

## A SUCCESSFUL HABSBURG EXPERIMENT. THE MILITARIZATION OF THE BORDER BETWEEN AUSTRIA AND TURKEY

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**Abstract.** The defeat of the Turks at the siege of Vienna sparked the campaign waged by the Habsburg Empire for the *Reconquista* of the territories occupied by the Ottomans. The gradual ousting of the Ottomans from the territories in Hungary, Serbia, the Banat and Transylvania shifted the boundaries of the Empire to these places. The Austrian-Turkish wars and the peace treaties that accompanied them changed the boundaries, which were to stabilize after the Peace of Belgrade. In the liberated territories, the emperors of the House of Habsburg colonized Christians from the Balkans, refugees because of the Turks, and used them primarily for military purposes. To strengthen Austria's border with Turkey, important parts of the border territory were militarized, under the direct leadership of the Aulic War Council. To this end, the Slavonic, Croatian, Banat, Tisza-Mureș military borders were created. Border guards became free men and enjoyed a higher social status than those in the civil province. The institution of the military border was efficient because it relied on its own resources and offered an armed force that proved very useful in the wars Austria waged in the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**Keywords:** the Slavonic military border, the Croatian military border, the Banatian military border, the Transylvanian military border, the Tisza-Mureș border, the House of Habsburg.

Border territories have always enjoyed a special status because borders represented, especially in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period, a fluid reality, with more or less extensive periodical modifications. After the siege of Vienna in 1683, the border between the Habsburg Empire and the Ottoman Porte was in constant motion, as the *Reconquista* of the territories in Central or South-Eastern Europe advanced.<sup>1</sup> Even before 1683, the Habsburgs had been faced with

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<sup>1</sup> For the history of the Austrian military frontier, see: Carl Bernhard Edlen von Hietzinger, *Statistik der Militärgrenze des Österreichischen keiserthums*, Wien, 1817; J.H. Benigni, *Statistische Skizze des Siebenbürgischen Militärgrenze*, Sibiu, 1834; George Bariț, *Istoria Regimentului al II-lea românesc grănițiar din Transilvania*, Brașov, 1874; Fr. Vanicek,