

The Merchant, the Spaniard and the Turks – How not build an army and siege a city?

How a rich merchant ended up as a soldier? How did he gather his army? How could he cooperate with a skilled and careerist Spaniard officer?

The events start at 1543, when the ottomans captured the town of Szeged. Many citizens went to exile, either because the turks expelled them, or because they hoped, that in the remaining country may can find a way to retake the town.

Among the latest was a rich merchant, Mihály Tóth. Tóth went to exile to Debrecen, where he already had some “friend.” He quickly became an important person of the town’s political life, and around 1550-51 he started to mobilize his contacts for his plan; banish the ottomans from his hometown Szeged.

He gathered followers from the hajduks, or at least, people who were regarded as hajduks. He moved his company to the southern parts of the Hungarian Plain, and when they arrived to Temesvár (today Timisoara), it became a huge mob of nearly four thousand people. Tóth showed his plan about Szeged to the Spaniard officer of the royal army, Bernardo Villela de Aldana, who agreed to join with his men. What after it happened is maybe one of the most tragic-comical events in the history of warfare.

However, Tóth went on, and always tried to re-group his company and took part in anti-ottoman campaign on the side of Aldana, with limited success. The core of his company took part in some battles in the year of 1552, when they were ultimately scattered by the ottomans. He and his company and their work with Aldana will be the center of my presentation. I will speak about contact webs, Tóth’s and Aldana’s soldiers, their attempted retake of Szeged and other ventures in the year of 1552.