauptmanns zu Joryn, Albrecht von Ulm Fischmeister zu Peck,
Peter Hebichler Hauptmann zu Poczfasy[n] [...].⁹²

Ignoring the personal names for now, the five place names are: Severin, Urswan, Joryn, Peck, and Poczfasy[n].⁹³ These would correspond, respectively, to the castles of Severyn, Orsua,

⁸⁹ OBA, Nr. 5999., transcribed in: Feneşan, *Cavalerii Teutoni în Banatul Severinului*, 240-243.

⁹⁰ Max Perlbach, ed. *Die Statuten des Deutschen Ordens nach den Ältesten Handschriften* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1890). English translation: Indrikis Sterns, *The Rule and Statutes of the Teutonic Knights*, PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1969.

⁹¹ Johannes Voigt, ed. *Namen-Codex der Deutschen Ordens-Beamten, Hochmeister, Landmeister, Grossgebietiger, Komthure, Vogte, Pfleger, Hochmeister-Kompane, Kreuzfahr...* (Königsberg: Gebrüder Bornträger, 1843).

⁹² OBA, Nr. 5999., transcribed in: Feneşan, *Cavalerii Teutoni în Banatul Severinului*, 240-243.

⁹³ I suspect that the last place name- *Poczfasy[n]*- might erroneously contain an “f” in the database transcription. Given that in many Gothic hand scripts the letter “f” can easily be confused with the letter “s” (l) and considering that the place name given in the correspondence attributed to October/November 1429 is spelled *Possesin*, it makes far greater sense that it is spelled *Poczasy[n]* in the original document dated to 7 March 1432. Further, the

Goryn, Peczsch (though it is unclear which one of the two is referred to here), and Possesin in Redwitz's letter from three years prior. Six of these men are listed as having military command, four with the command of an entire castle (*Hauptmann*), one as a companion or deputy of the *Hauptmann* of Goryn (*Kompan des Hauptmanns zu Joryn*), and one in command of a single tower (*Tormeister*) of the fortification of Goryn. The positions of *Tormeister*,⁹⁴ *Kompan*,⁹⁵ and of *Hauptmann* are attested to in the sources for castles within the *Ordensstaat* back in Prussia, such as the *Hauptmann zu Balga*.⁹⁶ The minor positions listed are attested to for each *Komtur* (commandery—fortified monastery) in the Prussian *Ordensstaat* as well. These include the *Küchenmeister* (head cook),⁹⁷ *Kellermeister* (head butler),⁹⁸ *Fischmeister* (in charge of each commandery's fish supply),⁹⁹ and *Priesterbruder* (priest).¹⁰⁰ Each individual commandery had these specific occupations in order to maintain both it, and its members.¹⁰¹

The contemporary documents from the *Ordensstaat* confirm that the same command structures that the Teutonic Order had developed there were imported into the Banat of

letter combination of *czs* is attested in the dialects of Niederdeutsch written by scribes of the Teutonic Order of this period, and not *czf*.

⁹⁴ The position of *Tormeister* appears in a two accounting books for the Teutonic Order. See: Walther Ziesemer, ed. *Das Ausgabebuch des Marienburger Hauskomturs für die Jahre 1410-1420* (Danzig, 1910), 33, 109, 110, 113, 145, 185, 241, and 310; also: Walther Ziesemer, ed. *Das Marienburger Ämterbuch* (Danzig: A. W. Kafemann, 1916), 121, 154, and 161.

⁹⁵ Ziesemer, *Das Ausgabebuch*, 16, 29, 31, 35, 37, 50, 51, 53, 64, 65, 71, 75, 80, 90, 91, 92, 93, 96, 98, 100, 102, 103, 107, 108, 109, 111, 112, 116, 117, 128, 129, 135, 145, 146, 147, 149, 185, 193, 194, 198, 212, 215, 221, 225, 236, 241, 242, 243, 247, 253, 255, 281, 284, 302, 311, and 387.

⁹⁶ This is the commander of the castle at Balga, now located on the shore of the Vistula Lagoon, in the Russian Oblast of Kaliningrad. See: Voigt, *Namen-Codex*, 21.

⁹⁷ For examples, see: Ziesemer, *Das Ausgabebuch*, 7, 11, 12, 25, 26, 40, 41, 84, 85, 119, 146, 169, 171, 172, 173, 197, 200, 201, 210, 211, 213, 217, 228, 230, 231, 242, 244, 245, 258, 259, 260, 287, 289, 293, 294, 316, 319, 320, 321, 335, 338, 342, 359, and 360; also: Ziesemer, *Das Marienburger Ämterbuch*, 46, 76, 121, 122, 137, 138, 139, 150, 154, and 162.

⁹⁸ For examples, see: Ziesemer, *Das Marienburger Ämterbuch*, 92, 93, 95, 154, 156, 158, 159, and 161; also: Ziesemer, *Das Ausgabebuch*, 6, 12, 38, 39, 82, 83, 97, 146, 147, 153, 171, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 204, 205, 206, 207, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 217, 218, 219, 220, 223, 230, 231, 237, 255, 282, 286, 287, 334, and 338.

⁹⁹ For examples, see: Ziesemer, *Das Ausgabebuch*, 13, 24, 26, 27, 46, 91, 122, 159, 188, 193, 203-205, 211, 231-232, 246, 262, 271, 295, 300, 327, 354, and 360; also: Ziesemer, *Das Marienburger Ämterbuch*, 21, 54, 55, 56, 113, 138, 154, 158, 159, and 160.

¹⁰⁰ For examples, see: Ziesemer, *Das Marienburger Ämterbuch*, 127, 128, and 132; also: Ziesemer, *Das Ausgabebuch*, 19, 21, 33, and 315.

¹⁰¹ Rolf Fuhrmann, *Der Deutschorden: von Akkon bis zum Baltikum die Armee 1198 bis 1420* (Berlin: Zeughaus, 2017), 8.

Severin by this expedition. Given the nature of the fighting men of the garrisons (discussed in the section below), it seems that the men listed by name above are full brothers of the Order that Redwitz brought with him to act as commanders over the common fighting men who are not from the Order.

3.3. The Men.

3.3.1. The Argument

It is necessary to examine the documentary sources for the Iron Gates *expedition* in order to perform a more complete military analysis of the men. This reveals a discrepancy through a comparison of the Order's normal basic organization and the composition of the fighting force of the expedition. I do not believe that this has been fully examined by scholars, as the implications seem to answer a number of questions about the obscurity of the expedition, the strange status bestowed upon its leader, Redwitz, and ultimately, its failure after only a very short period of time. I have surmised that this change is partially due to the continuing troubles facing the Teutonic Order, and its international entanglements at the time of the expedition. I also believe that it may be a symptom of a disconnect in understanding between the three key players: Emperor Sigismund- the ultimate beneficiary of the expedition, Paul von Rußdorf- the head of the organization commissioned to undertake the effort (though this is more in name than fact by the end of the expedition), and Redwitz- the overall manager tasked to supervise the project. In this section, I will discuss the reasons for the change in troop composition below, but a more in-depth examination of the disconnect can only be properly investigated in a larger work- which I propose to be an important part of my PhD work.

3.3.2. General Background on Troop Composition.

By the fourteenth century in the majority of German speaking lands, the smallest and most basic organizational unit of fighting men was called either a *gleve* (lance), a *lanze* (also lance), or a *spiesz* (spear).¹⁰² It was organized around the heavily armored, mounted warrior who was equipped with the lance. The *gleve* or *spiesz* was not a fighting unit but was more of a way to record and manage troop strength. At a minimum, it included a squire (who was also expected to fight), and a mounted crossbowman, but it also could include up to two others—usually infantry armed with a type of polearm, like a halberd or spear.¹⁰³ Usually, ten *gleven* were placed under the command of a *Hauptmann* (Captain), and one hundred *gleven* were commanded by an *Oberhauptmann* (roughly Chief or Head Captain).¹⁰⁴

In the *Ordensstaat*, the Teutonic Order seems to have organized their troop rosters into the basic group of three which included an *Ordensbruder* (armored knight-brother), a *knappe* (squire), and a *schütze* (bowman).¹⁰⁵ Given the way this type of unit was constituted, which would be described as “combined arms” in modern military terms, I believe that this organizational system was utilized in order to ensure that total troop strength was comprised of the correct ratio of types of combatants (i.e. 1/3 heavy horse, 1/3 light horse, 1/3 bowman) which were optimal to the style of warfare that the Teutonic Order had developed in over two centuries of warfare.¹⁰⁶ Otherwise, the terms *gleve* or *spiesz* would not appear throughout

¹⁰² This word has come to the German language from the Old French word for lance—*Glaive*—perhaps during the thirteenth century. Alternate spellings in sources are *glev*, and *glefe*. *Spiesz* is an Archaic German word for spear, and the two can be used interchangeably, as a lance is a spear used when on a horse. See: Jeffrey Hull, *Knightly Dueling: The Fighting Arts of German Chivalry*, trans. Monika Maziarz, and Grzegorz Zabinski (Boulder, Colorado: Paladin Press, 2008), Kindle Edition, 376.

¹⁰³ Fuhrmann, *Der Deutschorden von Akkon bis zum Baltikum*, 49.

¹⁰⁴ Christopher Gravett, *German Medieval Armies 1300-1500* (London: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 1985), 7.

¹⁰⁵ Fuhrmann, *Der Deutschorden von Akkon bis zum Baltikum*, 49.

¹⁰⁶ The United States Department of Defense defines the phrase “combined arms” as: “The full integration and application of two or more arms or elements of one Service into an operation.” This means that fighters using different weapons and weapon systems are capable of supporting each other in ways unique to their equipment and training in combat operations. See: Joint Chiefs of Staff. *DOD Dictionary* 43.

their records, and troop strengths would always be recorded in the generic terms of “men” or “fighters.”

3.3.3. The Sources.

In the few sources written by Redwitz from the Iron Gates, the term *spiesz* was used. However, the organizational unit of this expedition seems to have been slightly larger than the Order’s traditional size of three fighters. In fact, it was composed of five. One possible reason for this may have been the reality that there were simply less places to garrison these men in the Iron Gates region (24 total fortresses, both on the Danube and in the mountain passes),¹⁰⁷ as compared to almost seventy in Prussia.¹⁰⁸ However, I believe that there is another reason for this change, having everything to do with who these fighting men were: mercenaries.

I can best make this argument by using two separate documents. Both are situation reports written by Redwitz to the Grandmaster, Rußdorf, currently dated by scholars to the months of October or November 1429.¹⁰⁹ The first speaks specifically to overall troop strengths assigned to each fortress not deemed to be in too poor a state to defend. For example, the fortress of Zynicze is reported to have “40 person und 6 schutzen.”¹¹⁰ In the second document, the entry for Zynicze becomes slightly more detailed, listing “40 person, machet 10 spiesz,” indicating that the 40 men are organized into 4 units of ten men.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ See Table 1.

¹⁰⁸ This includes *Konvenstburgen* (Convent Castles- large commanderies), *Amtsburgen* (officer castles- mid-sized commanderies), *Burghäuser* (Manor Houses), and *Wachtürme* (Watch Towers). See: Christofer Herrmann, *Burgen im Ordensland: Deutschordens- und Bischofsburgen in Ost- und Westpreußen*, (Würzburg: Wilhelm Gottlieb Korn, 2006).

¹⁰⁹ Feneşan, *Cavalerii Teutoni în Banatul Severinului*, 90.

¹¹⁰ OBA, Nr. 27837, transcribed in: Erich Joachim, “König Sigmund und der deutsche Ritterorden in Ungarn 1429-1432,” in *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, vol. XXXII no. 1, doc. II, (1912), 108-109.

¹¹¹ OBA, Nr. 27837. Transcribed in: Erich Joachim, “König Sigmund und der deutsche Ritterorden in Ungarn 1429-1432,” in *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, vol. XXXII no. 1, doc. III, (1912), 109-113.

Remembering that the typical ratio of bowmen to the other two categories of fighters (heavy and light cavalry) in the *Ordensstaat* is 1:2, or one third, and then combining the information garnered from the first and second reports to the Grandmaster, the ratio has shifted to 3 bowmen for every 20 cavalrymen- in other words 15% of the total garrison in the Iron Gates are paid as bowmen.

This indication for a reorganization in troop composition for the Iron Gates expedition is confirmed by a similar ratio from the data derived from the much larger fortification of Severyn. It is clear that this particular garrison was increased sometime in the period between the first and second documents, but significantly, the ratio remains exactly the same for both reports. In the first document, Severyn castle is reported to have “*200 person und 40 schutzen*.”¹¹² This results in a ratio of one bowman to four cavalrymen, or 20%. The second document uses slightly different terms, but states that there are now “*300 person, machen 75 spiesz*,” thus organizing the cavalrymen into seventy-five groups of four, while also declaring that there are “*60 balistrern*” housed there at this time.¹¹³ Again the ratio for bowmen to fighters is 1:4, making them 20 % of the castle’s garrison. I believe the reason for this difference in the normal troop composition for the expedition can be explained in the second document. Quite plainly, these men are mercenaries. The change in composition, I argue, is a result of the purchase of entire bands or contingents of mercenaries already established with a “foreign” fighting tradition in terms of composition.

The second document clearly states that the going rate for bowmen was 6 forints per month, oarsmen for the river ships (*Nazaden, or Nassuten*) 3 forints per month, and a single *spiesz* made of a complement of four men was paid 300 forints per year. These rates are the

¹¹² OBA, Nr. 27837.

¹¹³ Rather than *schutzen*, this entry uses a Germanized form of the Latin term for crossbowmen: *balistrern*. See: OBA, Nr. 27837.

same for all garrisons listed throughout the document. These pay rates are then multiplied by the very number given as each castle's garrison strength.¹¹⁴ This means that the entire garrison has been bought and paid for. In no records from the Ordensstaat are fighting brothers ever listed as receiving an income. This is because brothers serve for the honor of God, St. Mary, and the Grandmaster, not money.¹¹⁵

To the point, the entire armed component of the fighting force seems to have been mercenaries. This is significant from the approach of a military analysis (which is the main point of this thesis), as this is the first instance in the Order's history where it relied on a garrison made entirely of mercenaries. This was never the case in the Ordensstaat. The fortresses of Prussia were always garrisoned by actual members of the Teutonic Order.¹¹⁶ To be clear, mercenaries were employed from time to time to help supplement poor crusader turnout for an annual campaign against the native Prussians or Lithuanians, but they were never used as supplemental members of a garrison, much less the entire garrison.¹¹⁷ This is the one astonishing thing about the Iron Gates expedition. It appears to be the first and only time in its history that the Teutonic Order operated in this manner, and at this scale.

Costin Feneșan mentions the expedition's use of a virtually entire mercenary force in his 2015 work, but only in the context of the cold native Romanian response to this foreign element in their lands, leading to the expedition's failure after only a very short period of time. I would agree with Feneșan that this played a part in the failure, but he focuses not on the fact that it was composed of mercenaries (which I would argue was definitely a factor),

¹¹⁴ OBA, Nr. 27837. Transcribe in: Feneșan, *Cavalerii Teutoni în Banatul Severinului*, 187-189.

¹¹⁵ This is part of the oath taken by initiates into the Order during the Initiation Ritual. See: Sterns, *The Rule and Statutes of the Teutonic Knights*, 322-324.

¹¹⁶ The Order's membership is comprised mainly of three categories: *Ordensbrüder*-full "knight-brethren" who have been knighted prior to admission to the Order who have taken an oath of fealty, *Halbbrüder*- "half-brothers" who were fully knighted but have not taken the oath, and serjeants who have not been knight but could still fight as either mounted troops or infantry. See: Urban, *Teutonic Order*, 298.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 289-352.

and more on the idea that they were Germans.¹¹⁸ That these are German mercenaries seem to be confirmed in a letter that Redwitz sent in 1431 from Nürnberg to the Grandmaster in which he reports that he has just sent more men (and supplies) from his location back down to the Iron Gates in eighty ships.¹¹⁹

In fact, this almost exclusive reliance on mercenaries may provide one reason for the expedition's obscurity within history. The Order may have viewed this as a minor operation because no significant portion of the brotherhood was involved, as it was mostly conducted by outsiders. Another reason may be found in the proposal of command given directly to Redwitz from Sigismund. This has the characteristics of a personal deal between the two men- and not a compact between the crown and the Order. It was completely external to the overall command structure of the Teutonic Order, for Redwitz was made a noble of the Kingdom of Hungary as an individual, despite still being a member of the Teutonic Order.¹²⁰ This, once again, seems to logically connect with the use of mercenaries and not serving brothers as troops- because Redwitz was directly responsible to Sigismund as the Ban of Severin and the Count of Sibiu, and mercenaries might be more receptive to working within this specific command framework- as opposed to serving brothers who may tend to see their ultimate loyalty lying with Grandmaster Rußdorf and their own military order.

Finally, there is an international element to all of this. As discussed in Chapter One, for twenty years, the Teutonic Order had been in a long period of decline since its loss in the

¹¹⁸ Feneşan, *Cavalerii Teutoni în Banatul Severinului*, 51.

¹¹⁹ Redwitz specifically states, “Synt Ich die Slossze in beuelunge von meynes heren gnaden gehat habe, habe Ich nicht eyns sunder mehe denne actzig hauptschiffe die Tune von Reggesburg, Passaw, Wyne, Pressburg, Ofen mit leuten vnde aller notdurfft zu den hewsern gesandt.” See: OBA, Nr. 5705, transcribed in: Feneşan, *Cavalerii Teutoni în Banatul Severinului*, 222-224.

¹²⁰ Redwitz first refers to these titles given to him by Sigismund in his signature on a document dated July 18, 1430. This is ten months after he had first led the expeditionary force into Hungary in September 1429. The original Latin is: “frater Nicolaus de Radewitz, Ordinis beate marie virginis domus ierosolimitani preceptor ceterorum fratrum predicti Ordinis in Regnum Hungarie missorum Banus Zewriniensis, necnon camararum monete regalis Cibiniensis comes.” See: Achim, “LOCUL ORDINULUI TEUTON,” 42.

Battle of Tannenberg (1410), punctuated by periods of crisis.¹²¹ Back home in the Ordensstaat, the Order was embroiled in the Lithuanian Civil War of 1432–1438, and the Polish–Teutonic War of 1431–1435,¹²² both at the same time as this expedition. It would be no wonder that another conflict on the far-off Danube frontier, especially one that would more vastly benefit the Emperor, would be considered a strain on much-needed military resources, like soldiers, in the context of multiple conflicts that more directly affected the Order. Under these conditions, the use of mercenaries would be understandable. The main question from all of this that should be explored further in a later work, is how the Teutonic Order was convinced that the entire undertaking in the Iron Gates was worthwhile.

¹²¹ The Order was forced to cede some territory and castles to the victor Poland, as well pay multiple installments of reparation due to the First Peace of Thorn (1411) following the end of fighting. This in turn led to sporadic skirmishes between the two- to include the Golub War in 1422– until a more permanent peace was set with the Treaty of Melno that same year. See: Aleksander Pluskowski, *The archaeology of the Prussian Crusade: Holy War and colonisation* (London: Routledge, 2012), 21 and 339.

¹²² Urban, *Tannenberg and After*, 290-314.

Chapter Four - Military Analysis of the Selected Castles

4.1. General Military Objectives of Castles.

4.1.1. Typology Dictates Function.

The observations and conclusions in this section are partially based on my own military experience. So are my impressions of these sites and their surroundings as I physically observed them over the course of two trips. Wherever possible, I have tried to back my “Army Instincts” up with written sources of military theory that explain or confirm my way of thinking from publications produced by the United States Army- the educational system where I learned to reason in this manner. I will also attempt to make my reasonings clear through the use of maps and diagrams as much as necessary.

To begin, castles can be classified in two different ways. The first has been briefly mentioned earlier, and that is a classification based on its relationship with its location. All the Danuban castles given to the Teutonic Order are *Flussburgen* (except for one) because they are positioned directly on the river. This means that some defensive traits that benefit *Höhenburgen* (hilltop castles), such as limited accessibility to attackers, has been traded for more rapid offensive capabilities- like a fast response force to face an invasion because they don’t have to wind along a long trail down a hill. The lone exception, Sand Ladislaen, is a *Höhenburg*, and the reason it has been placed on high ground is so that it can more easily monitor Turkish troops in Golubac directly across the river. It also is on a rocky promontory because it becomes a stronghold for its large garrison and support assets by being placed there. In its case, the ability for rapid response has been traded for the ability to see a farther distance.

Another way castles can be classified is by their architectural features. This is fairly straightforward for the four castles chosen for this study. Dranko is a simple *Turmburg*

(watchtower), whose entire structure involves one multi-storied stone building in a rectangular ground plan.¹²³ Zynicze is actually three single *Turmburgen* arranged in a triangle, about twenty meters apart between the two set closer inland and forty between these and the one set toward the river.¹²⁴ The two largest fortresses- Severyn and Sand Ladislaen with the largest garrisons- are *Ringburgen* (concentric castles- fortresses with multiple layers of defense of “walls within walls”).¹²⁵ The defensive features are more complex, and both provide for and require larger garrisons to maintain them.

4.1.2. Analytic Structure to be Applied.

Basic concepts like location and terrain play very important roles in the military analysis of castles, especially since we can no longer observe their day to day operations after falling into disuse. Also, no documents survive which describe the daily dynamic process of executing military operations. Careful interpretation is therefore necessary. In that case, my military training has taught me that an analysis must look at three overall categories for analysis: defendability, sustainability, and capability for offensive maneuvers (to include reconnaissance patrols and disruption/sabotage operations).¹²⁶

In terms of a castle’s defensive qualities, an examination of its surrounding terrain is needed to identify features which could provide a good natural defense- such as a restricted access because it is set on a hilltop, or clear lines of site for its crossbowmen because it is set in a large open field. It is also necessary to examine if each fortification’s garrison size is large

¹²³ Reclam, *Wörterbuch der Burgen*, 248.

¹²⁴ Andrei Bălărie, “Turnurile-Locuință de la Svinița,” *Banatica* 20/1 (2010), 237.

¹²⁵ Reclam, *Wörterbuch der Burgen*, 212.

¹²⁶ According to the US Army’s Operational Manual, large-scale combat operations (which I would argue describes the maintenance of a frontier castle chain) require the constant application of resources to properly execute “simultaneous offensive, defensive, and stability tasks...” These three concerns for commanders are very basic and transcend time and space. See: United States Department of the Army, *Operations: U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-0* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2017), 2-21.

enough to properly conduct defensive tasks. This will have to be determined on a case by case basis for each fortress or watch tower.

Sustainability involves an examination of the relationship of a fixed position (i.e. fortress in a medieval context) with natural resources such as food and water. If these are not sufficiently available, it needs to be determined if access to them is possible via a logistical supply train aided by a navigable river or well-built roads.¹²⁷ Once again, typology plays a major factor. Given that all four chosen castles are located within a few hundred meters of the Danube River (even the *Höhenburg*- Sand Ladislaen, though this is almost straight down), it is reasonable to assume that resupply is extremely possible. In fact, documents relate that Redwitz would leave the region to buy supplies on his way to Sigismund's court, wherever he was at the time, and have these shipped back on the Danube.¹²⁸ Therefore, I will not waste time restating this in each castle's case.

The main objective of the expedition in the Iron Gates was to deny Turkish Forces (of any size) access to the interior of the Kingdom of Hungary. In his letter dated July 2, 1426, Sigismund tells Loránd Lépés, his Vice-Voivode of Transylvania (who oversees the overall region in which the Banat of Severin, and by extension the Iron Gates were located), that Lépés must work to convince the local populations that the importation of the Teutonic Order was necessary to prevent the Turks from entering the kingdom and raiding.¹²⁹ The way the Turks gained access to the interior was to cross the river, and follow the paths through the mountains.

¹²⁷ According to the US Army's definition, "Supply is essential for enhancing Soldiers' quality of life and providing prolonged endurance in support of decisive action. Supply provides the materiel and life support that gives Army forces the combat power and prolonged endurance to accomplish the mission." See: United States Department of the Army, *Logistics Operations: U.S. Army Field Manual No. 4-95* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2014), 1-6.

¹²⁸ OBA, Nr. 5705, transcribed in: Feneşan, *Cavalerii Teutoni în Banatul Severinului*, 222-224.

¹²⁹ Sigismund's message reads: "*Cum nos partes nostras illas Transylvanas hostibus Turcorum paganorumque excursionibus et devastationibus continuo vicinas videamus, hinc regii nostri muneris, cui sedulo incumbimus esse cernimus, de opportunis ante tempus providere remediis, quorum ope tutamen et defensam earum parcium procurare possimus. In hoc autem assequendo laudabilia predecessorum nostrorum, regum utpote Hungarie, exempla intuentes, nihil aptius nihilque salubrius fore putamus, quam Cruciferis de Hospitali Sancte Marie Theutonicorum, quos iam olim à divo Andrea rege, predecessore nostro gloriose memorie, in partibus illis accolatum castraque et terras habuisse intelleximus, custodiam et defensam locorum finitimorum ad Portam*

Anyone who has traveled through a landscape in which it is difficult to see off into the distance in order to get one's overall bearings (like through a forest, or through the mountains), will understand the most basic function of a path. I realized this on my last trip to the Iron Gates as my bus winded through the last finger of mountains between the Romanian towns of *Nicolinț* and *Radimna*- sometimes turning a full one hundred eighty degrees as the forest path closely followed the steep contours of the mountain sides. The purpose of a path is to show the way when it is not possible to literally see through the larger forest because of the trees.

As enemy forces could use paths through the wilderness to reach softer targets in the interior of Hungary, patrolling at least part of the paths through the mountains that sat directly behind all of the Order's castles in the Iron Gates was therefore a part of the defense.

The same went for fords where it was easy to cross the river. Documents show that each fortress had a small flotilla of river ships to help patrol the river.¹³⁰ Also, as stated in Chapter 3, a report from Redwitz mentions a "good ferry crossing" somewhere between Sand Ladislaen and Possesin. Further, as crossing places such as this could allow the Turks easy access to the Kingdom of Hungary, they could also allow the Order the same opportunities into Ottoman territory for offensive operations like disruption and sabotage.

Given all the areas for investigating fortifications discussed above in this section, my process for analysis will apply the following method for each of the four chosen castles (Severyn, Zynicze, Dranko, and Sand Ladislaen):

1. Defendability.
 - a. An examination of each castle's locational typology with its immediate surroundings in terms of defense.
 - b. An examination of each castle's architectural typology with its immediate surroundings in terms of defense.
 - c. An examination of each castle's garrison size in terms of defensive capabilities.
2. Offensive Operations.

usque Ferream concedere eisque certa iisdem in locis condonare domicilia ad defensam quoque omnino habilia et sufficientia." See: Feneșan, *Cavalerii Teutoni în Banatul Severinului*, 113.

¹³⁰ OBA, Nr. 27837, transcribed in: Feneșan, *Cavalerii Teutoni în Banatul Severinului*, 190-199.

- a. Key terrain features in the immediate vicinity that require positive control.
- b. An examination of each castle's locational typology with its immediate surroundings in terms of offense.
- c. An examination of each castle's architectural typology with its immediate surroundings in terms of offense.
- d. An examination of each castle's garrison size in terms of offensive capabilities.

4.2. Severyn.

There had been a fortification at Severyn since Roman Times. A wooden fort was built upon its foundations by King Ladislaus I of Hungary in the late eleventh century to defend against the Cumans, beginning the second phase of construction for the fortress. It was later turned into a stone fortress by King Andrew II of Hungary in 1233, reckoned to be the first medieval stone fortress to be built in Romania.¹³¹ Also, a document dated October 16, 1424, mentions General Scolari's work to repair the fortress at that time.¹³²

4.2.1. Defendability.

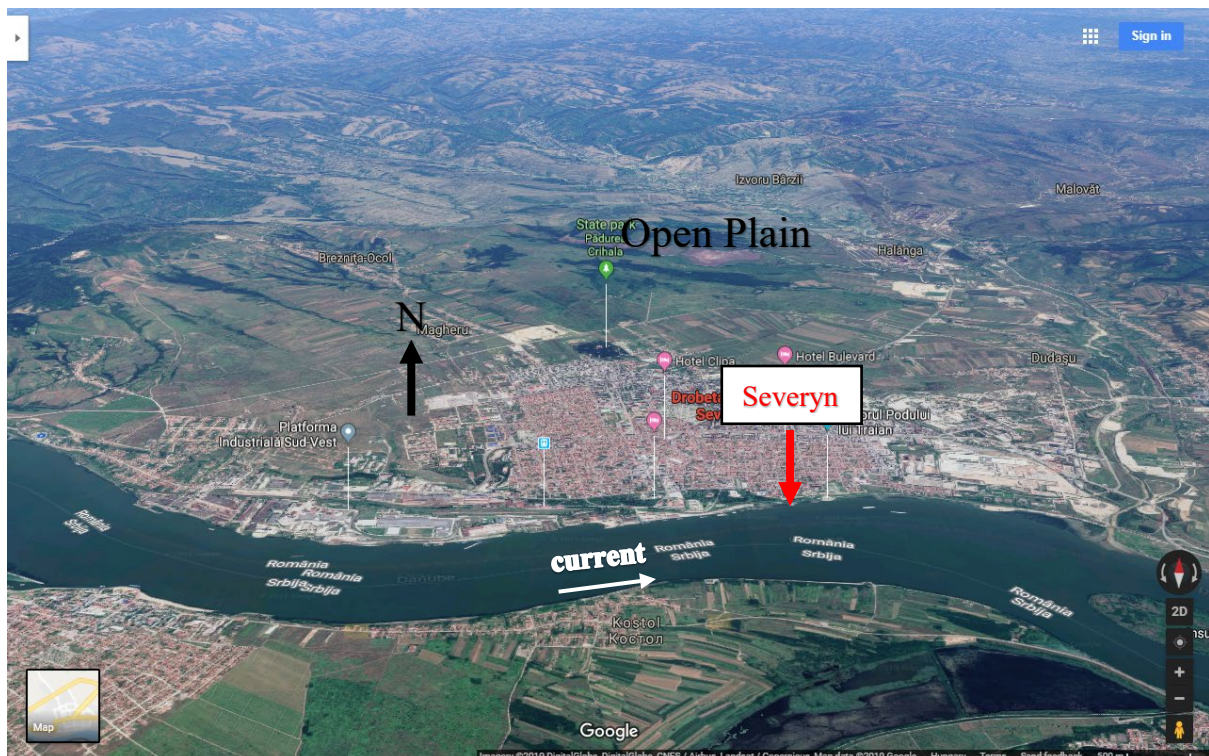
This riverine castle is located on the Danube shore on a long, gentle slope that runs about eight kilometers northward until it reaches hilly ground, and about the same distance to the east where it meets the mountainous eastern entrance of the Iron Gates. This makes it very easy to surround, given that there are an almost infinite number of places to cross the river by boat and then turn towards the castle to attack it. The problem is the location in the center of a wide open plain. More records speak about attacks on this castle than any other in this chain. During the Mongol invasion of 1241-1242, the original stone fortress was completely destroyed, which was then rebuilt.¹³³ It was first captured by the Turks in 1418 following the death of the Voivode of Wallachia, Mircea the Elder (r. 1386-1418), but was quickly

¹³¹ Gheorghiu, "Drobeta-Turnu Severin," 147.

¹³² Arhiva Națională Maghiară (Magyar Országos Levéltár) Budapest, Dl. 48.752, transcribed in: *Feneșan, Cavalerii Teutoni în Banatul Severinului*, 105.

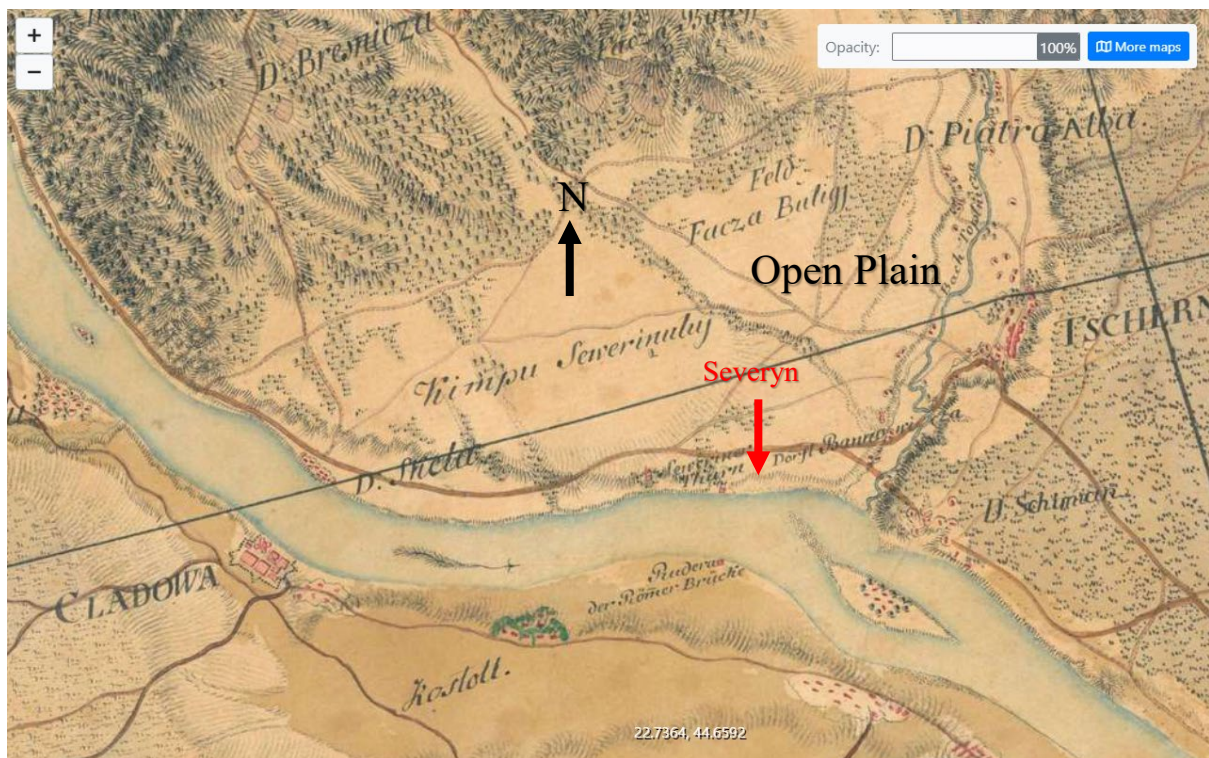
¹³³ Gheorghiu, "Drobeta-Turnu Severin," 147.

recovered.¹³⁴ During the traumatic year of 1432, the Ottoman forces made a “violent” attack on Severyn on their way to continue further raids in *Bârsa* Country.¹³⁵ The two maps below show the geographical context in which the castle is located, from an attacker’s “point of view” on the southern bank of the Danube. The first is a three-dimensional depiction from Google Maps, the second is a pre-hydroelectric dam view from the Eighteenth-Century Military Survey Map Website.



¹³⁴ Feneșan, *Cavalerii Teutoni în Banatul Severinului*, 9.

¹³⁵ Whelan, *Sigismund of Luxemburg*, 181.



Map 3 Modern and Historical views of Severin from an "attacker's" point of view.

The concentric castle walls speak to a more complex system of defense than a simple watch tower. The two artillery bastions on the eastern side of the outer wall definitely come from a later period, most likely from the sixteenth century, even though the order was definitely using gunpowder weapons at the time.¹³⁶ As is typical of most concentric castles, the entrance to the outer wall (on the northern end of the western wall) does not line up with the entrance to the inner curtain wall. It is offset to the south by about 19.27 meters, up a ramp that is only 6.11 meters wide. This makes it very hard to get a battering ram or other piece of siege equipment through the outer gate, around the corner and up the narrow ramp to the second gate- which requires a second ninety degree turn- all the while under missile fire from the curtain walls and the Northwestern Tower. See the diagram and photograph directly below for

¹³⁶ The Order had been casting its own canon made of iron, bronze and copper within the foundry of its headquarters in Castle Marienburg for several decades by the 1430's. It was also casting the projectiles for these barrels. See: Grzegorz Żabiński, "Technology of manufacture of firearms in the Teutonic Order's state in Prussia – gun barrels and metal projectiles," in *FASCICULI ARCHAEOLOGIAE HISTORICAE* [From the Problems of Historical Archaeology], ed. Jerzy Maik (Łódź: Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii PAN, 2015), 83.

a better idea of degree of the offset between gates.



Figure 2. Diagram of Severyn Castle from above highlighting gates.



Figure 3. Photo of Severyn's inner gate entrance from the entrance to the outer gate.

There are four corner towers, the two on the north side were five stories high, not including the open upper level, which measured about ten meters by eight meters in plan.¹³⁷ These would have provided excellent platforms for lookouts in all directions. Only the northern façade of the Northeast Tower survives to the original height of these two platforms that served as both living quarters and lookout posts.



Figure 4. Northeast Tower looking south towards the Danube.

The total footprint of the castle is about one hundred twenty meters by ninety meters. The inner bailey (courtyard) measures approximately thirty-five meters by seventy meters. Again, Redwitz reported the garrison size as being 200 fighters and 40 bowmen.¹³⁸ This roughly matches the garrison size and ground plan footprint of the Order's castle of *Balga* in

¹³⁷ These measures are approximate, using the distance tool on Google maps, with the zoom set to the closest view on the map.

¹³⁸ OBA, Nr. 27837, transcribed in: Feneşan, *Cavalerii Teutoni în Banatul Severinului*, 187.

the *Ordensstaat*.¹³⁹ This comparison indicates that it is likely that the size of the castle is capable of housing the two hundred forty man garrison.

4.2.2. Offensive Operations.

As stated above, this fortress guards the eastern flank of the Iron Gates castle chain. The word “outflanked” refers to the situation when a military force runs around the end of a defensive line, so that it can then either turn and attack the defensive line from behind, or simply move past it to attack elsewhere.¹⁴⁰ This seems to have happened in 1432 when the Ottomans forces first attacked Severyn, and then ran around the entire castle chain to go as far as *Bârsa* County where they raided the countryside and killed many of the nobles.¹⁴¹ This is definitely an example of a failure for this castle.



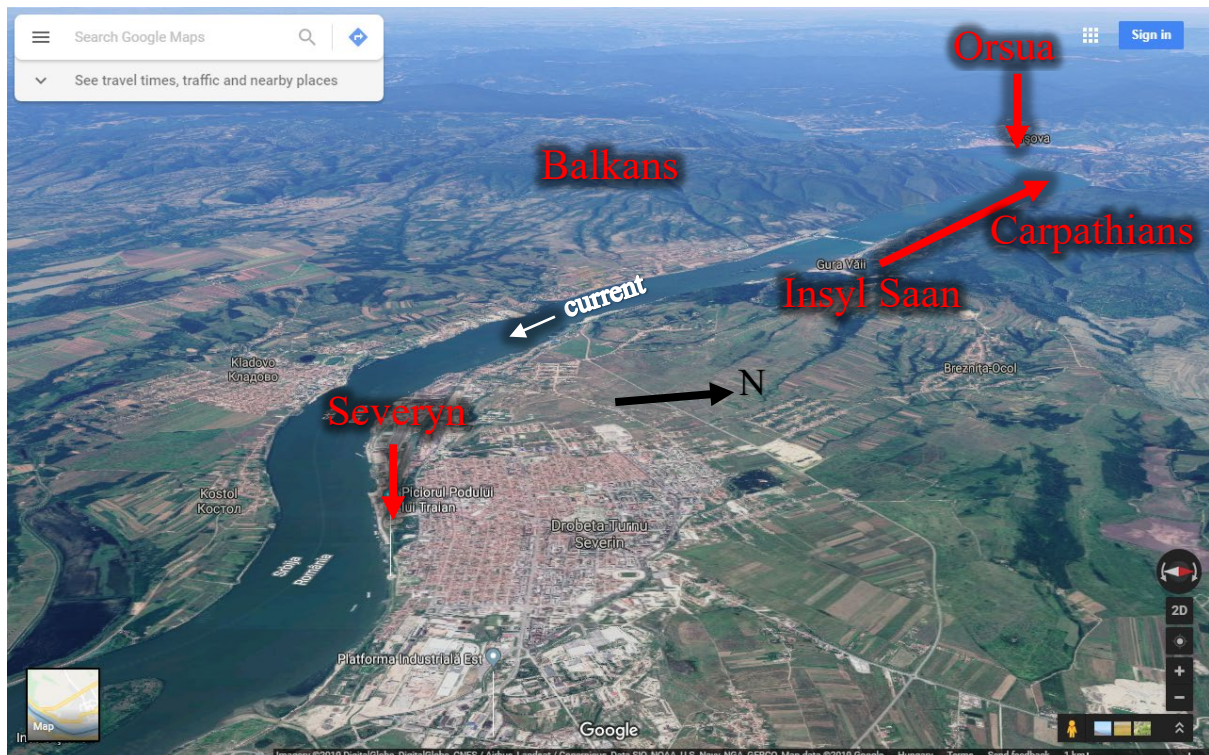
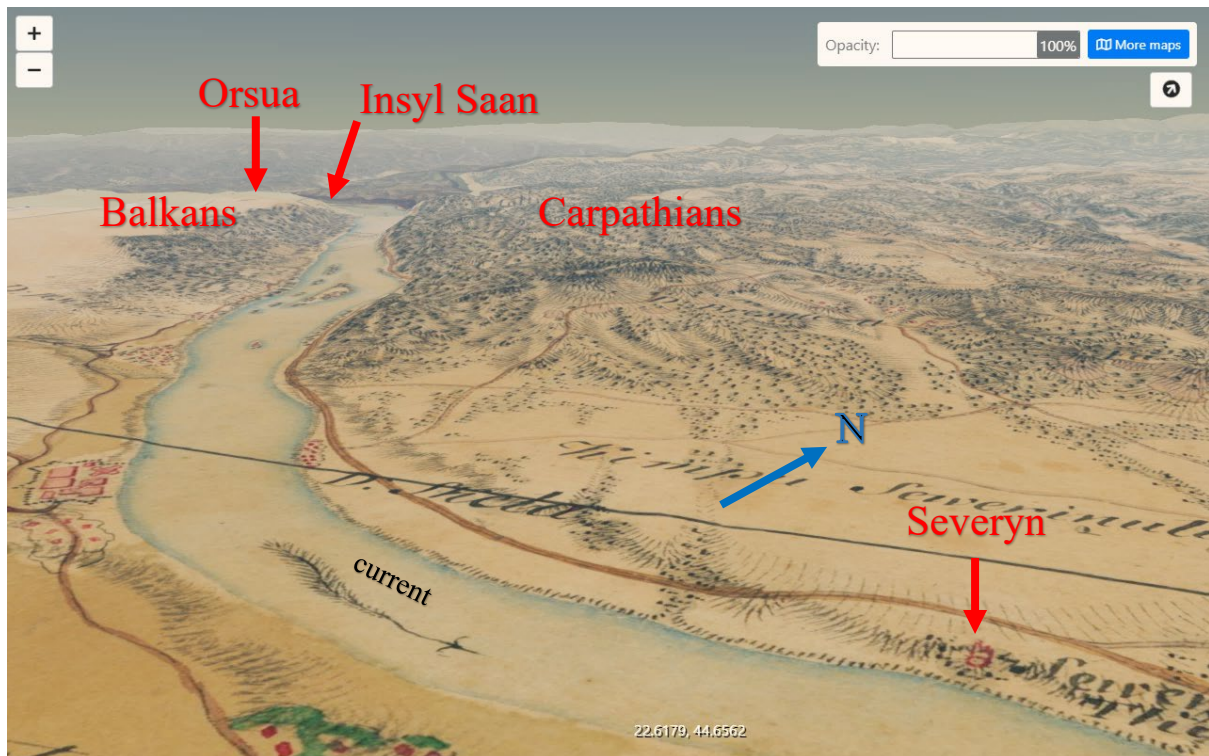
Map 4. Severyn and access points to the interior.

¹³⁹ The ruins of this castle are located near *Vessel Noje* in the Russian Oblast of Kaliningrad. According to Rolf Fuhrmann, *Balga's* garrison could range from 70 to around 210 fighting men, depending on the recruitment of the times. Christofer Hermann's survey on the castles of the *Ordensstaat* shows the footprint of the living space in the inner works of this castle to be about one hundred by one hundred meters. See: Fuhrmann, *Der Deutschorden von Akkon bis zum Baltikum*, 7, also: Herrmann, *Burgen im Ordensland Deutschordens*, 65.

¹⁴⁰ The US Department of Defense defines a flanking unit as: “A flank unit; that part of a military force to the right or left of the main body.” See: Joint Chiefs of Staff. *DOD Dictionary*, 253.

¹⁴¹ Whelan, *Sigismund of Luxemburg*, 181.

Another military objective that the fortress of Severyn must control is the eastern river entrance into the Iron Gates. The steep mountain slopes of the Carpathians and the Balkans that drop straight down into the water to form both sides the gorges on the river in the Iron Gates act like the thin neck of a bottle. In terms of the river, the task of all of the castles in the chain is to be a cork in the neck. Severyn is the outer face of the cork, and Sand Ladislaen is the inner because the interior of the Kingdom of Hungary lies beyond it to the north and west. I would argue that Severyn works far better in this capacity of guarding access via the river because the open plains lie to its north where an entrance into the mountains can be found in a number of places that are not guarded by a fortress.



Map 5. Severyn oriented to guard the "neck of the bottle".

Severyn also protects a developing urban center with a trading population.¹⁴² Once again the Ottoman success in the 1432 raid would suggest that Severyn was not successful in

¹⁴² Gheorghiu, "Drobeta-Turnu Severin," 148.

this task either. This may have been exacerbated by the fact that the garrison was comprised of mercenaries who may not regard civilian casualties as high as their own protection behind stone walls. This is, however, my own conjecture.

In conclusion, this castle has the best defensive properties of the four *Flussburgen*, from the four sample castles in terms of its architecture. However, given the terrain features of being located on the extreme flank of the Iron Gates Chain, and being in the middle of a wide, gently sloping plain, it seems to have been more susceptible to attack as an important target of opportunity. This seems to be confirmed by the sources. However, its location on the river made resupply easy. Its garrison size was towards the median number for the four castles chosen, which made it possible to run multiple missions at once, while still fulfilling its surveillance mission of the river and plain to the west.

4.3. Zynicze

Some of the modern names for this castle refer to its unusual characteristic of three individual, stand-alone watchtowers grouped together at the same site. These are Tricule (Romanian), and Három torony (Hungarian). It is also known by the name of the nearby village of Szinice or Svinița. This castle was the only one of the Danuban fortresses under threat of flood to be excavated in 1970 and have its results published as part of an agreement with the Danube River Project at the Iron Gates.¹⁴³ A later study was conducted in 1979, but in the opinion of Dumitru Țeicu, was too little, too late.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Țeicu, *Cetăți medievale din Banat*, 15.

¹⁴⁴ This study is: A. Corvătescu, and A. Rădulescu, “Despre ansamblul fortificat de la Tricule-Svinița, Jud. Mehedinți [About the fortifications of Tricule-Svinița, Mehedinți County],” *Tibiscus*, vol. 5, (1979), 169-182. Discussed in: Țeicu, *Cetăți medievale din Banat*, 15.



Figure 5. Old postcard showing Zynicze's three towers before the permanent flood.

4.3.1. Defendability.

Zynicze sits at the tip of a broad peninsula of land created by the Danube. In thinking about the Danube as a river that flows along a general west to east line, this means that Zynicze juts further into hostile territory than any other castle of the chain- exposing its west, south, and eastern flanks. Needless to say, this position is a very key part of the castle chain. If it were to fall, it would create a large opening in the defensive line, allowing access to the interior of the peninsula and the territories beyond. See the map below.

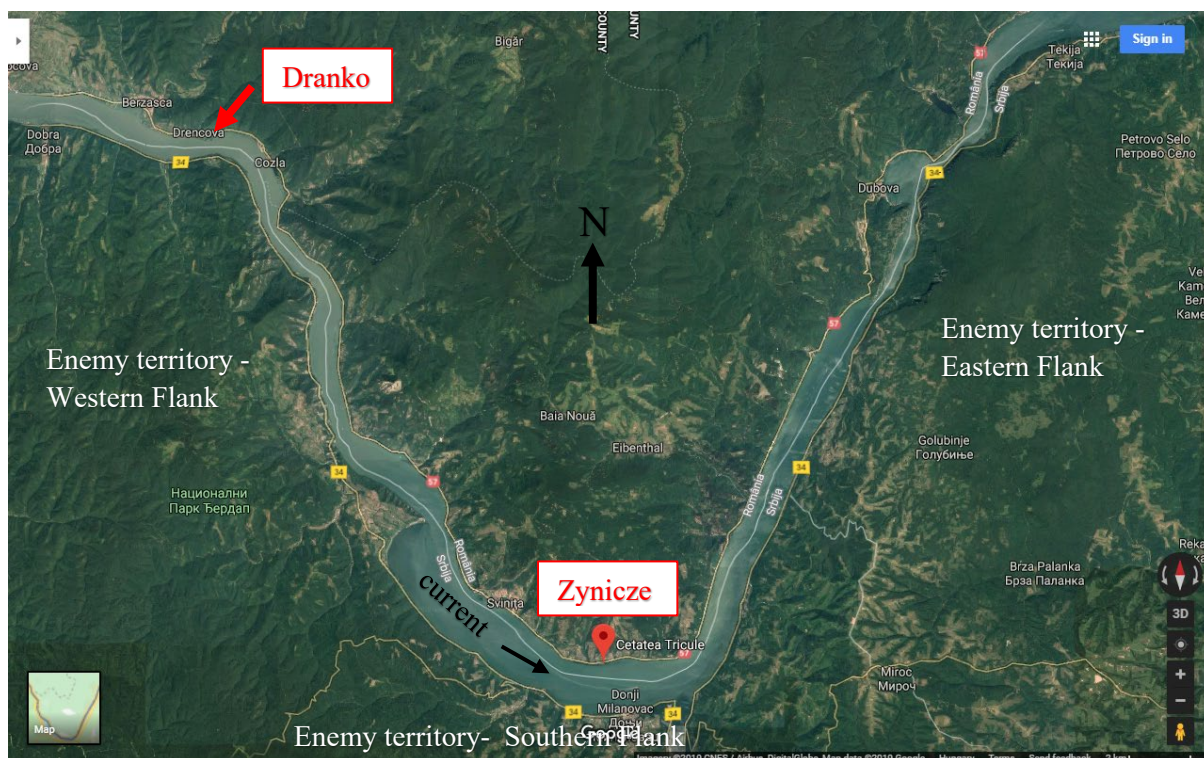
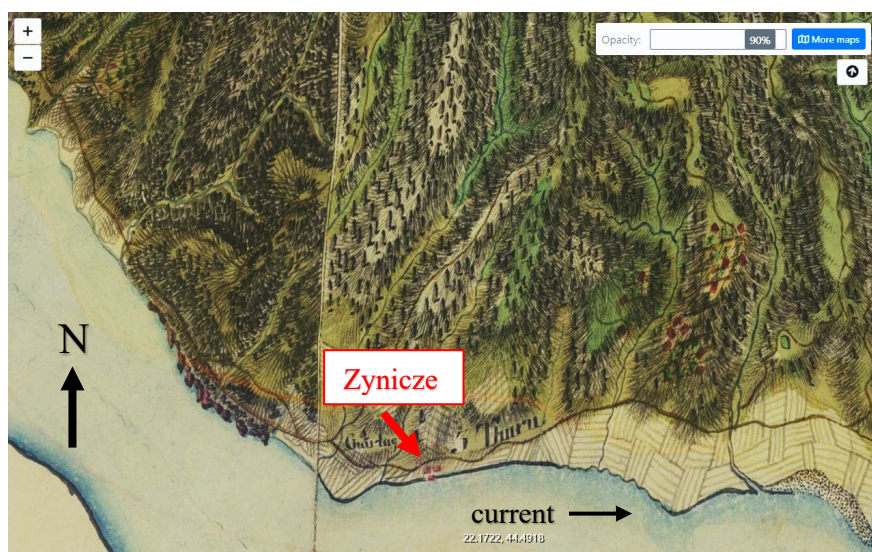


Figure 6. Zynicze's Flanks

Luckily, though not from this specific time, earlier maps from the military survey-produced prior to modern town and urban development- shows no trails in the forested hills directly behind the castle. This means that flanking it from behind is less likely. This is shown below.



Map 6. Terrain to the northern flank of Zynicze showing no trails.



Figure 7. 3-D Satellite picture of the mountains behind Zynicze.

Given the precarious position of this fortification, it would make military sense to erect something more defensible than a simple watch tower. Though this site has three, it is still a very simple defensive structure as compared to Severyn and Sand Ladislaen. It would also make sense to fortify it with a garrison larger than that of a watch tower.¹⁴⁵ The average garrison size for all Danubian castles with manpower listed is 140 men. Zynicze is listed by Redwitz as having forty-six. The space between the water's edge and the mountains behind may have played a large role in determining architectural structure, but given observations above, it may have been wise for Redwitz to both strengthen the fortifications with connecting walls, or even digging a water moat around them- like what is portrayed in the military survey map for the watch tower of Possesin.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ See section 4.4. below on Dranko, a simple watch tower, with a garrison of twenty-eight men.

¹⁴⁶ See Map 8 below.

4.3.2. Offensive Operations.

While a disadvantage defensively, the tip of a peninsula is an advantage offensively. Offensive operations can be launched across a larger “surface area” along the river from one single point. Less simultaneous operations can be conducted than can be conducted at Severyn or Sand Ladislaen, because of a smaller garrison size. However, it would be easier to sneak across the river to multiple landing points because it is located at the tip of a peninsula. Further, there is a river almost directly to the south which flows into the Danube. This would be an excellent entrance into the enemy heartland by remaining on the boats.

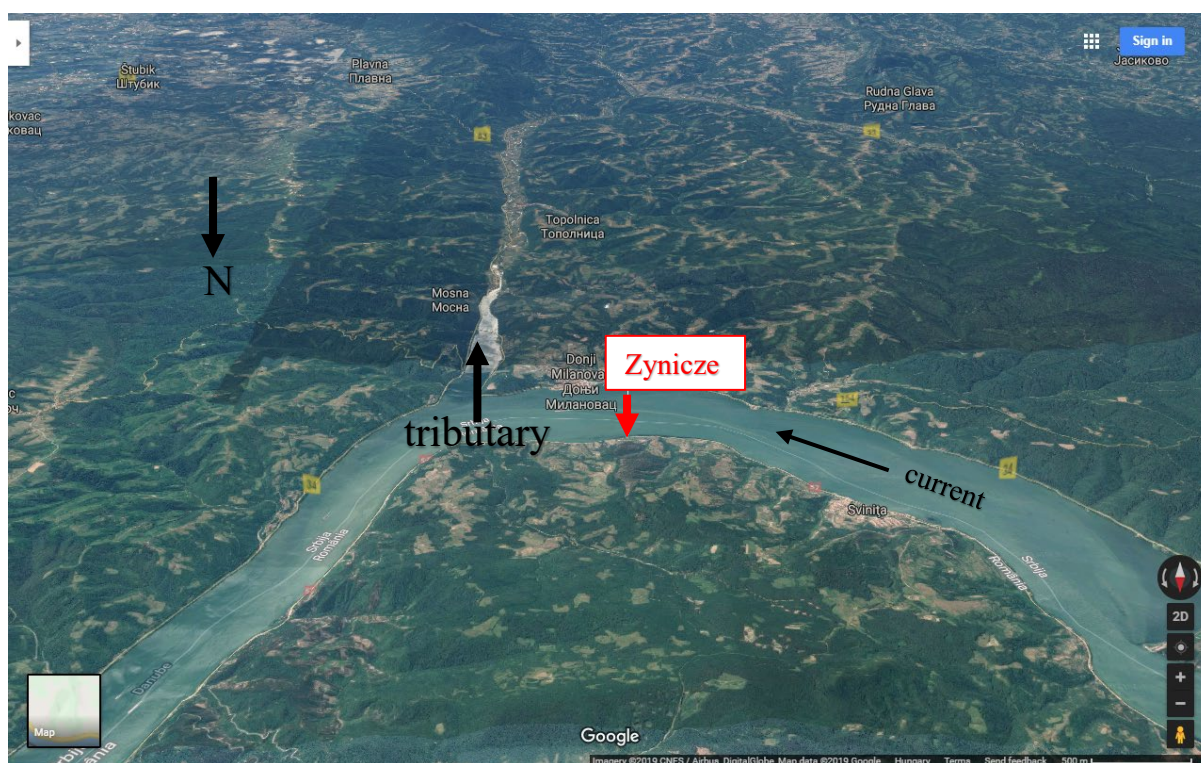


Figure 8. Southern view from Zynicze with tributary.

An overall review of this fortification yields mixed results. Some kind of stronghold must be placed here. However, I am not convinced that the architecture, nor the garrison size is enough to fulfill the mission of protecting this key place in the castle chain. On the other hand, the natural terrain directly backing this castle may have been enough to deter an enemy from using this place as an access point into the Hungarian interior.

4.4. Dranko

Dranko was most likely built at the same time as the other fortresses of Possesin, Ybrasd, Ander Peczs, and Staniloucz after 1419.¹⁴⁷ It only features by name in one document by the time of the expedition, in the 1429 report from Redwitz that gives its garrison as 28 total men.¹⁴⁸ Its walls are a meter and a half thick, and its dimensions on the ground is twenty-three meters by twenty-one. It is fifteen meters tall, despite being submerged to its top floor.



Figure 9. Dranko as submerged today.

Before the dams were built, Theodor Trâpcea was able to make a survey of the well-preserved ruins in 1969.¹⁴⁹ By that time, it had come to serve its original purpose once again in the 1960's, as a modern watch tower was added to the top of its walls to monitor the opposite shore of Danube.¹⁵⁰ This seems to be the only example of the Danuban castles to be brought out of

¹⁴⁷ Țicu, *Cetăți medievale din Banat*, 147.

¹⁴⁸ OBA, Nr. 27837, transcribed in: Feneșan, *Cavalerii Teutoni în Banatul Severinului*, 187.

¹⁴⁹ Țicu, *Cetăți medievale din Banat*, 81.

¹⁵⁰ Karczag, "A Dunába süllyedt vár," 24.

retirement in this way. I believe this indicates that the site was originally well chosen in the 1420's, or the modern observation post would have been put elsewhere. See below.



Figure 10. Photo of Dranko in the 1960's as a modern observation post.

4.4.1. Defendability.

The fortification's size was definitely adequate enough for its garrison. Further, as a simple watch tower, its function was to act as a plain monitoring platform, like the rest of the watch towers in the chain. These were spread to fill in the gaps between the larger fortresses along the line. Think of them like the small radar towers that lined the coast of Britain between larger installations during the Second World War.¹⁵¹ They were set to detect the enemy, and then relay the alert to the other stations on the chain. This was a way to spread out resources while still properly performing the mission.

Unlike Zynicze which was set at the apex of an angle in the river which formed a peninsula, Dranko is located at the nadir. This means that its flanks are not as exposed to places

¹⁵¹ Ybrasd, Dranko, and Staniloucz were the smaller detection towers of this fifty-kilometer section of the chain found between the more complex fortifications of Sand Ladislaen and Zynicze.

of attack from enemy territory. I am not certain how to describe this comparison more clearly, so I am including the map diagram below.

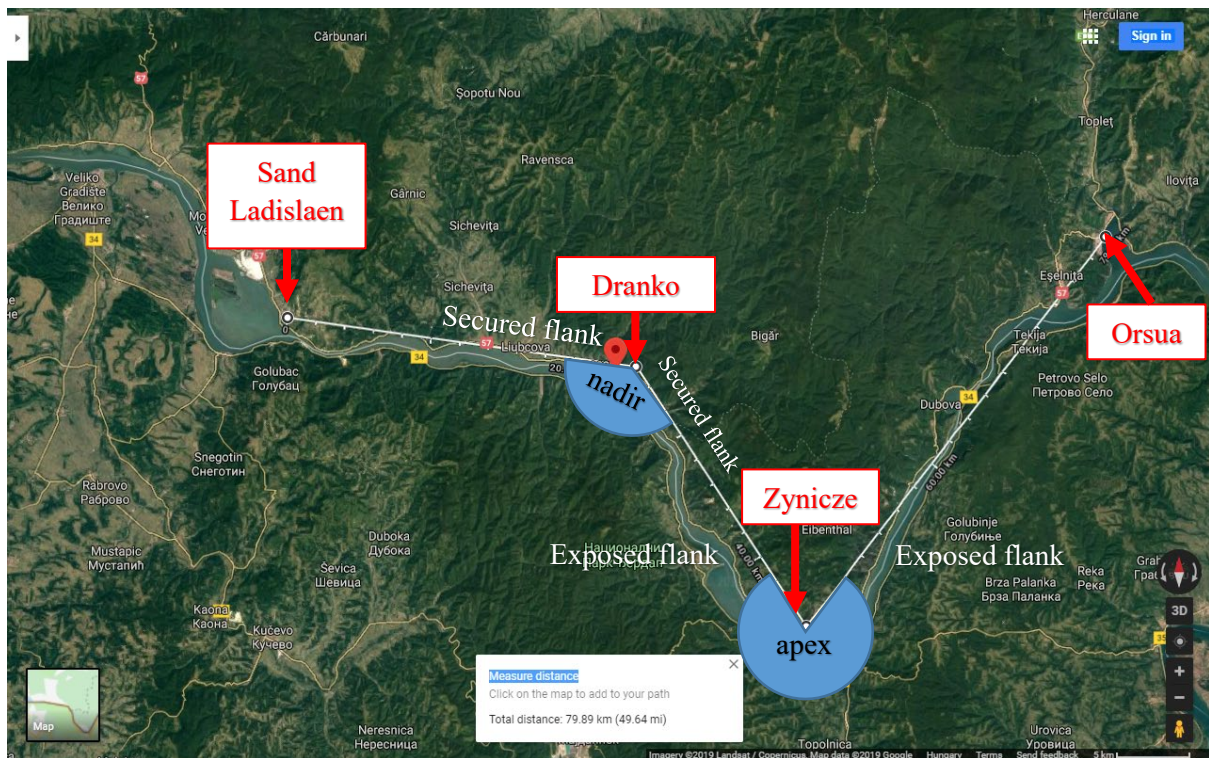


Figure 11. Angular explanation regarding flanks.

As a simple tower, there are no other defensive features of the architecture itself, with the exception of the rectangular walls themselves. Again, I believe these smaller towers were meant to monitor the river while using the smallest amount of resources as possible. However, it is located next to a military objective which an enemy might be tempted to utilize or seize.

Looking at Fig. 9 below, a road through the mountains can be clearly seen behind the spur at the back of Dranko.¹⁵² It begins at the village of *Berg Saska* (modern *Berzaska*) at the river's edge, and like a tributary flowing into a larger river, this road connects into a bigger one a little further in the mountains, which in turn, connects to many other roads that head out of

¹⁵² According to the US Army Field manual on interpreting maps and terrain features, a spur is “a short, continuous sloping line of higher ground, normally jutting out from the side of a ridge. A spur is often formed by two roughly parallel streams cutting draws down the side of a ridge. The ground will slope down in three directions and up in one. Contour lines on a map depict a spur with the U or V pointing away from high ground.” See: United States Department of the Army, *Map Reading and Land Navigation: U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-25-26* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2005), 10-14.

the mountains in many different directions. This road still exists today, though it has been widened and paved.



Figure 12. Dranko's position in relation to the mountain road.

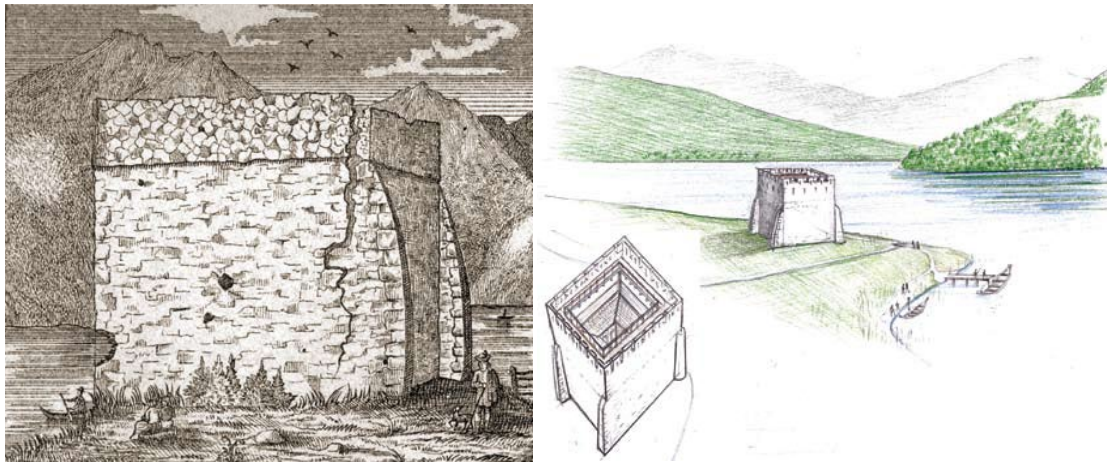


Figure 13. Old sketch and modern reconstruction of Dranko.

4.4.2. Offensive Operations.

Due to its size, Dranko is less capable of performing offensive operations than the others in this study. Its garrison (28) is smaller than Zynicze's (46), making it even harder to conduct multiple simultaneous raids and patrols. Yet, given that it has the mountain road behind it, some manpower resources must be set aside to patrol it.

In conclusion, this castle is almost singly meant to be an observation post. Its defensive architecture seems almost "bare-bones" as compared to its larger neighbors. However, as pointed out above, there is a need for it to control the road.

4.5. Sand Ladislaen

The history of this fortress has been discussed above in Chapter One. Like Dranko, its main task is to monitor across the Danube. However, it also serves to counteract Golubac's role as the western "gatekeeper" of the Iron Gate gorge. The appearance of the cliffs on the river to its east makes it clear that once beyond them, there is dramatic change in terrain and mindset for a traveler who passes them. The photo below shows this demarcation in landscape with these white outcroppings which seem to serve as immense lintels for the passageway beyond them. On this side of them is a more wide-open space, beyond them is the constrictions of the gorges. Therefore, this castle contests Golubac for control of that narrow passageway.



Figure 14. Photo of Golubac guarding Iron Gates entrance.

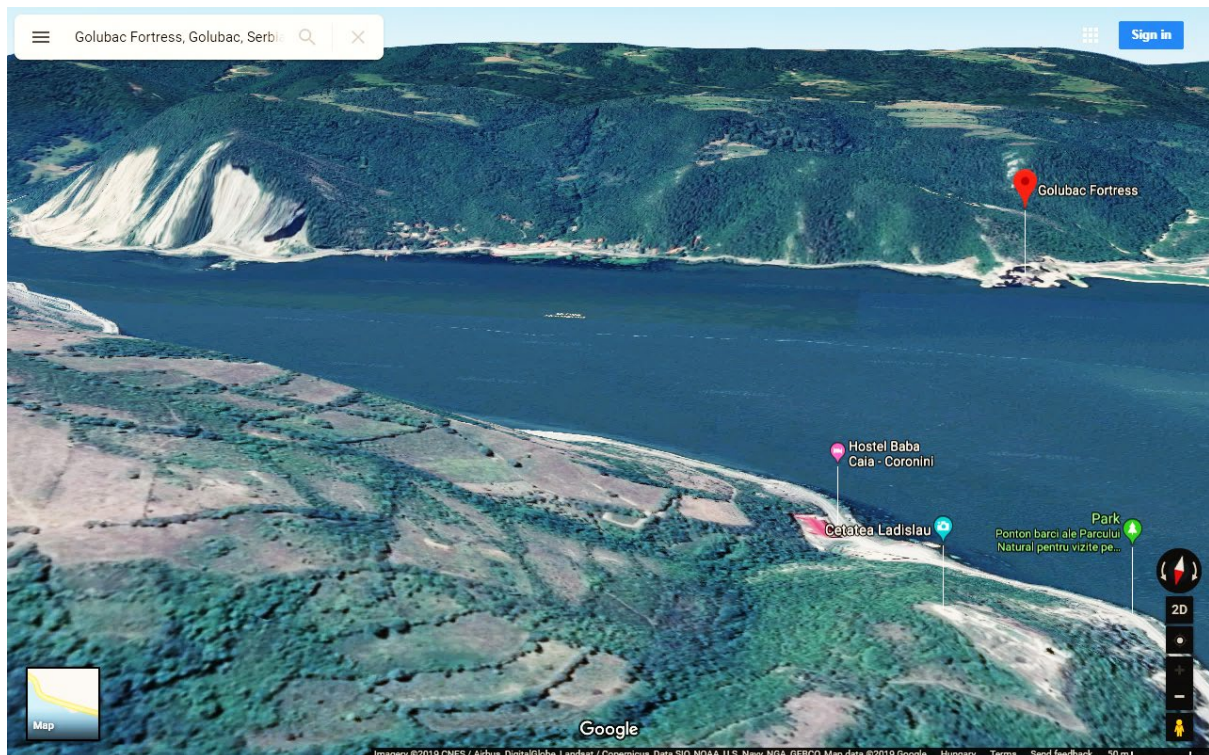


Figure 15. Similar view using Google Maps.

4.2.1. Defendability.

Natural surroundings also make Sand Ladislaen unique as a Höhenburg in the castle chain. It rises about two hundred fifty meters above the current level of the Danube and can only be reached by a single path to the north, on the opposite side of the castle from Golubac. It was built in the shape of an ellipse, dictated by the contours of the hilltop, roughly enclosing one hundred ninety meters by one hundred meters. This makes it larger than Severyn castle. Its outer walls measure 2.80 to 3 m. thick and are constructed by carefully shaped blocks of

limestone. There is also a defensive ditch to protect the northern side. It has five towers- four rectangular in shape (the largest has an internal diameter of 3.45m. by 3.25 m.), and one round (with an interior diameter of five meters).¹⁵³ The river, the hill, and the defensive works make this castle incredibly formidable.

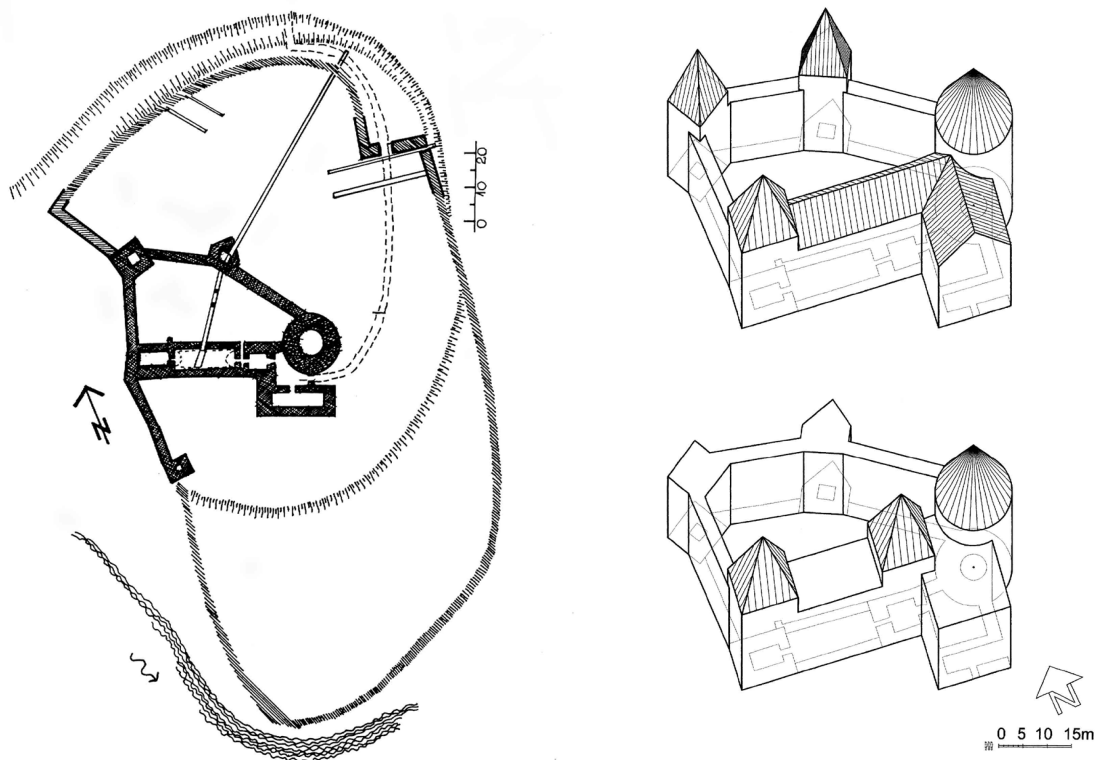


Figure 16. Plan and Reconstruction of Sand Ladislaen.

Its garrison (456 total men) is almost double that of Severyn (240 men in total). As the area it encloses (190 m. x 100 m. = 19,000 m²) is almost double that of Severyn (120 m. x 90m. = 10,800) as well, and given that Severyn castle was determined above to be large enough to house its garrison (through a comparison with the similar sized Balga Castle in Prussia), it seems logical to assume that Sand Ladislaen is also large enough.

¹⁵³ Țeicu, *Cetăți medievale din Banat*, 114-115.

4.2.3. Offensive Operations.

The size of its garrison also ensures that multiple scouting, patrolling, and other offensive operations can be conducted at the same time. This is with a reserve that is capable of supplementing the manpower in the smaller surrounding castles in times of trouble. It also controls a slight choke point in the river made by the giant rock formation directly below it, called *Papooayer Felsen* in the military survey map, makes control of this part of the river a military objective as well.¹⁵⁴

In conclusion, in my analysis, this castle is the strongest in terms of both offensive and defensive qualities. It has a complex set of defensive features such as multiple towers, a surrounding ditch, and restricted access. It had a large garrison capable of running many different operations to counter the Turks across the river. It also has a very good view of Golubac where they were based, only 1.34 km. across the river. This can be seen in the photo below which was only taken at the bottom of the hill that Sand Ladislaen sits upon.

¹⁵⁴ See Fig. 1.



Figure 17. Direct view of Golubac from the foot of Sand Ladislaen.

Overall Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to attempt a military analysis of the chain of fortifications in the Iron Gates as they were given to the Teutonic Order in 1429. Over the almost six centuries that has passed, many things have changed. The castles all fell out of use once the dangers faced by imminent invasion passed. One, Dranko, did return to fulfill its original capacity as a tool to once again observe and control the river. The Danube itself served as both a line of separation between north and south, and at the same time it was a means of connecting the east and west. The linking qualities of the river for the castle chain was important. It became an axis around which the various garrisons communicated and supported each other. Messages and supplies ran atop and along the river. This, however, has also changed in the intervening centuries.

The changes cloud our ability to understand the castles as material objects- specifically as military tools. This thesis has attempted to see if it is possible to get some sort of picture which may help to understand them in their original contexts. This has presented a number of challenges. First, is the limited number of written sources concerning the Order's expedition. There are none surviving which reflect the day to day operations and the human lives of the men who defended the castles- important pieces that help to provide a picture of what these structures meant to the men, and exactly how these castles were used. Therefore, archaeological and survey information was used in this thesis to try and supplement the missing information. This is nothing strange or new, as the discipline of archaeology has been used by many academics to fill in the gaps in our knowledge of the past that is lacking when documents are scarce.

In this case, archaeology itself is hindered slightly in its help because of the two hydroelectric dams which flooded the excavation sites before proper investigations could be

made of many of these ruins. Fortunately, the location of the Iron Gates in the region has always been a crossroads between cultures, and many travelers over the centuries have passed by these sites, recording them either visually in the form of drawings and sketches, or descriptively, as entries in travel journals. It is in this vein of research where I have tried to provide another source of information by observing these places myself. I have taken photographs and attempted to question the residents as much as my translation software would allow.

However, this resource of information brings other problems in the form of conclusions that can become too subjective. These observations are rooted in my own experiences and way of thinking, so I have tried to limit this outcome as much as possible, in the manner that I described at the very beginning of Chapter Four. Yet I would also argue that military analysis is at its heart an instinctive process. After all, once the intelligence briefings and training sessions are over, military commanders act in the end by using their “gut”.

Concerning the historical events that directed the use of these castles, the expedition was doomed to fail before its start. As discussed in Chapter Three, too little of what was promised from the royal court and coffers of Sigismund actually materialized in the Iron Gates. Grandmaster Rußdorf was stretched far too thin to be of any help to his men way down on the very southern border of the Kingdom of Hungary. Finally, Redwitz was far too absent in the region, especially when things got violent, as he chased the Emperor around his imperial estates back in German lands.

This brings me to topography, location, and geography. First, the flanks. The castle chain had a very strong western flank with the fortress of Sand Ladislaen. It was purpose built to hold this flank from a strong enemy garrison located at this end of the Iron Gates, while sitting on a well-protected promontory. However, the chain had a weaker eastern flank that was defended by Severin, which happened to be dropped in the middle of a fairly open plain, while also sitting on the edge of a river. Further, rivers in the past were not barriers but significant

means of travel for foe as well as friend. This analysis is backed up by the fact that there were historical instances where the castle of Severyn was either captured or destroyed. If this did not play a part in the failure of the expedition, it definitely shaped the perception that the enterprise was a loser. However, I believe it is possible to determine which of these it was with subsequent work on the topic.

Now the men. This is clearly a subjective observation, but my personal understanding of the fighting capabilities of mercenaries is a “mixed bag” at best. They tend to have a wealth of fighting experience, but their complicated motivations and easily shifting morale can overcome the positives. This must have been the same in the past, and I believe this played a part in the breakdown of the expedition. I also believe this to be an area that requires further study in a larger work.

Finally, the sample of four castles. I absolutely believe that a more complete and meaningful study of this topic produced in this manner can be done well in a doctoral setting. The individual fortress examples have already been treated over the course of analysis in Chapter Four. However, regarding the types of castles, the smaller towers made good sense as a way to conserve limited and then dwindling resources as the fewer large ones were needed to give the chain strength, albeit at points which were spread out. I look forward to possibly testing this conclusion in the future.

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Appendix



Fig. 1. Map of the Teutonic Order's castles in Prussia and Livonia.

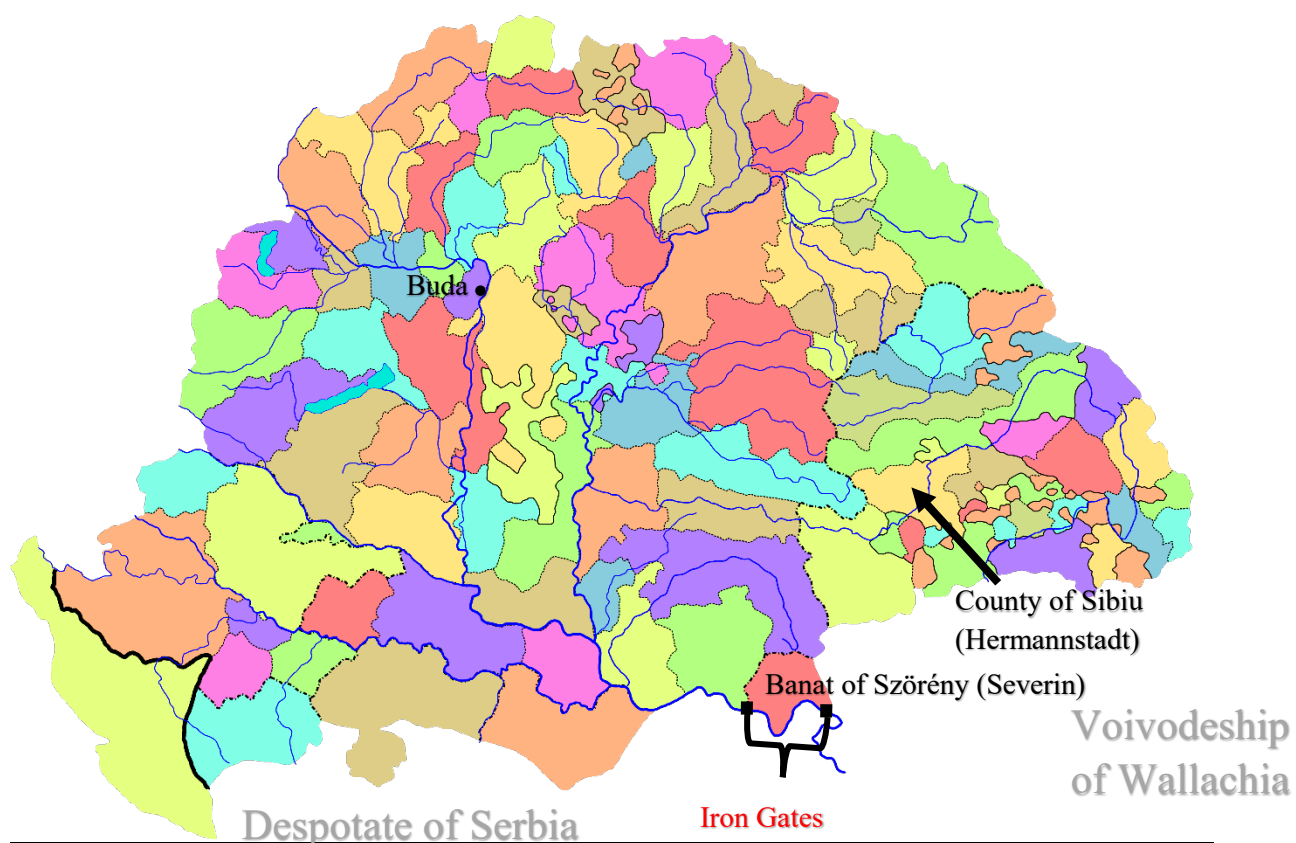


Fig. 2. Map of the administrative divisions of the Kingdom of Hungary to include the areas of the Banat of *Szörény* (Severin), County of *Sibiu* (Hermannstadt), and the Iron Gates.

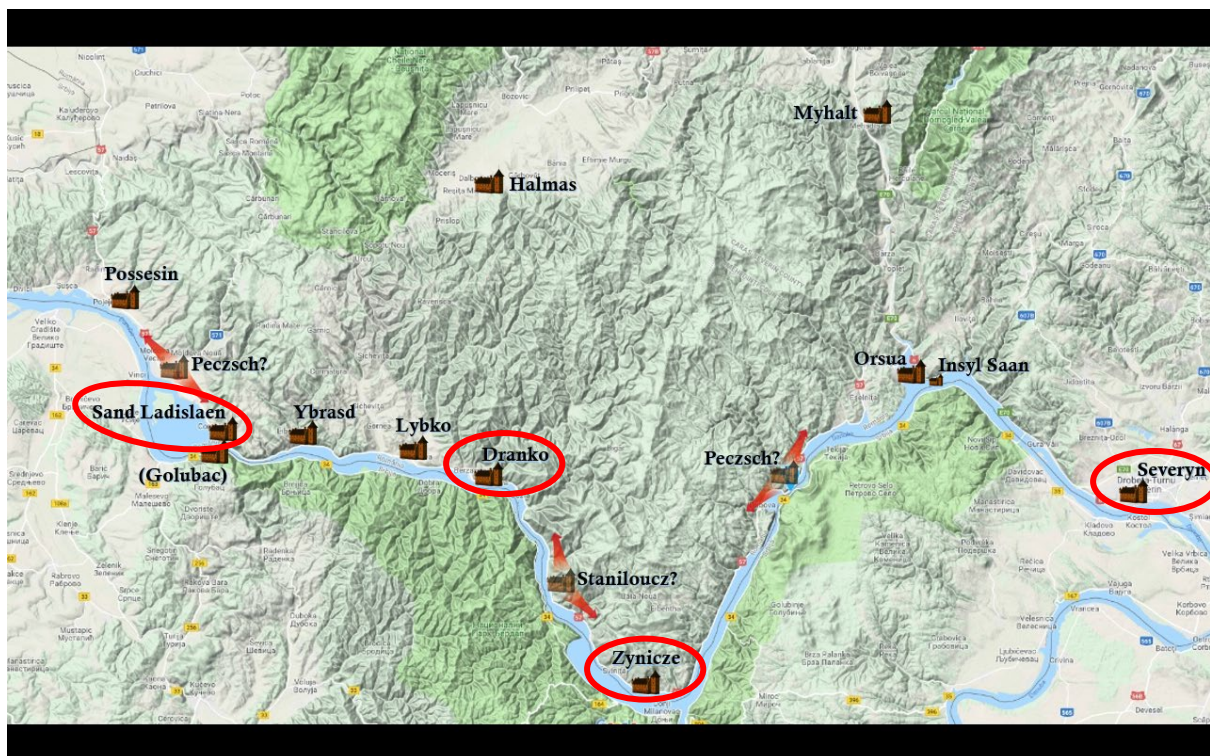


Fig. 3. Map of the Danubian chain of Fortresses and the location of the four chosen for this study..

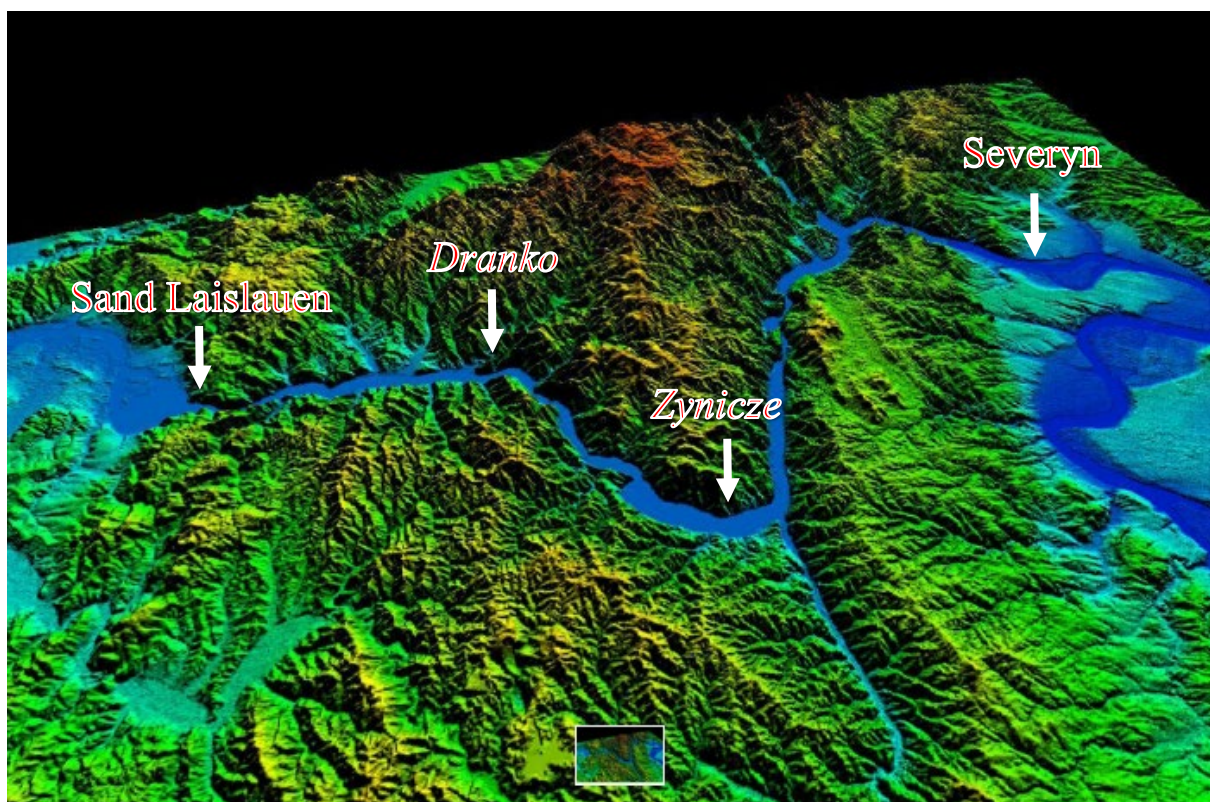


Fig. 4. Digital Relief map of the Iron Gates.

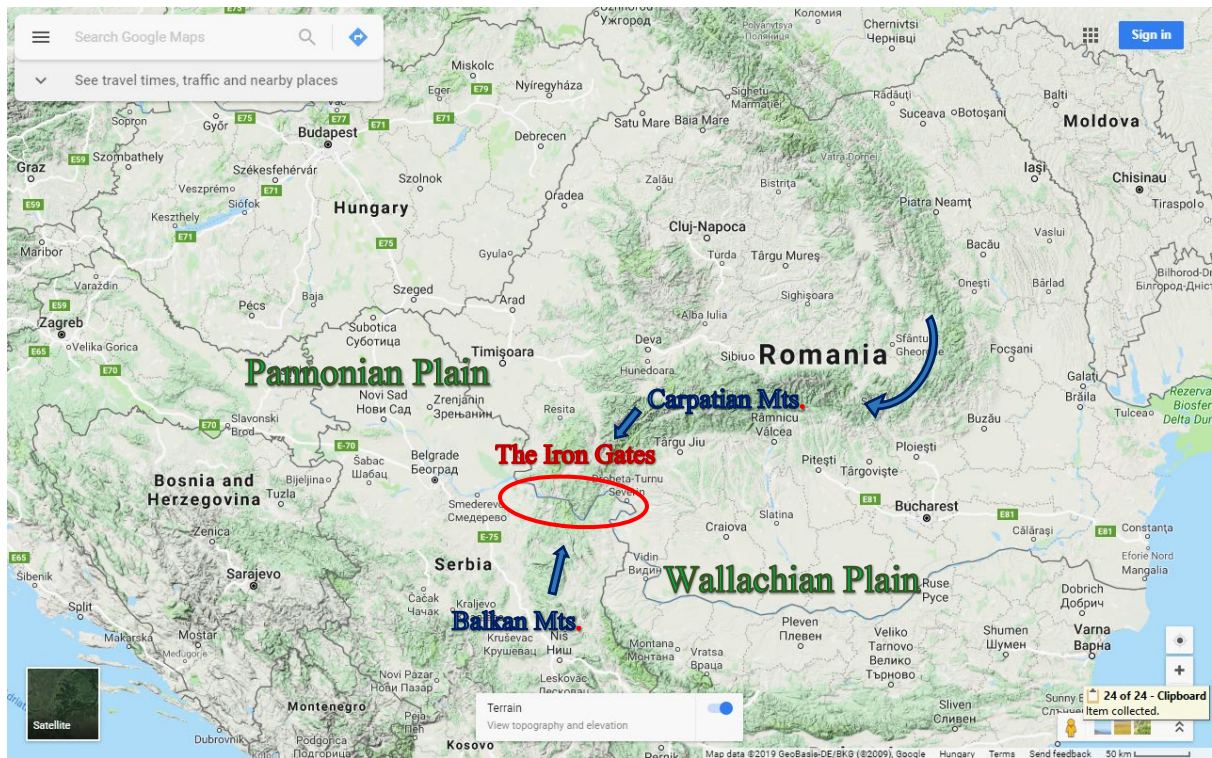


Fig. 5. Map of the strategic location of the Iron Gates.