

# POLTURAS IN OTTOMAN HUNGARY AND THE PRINCIPALITY OF TRANSYLVANIA

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*Errare humanum est* – “to err is human”. This oft-heard saying is most applicable to certain details of Hungarian monetary historiography. We find in the specific area of numismatic history the well-established view that the Polish *póltorak*, known in Hungary *poltura*,<sup>1</sup> was a key culprit in the inflation that raged in Central Europe in the early 1620s. Hungarian-language sources do indeed distinguish and appraise several different *polturas*: by age (old and new), colour (white and brown), size (small and large),<sup>2</sup> quality (good and bad) and origin (Polish and Transylvanian). The latter distinction, however, directly implies that not all coins named “*poltura*” were of Polish origin. The number of different versions itself arouses suspicion – could this Polish small-denomination coin really have been issued in so many different forms? With this in mind, we should first ask when Polish *póltoraks* were first issued. Historians have given a definite answer to this: it was in 1614.<sup>3</sup> We do not,

1 Lajos Huszár, *Bethlen Gábor pénzei*, Kolozsvár, 1945, 34–35, passim; Idem, A lengyel pénzek forgalma Magyarországon a XVI–XVII. században, *Numizmatikai Közlöny* 68–69 (1969–1970) 51–60; János Buza, Az első európai infláció és magyarországi hatása (1618–1628), *Aula. Társadalom és Gazdaság* 13 (1991) 88–104.

2 I have tried to classify the names of “*polturas*” before. The adjectives relating to their age, colour and size do not enable their origins to be established without other information. János Buza, Kipper-pénzek a mérlegen. Az 1620-as évek inflációjának két szakasza, *Századok* 164 (2000) 886–887.

3 Marian Gumowski, *Handbuch der polnischen Numismatik*, Graz, 1960, 45.

however, despite many attempts, have a precise answer to the similarly relevant question of when the Polish word *półtorak* first emerged as the name of a coin.<sup>4</sup> It was almost certainly some time after 1534, and probably not before the Augsburg Money Decree of 1551,<sup>5</sup> after which an increasing number of mints in the Holy Roman Empire produced three-kreutzer coins.

What had the Austrian/German three-kreutzer coin or the equivalent 1/24 thaler have to do with the Polish *półtorak*? The story begins with the eastward migration of three-kreutzer coins as increasing numbers were minted. As a result, by the second half of the 1590s, there was a very large number of them in circulation in the Kingdom of Poland, and in 1598, the sejm decided to ban the use of three-kreutzers and other low-quality small coins, on pain of confiscation. All existing such coins had to be redeemed at their true value. In summer 1599, Sigismund III issued an order, ostensibly in the interests of the whole *Rzeczpospolita*, that the true value of foreign coins be established by assay and the image of their obverse and reverse sides be publicised. The assay office set up in 1598<sup>6</sup> worked diligently, resulting in a royal decree, printed in Krakow<sup>7</sup> in 1600, that bore high-standard engravings of the legends and depictions. The first part of the decree has images of the obverse and reverse of twenty-six “POŁTORAKIS”.

Since the small-denomination coins referred to as *półtoraki* were of very diverse quality, they were classified by value into five groups. The “imperial

4 Some linguists trace the word *półtorak* to the seventeenth century. Witold Doroszewski (ed.), *Słownik języka polskiego*, VI. Warszawa, 1954, 1388–1389; Loránd Benkő (főszerk.), *A magyar nyelv történeti-etimológiai szótára*, III. Budapest, 1976, 245–246.

5 Wolfgang Schulten, *Deutsche Münzen aus der Zeit Karls V. Typenkatalog der Gepräge zwischen dem Beginn der Talerprägung (1484) und der dritten Reichsmünzordnung (1559)*, Frankfurt am Main, 1974, 433, 439.

6 Andrzej Mikołajczyk, *Einführung in die neuzeitliche Münzgeschichte Polens*, Łódź, 1988, 111–112.

7 Kasper Rytkier, *Wizerunk y szacunek mynic wszelakich cudzoziemskih iáko ktoré w Koronie Polskiej bráne y wydawáne bydz máiq*, Warszawa, 1965 [komentarzem opatrzył Ryszard Kiersnowski] (reprint). I would like to thank Barbara Bulat, head of department in the Jagiellon University of Krakow, for sending me the bibliographic data on this publication. Professor Áron Petneki of the University of Miskolc kindly informed me about the sworn head inspector K. Rytkier, the document he compiled (published in 1600) and the facsimile edition of 1883.

*póltoraks*”, which bore the value 24,<sup>8</sup> were declared to be of equal value to the one-and-a-half Polish *grosz*, and no limitation was set on their circulation. The rest were officially banned from circulation on pain of confiscation. The coins of Group 2 were worth 5.5% less, and those of Group 5.21% less,<sup>9</sup> than the one-and-a-half *grosz*. Anyone unable to pass on the lowest-quality 3-kreutzer coins in time could dispose of them only by redeeming them for Polish coins of legal purity in the royal mint. The holder lost one-fifth of the face value in this conversion.

A strikingly high proportion of the images on the engravings were of foreign coins already known as *póltoraki* in 1599(!), mostly three-kreutzer coins from German lands. This is somewhat puzzling, because at that time the one-and-a-half *grosz* coin called *póltorak* was not yet being minted. The failure of this attempt to stem the inflow of small coins of varying composition and quality led in 1614 to a new policy for issuing small-denomination coins in Poland. This involved the introduction of the *póltorak*, a truly Polish one-and-a-half *grosz* coin.

In Hungary, after much previous effort, a law was passed in 1613<sup>10</sup> ordering that “false coins from the Polish provinces shall not be brought into Hungary and shall not be passed on, causing great harm of the public”. This clearly could not have been directed at the *póltorak*, which was not minted until 1614. After

8 Friedrich Schrötter, *Wörterbuch der Münzkunde*, Berlin, 1930, 163 (*Dreipölker*); also see: Konrad Schneider, *Dreipölker*, in Michael North (hrsg.), *Von Aktie bis Zoll*, München, 1995, 92–93.

9 The three-kreutzer coins in Group 2 came from the mints of Montfort, Carintia, Zug, Chur, Württemberg, Solothurn, Tyrol and Alsace-Pfirt, and the Strasbourg *semissis* also belongs here. Those in Group 3 were minted in Hanau-Lichtenberg, the Diocese of Strasbourg (2 items), the city of Konstanz, the canton of Schaffhausen (2 items), Pfalz-Zweibrücken, Montfort, Styria and Pfalz-Veldenz. Those in Group IV were minted in the old cantons (Swyz, Uri and Unterwalden), and in Hanau-Lichtenberg. Those in Group 5 came from two Swiss cities – Zurich (3 items) and Sankt Gallen (2 items). Rytkier, *Wizerunk*, 11, 16; Geographical names identified in: Hugo Frhr. v. Saurma-Jeltsch, *Die Saurmasche Münzsammlung deutscher, schweizerischer und polnischer Gepräge von etwa dem Beginn der Groschenzeit bis zur Kipperperiode* [According to the preface, until 1620], I. Text, II. Abbildungen, Berlin, 1892.

10 Dezső Márkus et al. (szerk.), *Corpus Juris Hugarici. Magyar Törvénytár 1000–1895*, V. (1608–1657. évi törvénycikkek), Budapest, 1900, 113; see, also: János Buza, A pénzügyi válság előszele. Az 1613. évi 28. törvény cikk nyomában. *Történelmi Szemle* 65 (2023) 669–677.

this decision by the national diet in Pozsony (Bratislava, Slovakia), the Transylvanian diet followed suit, prescribing the death sentence<sup>11</sup> for anyone who minted “the many and varied false and counterfeit coins,” suggesting that not all bad money was of foreign origin. We should note, however, neither the Hungarian nor the Transylvanian diet proscribed real Polish coins.

In the early 1610s, “bad and shoddy white *garases*” caused<sup>12</sup> monetary disturbances in the Kassa (Košice, Slovakia)<sup>13</sup> and Tokaj-Hegyalja areas of Upper Hungary, but Polish coins were not blamed, which is important to stress, because the wine dealers were very familiar with these. The depictions on the “shoddy white *garases*” are not recorded, but they were in all probability coins from the Holy Roman Empire, three-kreutzer and groschen – 1/24 thaler – coins. This conclusion is supported by German-language publications<sup>14</sup> and the regular contemporary assays.<sup>15</sup>

To judge from our present information, the actual Polish *póltorak* appeared in the Kingdom of Hungary soon after it was first issued in 1614. An attempt to fix its exchange rate<sup>16</sup> was made in 1617. Many *póltoraks* were in circulation – and viewed with general suspicion – in the county of Borsod in 1618. The county authorities, however, decided that “the Polish *garas* known as ‘pothura’ is a good coin” and stipulated a fine of twelve forints for anyone who did not

11 Sándor Szilágyi (szerk.), *Erdélyi Országgyűlési Emlékek* (= EOE) VI. (1608–1814), Budapest, 1880, 281.

12 Budapest, Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Könyvtára. Kézirattár (= MTA KK) Ms. 5259/2. Nr. 1136–1137, Handwritten notes of Tibor Antal Horváth; see also Buza, A pénzügyi válság, 672–673.

13 István H. Németh, *Várospolitikai és gazdaságpolitika a 16–17. századi Magyarországon*, II, Budapest, 2004, 120.

14 Rather than a long list of journal and book titles, I cite only one of the best. Niklot Klüssendorf, *Der Münzschatz von Herborn zur Kipperzeit in der Grafschaft Nassau-Dillenburg*, XX, Marburg, 1989, 201.

15 Adolf Meyer, Das Probierbuch des Nürnberger Münzwardeins Hans Huefnagel (1605–1612), *Numismatische Zeitschrift* 18 (1886) 87–140.

16 Štefan Kazimír, Polish Coins in East Slovakia in 16 and 17 Centuries, in *Studia Historica Slovaca*, III. Bratislava, 1965, 124.



accept it.<sup>17</sup> There was even a proposal in Pozsony in 1619 to make the “little *garas*” or *póltorak* legal tender, but it was eventually withdrawn.<sup>18</sup>

The Polish *póltorak* was from its inception minted in large quantities, but its name was applied with qualifying adjectives to the inferior three-kreutzer, the notorious Silesian coins known colloquially in Hungarian as *oli polturák* after Ohlau (Oława, Poland), *brigai polturák* after Brieg (Brzeg, Poland), and *keresztes polturák*, probably after Kreuzberg (Kluczbork, Poland).<sup>19</sup> Unlike these and similar coins, the real Polish *póltoraks* became known as *bitkowsky polturas*<sup>20</sup> after the city of Bydgoszcz (Bromberg) and its highly productive mint.<sup>21</sup> The latter were good coins, but circulated together with the bad ones for some time. According to a sharp-eyed Transylvanian contemporary<sup>22</sup> in 1622, “good old, good silver, rich *polturas* were brought to Transylvania from Upper Hungary, but mixed with inferior [coins].” He considered the false *polturas* to have come from Silesia – the principalities of Oppeln (Opole, Poland) and Ratibor (Racibórz, Poland).<sup>23</sup> The “small *polturas* with heads”, considered the worst in

17 Péter Tóth – János Barsi, *Borsod Vármegye statutumai 1578–1785*, Miskolc, 1989 (Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén Megyei Levéltári Füzetek 23) 17.

18 „Die kleinen gröschl oder polturackern ...” In this case, the intention may not have been to determine the exchange rate of the actual Polish coins. The name of the *póltorak*, however, certainly became Germanized. Sándor Kolosvári – Kelemen Óvári, *Corpus statutorum Hungariae municipalium. A magyar törvényhatóságok jogszabályainak gyűjteménye*, IV/2. Budapest, 1897, 306.

19 János Buza, *Schlesische Kipperprägungen im Geldumlauf Oberungarns*, in Krisztina Bertók – Melinda Torbágyi (hrsg.), *Festschrift für Katalin Bíró-Sey und István Gedai zum 65. Geburtstag*, Budapest, 1999, 339–355.

20 Lajos Huszár, *A bitkowsky poltura*, *Numizmatikai Közlöny* 84–85 (1986) 69–71.

21 It issued about 100 million *póltoraks* in many different versions. Marian Gumowski, *Mennica bydgoska*, Toruń, 1955, 69–71, 97–88; Idem, *Handbuch der polnische Numismatik*, 45; Andrzej Mikołajczyk, *Einführung*, 72.

22 Huszár, *Bethlen Gábor pénzei*, 42–43; Imre Mikó (szerk.), *Marosvásárhelyi Nagy Szabó Ferenc memoráléja*, Kolozsvár, 1855, (Erdélyi Történelmi Adatok I) 140.

23 A similar opinion in the chronicle of Lőcse (Levoča, Slovakia): “... all kinds of inferior Silesian *polturas* were brought in...” Jeromos Bal – Jenő Förster – Aurél Kauffmann (hrsg.), *Zipserische oder Leutschauerische Chronica und Zeitbeschreibung. Zusammengetragen der lieben Posterität zur Nachrich von Caspar Hain*, Lőcse, 1910, 161.

Upper Hungary, were also from Silesia, the duchy of Teschen (Cieszyn, Poland; Těšín, Czech Republic).<sup>24</sup>

In spring 1623, during the flood of inferior coins, nobody accepted the kreutzer-value<sup>25</sup> coins known as “bad *polturas*”, and the new *garases* issued by Ferdinand II of Hungary and Gábor Bethlen of Transylvania were also bad coins. Coin values gradually settled down only at the end of 1625, or rather early 1626. There are reports of inflationary coins coming into Ottoman Hungary, and one Styrian document notes that in 1623–1624 neither the Hungarians nor the Turks were pleased to receive the bad coins, and after a while would accept the kipper coins only at a quarter or a fifth of face value.<sup>26</sup>

The real Polish *polturas*, however, earned increasing confidence, and after a while were in circulation in all three parts of the country; in 1626, they were referred to as “good, old *bitkowsky polturas*”.<sup>27</sup> Although the coins met with ready acceptance, there was some difficulty in setting their value. The *poltura* was valued at two and a half denars in Lower Hungary and three denars in Upper Hungary, the Principality of Transylvania and the Ottoman-ruled territory. The 100-denar “Hungarian forint”, which was not a coin but a unit of accounting, was considered equivalent to forty *polturas* in Lower Hungary and thirty-three *polturas* plus one denar elsewhere. By contrast, the thaler was considered equal to sixty *polturas* everywhere. Consequently, the thaler was worth 150 denars in the west and 180 denars in the east.<sup>28</sup> For inhabitants of

24 János Buza, Tescheni három krajcárosok voltak a “fejes, apró polturák”, *Numizmatikai Köz-löny* 106–107 (2007–2008) 97–100.

25 János Buza, Kipper-pénzek a mérlegen. Az 1620-as évek inflációjának két szakasza, *Századok* 134 (2000) 891–894.

26 Arnold Luschin von Ebengreuth, Das lange Geld oder die Kipperzeit in Steiermarkt, *Mit-theilungen des Historischen Vereines für Steiermark* 36 (1890) 49.

27 The old *polturas* of “Bitkock” were considered very good, valued at 4 denars. 22 August, 1626. Budapest, Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (= MNL OL) Zichy lt. See also: “.. people would rather take their money if it was sent in Bitkoczki...” 4 July, 1629 MNL OL Szepesi Kam. rksz. 3204. p. 550. Both references are from the handwritten notes of Tibor Antal Horváth, the first without further specification. MTA KK Ms. 5259/2.

28 Lajos Huszár, Pozsonyi forint – kassai forint, *Numizmatikai Köz-löny* 78–79 (1979–1980) 59–61.

Ottoman Hungary obliged to pay tax to the pasha of Buda, the thaler exchange rate was usually 160 denars.<sup>29</sup>

There were of course Polish small-denomination coins other than the *póltorak* that went into circulation in Hungary and Transylvania, and some coins issued in Transylvania were even modelled on Polish coins valued at multiples of the *grosz*. The most important of these, based on the Polish *trojak*, was the three-*garas dutka*, which was first minted in the principality in 1594.<sup>30</sup> Minting of the *póltorak* stopped in 1627, and because Hungarian denars were not being minted in sufficient quantity, this led to occasional shortages of small-denomination coins in some places. According to a document of 1638, “the *polturas* have very much dwindled, and the coins in circulation are mostly *sektas* (= *szóstak*, six-*garas* coins) and thalers”.<sup>31</sup> In the Principality of Transylvania, where few small-denomination coins<sup>32</sup> were usually produced, this problem was one of the considerations that led George I Rákóczi to issue Polish-model *polturas* between 1636 and 1638; in 1637, he also made a contract with Polish mints<sup>33</sup> for three- and six-*garas* coins.<sup>34</sup>

A recurring crisis in the Ottoman Empire, more fiscal than monetary, heightened the troubles in Ottoman Hungary.<sup>35</sup> Towards the end of the 1630s, the imperial small-denomination coin, the *akçe*, known in Hungary as *oszipora*, was drastically debased. According to a contemporary description of 1639, “the

29 János Buza, A tallér és az aranyforint árfolyama, valamint szerepe a pénzforgalomban Magyarország török uralom alatti területén a XVII. században, *Történelmi Szemle* 20 (1977) 73–108.

30 Lajos Huszár, *Az Erdélyi Fejedelemség pénzverése*, Budapest, 1995, 13, catalogue number 149.

31 Handwritten notes of Tibor Antal Horváth. MTA KK Ms 5260/17.

32 Huszár, *Az Erdélyi Fejedelemség pénzverése*, 11.

33 Rákóczi mentioned “the contract with the Polish mint” in an undated decree sent to János Ballingh, captain of Munkács. Handwritten notes of Tibor Antal Horváth. MTA KK Ms. 5260/11.

34 Huszár, *Az Erdélyi Fejedelemség pénzverése*, 124–125.

35 The critical review of the extensive literature on the question relieves the need for setting out the competing views. See: Pál Fodor, *Az oszmán pénzrendszer 16. századi válságáról*, *Aetas* (1999) Nr. 4, 27–40; Şevket Pamuk, *A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire*, Cambridge, 2000, 131–144.

*akçe* was similar to a copper *fillér*.<sup>36</sup> New small coins of higher quality were issued in 1640, but not in sufficient quantities. At the same time, some silver mines<sup>37</sup> were abandoned following the inflow of overseas silver, some mints were closed, and the capacity of other mints was not expanded. All of these combined to create an increasingly severe shortage of coins for everyday payments. The effects of the monetary troubles eventually became palpable even in the peripheral areas of the Ottoman Empire. The worrying news reached the other parts of the Kingdom of Hungary, where it took up the attention of senior officials, and it even gave the Vienna court pause for thought.<sup>38</sup> In autumn 1641, George I Rákóczi, prince of Transylvania, wrote to warn his son that “thirty wagons of coins have been sent to Buda” from the Porte.<sup>39</sup> The rumours may already have reached Buda, because several months earlier the Ottoman authorities demanded taxes to be paid principally in *polturas*. This would have caused few problems had the Polish coins and others minted on the Polish model been accepted at the usual local value, but that is not what happened. In 1641, the leaders of Pest County – then residing outside the occupied territory – called on the head of the market town of Nagykőrös, which paid tax to the Ottomans, to explain why he would only accept the *poltura* at the value of two denars.<sup>40</sup> The Nagykőrös authorities were clearly not acting arbitrarily in lowering the exchange rate, but at the order of the *beylerbeyi* of Buda. Some villages in Borsod County<sup>41</sup> complained in 1641 that the pasha

36 Walther Hinz, *Islamische Währungen des 11. bis 19. Jahrhunderts umgerechnet in Gold. Ein Beitrag zur islamischen Währungsgeschichte*, Wiesbaden, 1991, 48.

37 Halil Sahillioğlu, The Role of International Monetary and Metal Movements in Ottoman Monetary History 1300–1750, in J. F. Richards (ed.), *Precious Metals in the Later Medieval and Early Modern Worlds*, Durham, 1983, 287.

38 Günther Probst, *Österreichische Münz- und Geldgeschichte. Von den Anfängen bis 1918*, Wien–Köln–Graz, 1973, 456–457.

39 Written by the prince in his own hand in a letter to György Rákóczy the Younger. Gyulafehérvár, 17 October, 1641. See: Sándor Szilágyi (szerk.), *A két Rákóczy György fejedelem családi levelezése*, Budapest, 1875, 95.

40 Áron Szilády – Sándor Szilágyi (szerk.), *Okmánytár a török hódoltság történetéhez Magyarországon*, I. Pest, 1863 (Török-magyarkori Történelmi Emlékek I) 94.

41 G[ábor] K[azinczy], Adalékok a török magyarkori beltörténethez. Hivatalos nyomozások a török adó s hódítások körül Borsodban a XVII. század első felében, *Magyar Történelmi Tár* 1 (1859) Nr. 6, 151.

of Eger had counted the *poltura* at two rather than three denars, an effective tax increase of 33%. An example of a similarly severe exchange-rate imposition is recorded on a list of complaints<sup>42</sup> in autumn 1645: the *poltura* was demanded at an artificial rate in several places in Bihar and Zaránd counties, where – like the rest of the Partium region – it was widely used and was worth three denars. The monetary crisis in the Ottoman Empire caused the value of the *poltura* to be forcibly set at two and a half or only two denars, and the local residents complained. There was even a case where the *sipahi* of a village set the *poltura* at two and a half denars but the state tax collector approved it only at two denars.<sup>43</sup> The artificial *poltura* exchange rate often led to the devaluation of the *dutka* (*trojak*) – often referred to merely as *garas* – and the thaler. The residents of several villages in Transdanubia complained that the occupiers had devalued the thaler from 150 to 120 denars, and in the most extreme case, to 105 denars. At the same time, if someone could pay only in *polturas* or other small denominations and not in thalers, the exchange rate was set at 150 denars.<sup>44</sup>

While taxpayers were burdened by tax increases disguised as compulsory rates of exchange, some people tried to make profits through speculative money trading. At its simplest, this was done by taking ducats and thalers to Poland<sup>45</sup> and exchanging them for Polish small-denomination coins. This yielded some degree of profit, but then the coins – especially *póltoraks* – were taken to Ottoman-ruled lands where they could be exchanged again into ducats and thalers at a substantial profit. Profits could also be made through the trade of goods. The monetary trade probably took place in the north-south direction from Krakow to Belgrade via Kassa and Komárom, along various routes and in various stages, and may also have taken an east-west direction involving kreutzer-value coins within Hungary between Transdanubia and the county of Vas.<sup>46</sup> Trade within Ottoman Hungary, too, also clearly increased the demand

42 „1645. oct. 22. A hódoltsági falvak sérelmei.” EOE, XIV. Budapest, 1889, 447–474.

43 Mahmud ağa of Gyula accepted the *poltura* only as “two and a half” coins in (Mező)Baj (Boiu, Romania), but “the *çavus* only takes the *pótura* as two coins”. EOE, XIV. 473.

44 Károly Ráth, A Győr vármegyei hódoltságtól. Győr vármegyének 1642. évben összeírt jegyzőkönyve a török ellen, *Magyar Történelmi Tár* 7 (1860) 108 (the village of Pázmánd).

45 Lajos Merényi, Eszterházy Pál újbáti kapitány levelei a nádorhoz 1641–1644, *Történelmi Tár* 8 (1907) 586.

46 János Buza, Tiroli tíz krajcárosok hódoltsági sikere Batthyány I. Ádám idején, in Bence

for *póltoraks*. Wine by the barrel, always a popular commodity, usually had to be bought with thalers, but in the new situation, *póltoraks* were also accepted.<sup>47</sup> The Jewish merchants of Pest and Buda, who could obtain any kind of money, extended interest-bearing loans in *polturas* in the first half of the 1640s.<sup>48</sup>

The serious monetary disorders were eventually resolved, but *poltura* exchange rates remained uneven and payment with *polturas* could still involve a profit or a loss. Another complaint about conversion rates is dated to 1654, when the nobles of the county of Gömör petitioned the pasha of Eger to have his subordinates accept the *poltura* at three denars,<sup>49</sup> as was done in Upper Hungary. There was recognition on the Ottoman side that the Gömör nobles' complaint was valid and even that it was not merely a local grievance, but to achieve redress at country level would have required the agreement of the *vezir* pasha of Buda and the cooperation of Buda, Esztergom, Kanizsa and other castles, and so the three-denar rate for the *poltura* was accepted only within the county. The action by the Gömör nobility stemmed partly from an event that had importance for monetary affairs in many respects. This was the national diet of 1659, where the nobles – in Act 13<sup>50</sup> – asked the king to intervene so that “the Turks neighbouring [the Habsburg-ruled] parts of the country accept from the impoverished taxpayers *poltura* coins at the value customary in those parts.”

Arbitrary action by the *sipahis* was not the only factor behind the devaluation of Polish small-denomination coins in the 1660s. After 1658, the proportion

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Biró – Péter Miski – Renáta Törtei (szerk.), „A magyar múltat kutatni, írni és láttatni ez által szolgálni a hazát” Tiszteltgő kötet J. Újváry Zsuzsanna 25. Pázmányos oktatási éve előtt, Budapest–Piliscsaba, 2020, 241–250.

47 In 1646, the council of the market town Nagykőrös purchased 16 barrels of wine from a woman of Kiskunhalas, for 468 forints, and paid one third of price (156 forint) in *polturas*. Budapest, Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Pest Megyei Levéltára, Nagykőrös város számadáskönyve (= MNL PML Nagykőrös szk.) 1646, 234.

48 The market town of Nagykőrös borrowed 141 forints-worth of *polturas* from “Oroszlán (= Arslán?) the Jew” at monthly interest of three per cent. MNL PML Nagykőrös szk. 1640. 175.

49 Jozef Blaškovič, Türkische historische Urkunden aus Gemer, *Asian and African Studies* 8 (1972) 83–84.

50 Dezső Márkus et al. (szerk.), *Corpus Juris Hungarici. 1657–1740. évi törvénycikkek*, Budapest, 1900, 144–145.

of precious metal in Polish *grosz*-related coins was reduced by approximately one third: the new *półtorak* contained thirty-two per cent less silver<sup>51</sup> than those minted between 1623 and 1627. The monetary reform<sup>52</sup> in the Holy Roman Empire ordered by Leopold I in 1659 also brought changes for the worse: all coins were adjusted to the silver in the new, debased small denominations – the six- and fifteen-kreutzers – and the issue of thalers was restricted. The severe consequences of these measures showed up only a few years later. We should also mention that the Ottoman Empire doubled the tribute payable by the Principality of Transylvania in 1658 and imposed crippling war reparations.<sup>53</sup>

While *polturas* and their multiples circulated in substantial quantities in all three parts of the Kingdom of Hungary, along with kreutzer coins and to a lesser extent denars, “good money” – thalers and ducats – was increasingly demanded for payment of tax. In the mid-1660s, the number of denars attributed to the *poltura* became a central question, as did the number of denars or *polturas* demanded from taxpayers who could not pay in “good money”. A question asked during a witness interrogation procedure in the county of Pest<sup>54</sup> in 1668 provides good evidence of this: “Do you know... whether coins other than gold and thalers are not being accepted...?” There were also inquiries in Gömör concerning the rate of exchange for *polturas*:<sup>55</sup> “Do you know whether they now want to take the *poltura* at only two and a half denars?” More than

51 Mikołajczyk, *Einführung*, 64, 69, 78.

52 Eduard Holzmair, Geld und Münze unter Kaiser Leopold I., *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 60 (1952) 238–250.

53 In retaliation, the Sublime Porte radically increased its demand for tribute to 40,000 ducats or 80,000 thalers, plus war reparations of 500,000 thalers. János Buza, The History of the Transylvanian Thaler in European Perspective, in Csaba Tóth (ed.), *The Silver of Fairyland. A Transylvanian Thaler Collection in the Magyar Nemzeti Bank*, Budapest, 2017, 123; Idem, Ottoman Tributes and Circulation of Money in the Principality of Transylvania, 1658–1687, in Pál Fodor – Nándor E. Kovács – Benedek Péri (ed.), *Şerefe. Studies in Honour of Prof. Géza Dávid on his Seventieth Birthday*, Budapest, 2019, 402.

54 István Purjesz, A török hódoltság Pest megyében a XVII. század második felében, *Levéltári Közlemények* 28 (1958) 185.

55 “Inquisitio contra Turcas excedentes sine anno.” Banská Bystrica, Štátny oblastný archív v Banskej Bystrici PZ 173; János Buza, Török kori pénzürtékviszonyok egy Gömör megyei tanúvallatás tükrében, *Numizmatikai Közlöny* 84–85 (1985–1986) 61.



one fifth of Gömör villages answered in the affirmative to the question, and the residents of Rozložsnya (later Hámosfalva, Rozložna, Slovakia) answered that it was even worse, the *poltura* being accepted only at the rate of two denars.<sup>56</sup> The village of Felsőfüge (later Gömörfüge, Figa, Slovakia) provides a more nuanced example, one of its Turkish *sipahis* accepting the *poltura* at two and a half denars and the other at three.<sup>57</sup> The residents of only five settlements in the county reported the Hungarian rate of three denars for the *poltura*. Since most of the villages did not answer, there is a high level of uncertainty, but the source is unlikely to have covered every case of abuse. We should also bear in mind that the respondents in the Gömör villages mentioned the *poltura* rate for the thaler without being asked about it. In contrast with the 60-*poltura* rate typical in Upper Hungary, there are examples of rates of 66, 70, 75 and 80 *polturas* to the thaler, implying a hidden tax rise<sup>58</sup> of between 10 and 33%.

Conversion of small denominations, including the Polish coins, into “good money”, which meant thalers and ducats, became particularly burdensome in the Principality of Transylvania in the 1660s. The monetary troubles of the Ottoman Empire in the 1640s took effect in counties taxed directly by the conquerors, notably in the Partium region, but monetary conditions in the areas of the principality not under Ottoman rule remained fairly stable. The tax increase of 1658 combined with payment of war reparations and the ransom for those in Tatar captivity put an oppressive burden on the Transylvanian population. Thalers were highly prized, partly because of reduced issue of silver coins in favour of debased small denominations in the Habsburg Empire and the Kingdom of Poland. The two eastern giants – the Ottoman Empire and tsarist Russia – did not yet mint thalers, which were in great need for international trade and were also hoarded as treasure or even used as raw material for small denominations. Something close to thaler fever broke out in the Ottoman Empire in the 1660s. In Transylvania, there was obligatory conversion of various small denominations – including *polturas* – into good money “to meet the needs of the country,” as it was put at the time, and attempts were made to determine the number of thalers to be served by each

56 Buza, *Török kori*, 61.

57 Buza, *Török kori*, 62.

58 Buza, *Török kori*, 63. Cf. Klára Hegyi, *A Füleki szandzsák*, Budapest, 2019, 150.

administrative region.<sup>59</sup> Some of the burden of conversion was also placed on the merchants.

A new competitor to *polturas* and the other familiar small-denomination coins arrived from a more distant land in the 1660s. In summer 1663, soldiers in the Ottoman army making a new attack on Vienna were paid in French coins, and the well-made, high-silver-content French “five-garas” (*cinq sous* or *timon*) soon became a favourite means of payment<sup>60</sup> in Ottoman Hungary. The French coins also trickled into Transylvania via the Romanian principalities. After a brief period of popularity, however, they found their way back into the Ottoman Empire and the Mediterranean region.<sup>61</sup>

We have already seen the occurrence of temporary, local shortages of *polturas*. The causes, in addition to the suspension of *poltura* issues in 1627 and the heavy taxation, included accumulation and withholding. Probate inventories of merchants show the wealthiest of them to have hoarded sacks of *polturas* at home. In the cash held by the Kassa merchant Mihály Szegedi in 1632, 93% of the small denomination coins classed as “good” were *polturas*,<sup>62</sup> which means that, given a rate of three denars, he must have had 429,085 of them! Not surprisingly, his *polturas* were weighed rather than counted. Similarly, for the 1643 accounts of the gold and silver holdings in the city of Kassa, the *dutkas* were counted, but the amount in *polturas* was entered in pounds weight.<sup>63</sup>

59 For example, in 1666, Debrecen was obliged to pay 10,000 thalers under the heading of conversion at the start of the year and another 6,000 thalers in autumn. This amounted to at least the equivalent of 960,000 *polturas*, but there were no doubt other coins involved in the conversion. Buza, *The History of the Transilvanian Thaler*, 122.

60 “The Turk will not hear of the *poltura* or the five-denar, every merchant wants this coin” reported a customs official in January, 1664. Tibor Antal Horváth, *Régi magyar pénznevek, Numizmatikai Közlöny* 52–53 (1953–1954) 20.

61 János Buza, *Les monnaies françaises ou du système français dans la circulation monétaire en Hongrie au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, Revue numismatique* 6 (1976) Nr. 18, 119–135.

62 Košice, *Archív mesta Košice, Archivum secretum, Fasciculus S–Szegedi*, Nr. 60. (8 Dec, 1632). As regard to Mihály Szegedi and his bequeath, see: Zsuzsanna J. Újváry, *Egy kereskedő család metamorfózisa (A mezőszegedi Szegedi család)*, in Vera Zimányi (szerk.), *Óra, szablya, nyoszolya. Életmód és anyagi kultúra Magyarországon a 17–18. században*, Budapest, 1994, 33–85, especially 37. As regard to the value of the coins, see: Buza, *Kipper-pénzek*, 881–910.

63 Béla Pettkó, *Kassa város kincstára 1643–1644-ben. (Registratio pecuniarum, aurearum item et argentearum in archivo repertarum)*, *Történelmi Tár* 3 (1883) Nr. 6, 176–180.

Princely accounts also give an indication of the circulation of *polturas* and coins valued in *polturas* in the 1630s and 1640s. In George I Rákóczi's house in Borsi (Borša, Slovakia), 64% of the 1,412 forints and 81 denars held there consisted of *polturas*.<sup>64</sup> In the prince's estate of Makovica, near the Polish border, there were many copper schillings<sup>65</sup> as well as "*poltura* coins". A distinction between "old" and "new" *polturas* was made in Nagykörs, which lay some distance to the south and paid tax to the Ottoman authorities of Buda.<sup>66</sup> The exchange rates were three for "old" and two and a half denars for "new" *polturas*, in this case probably determined not arbitrarily by the conquerors but from the age of the coins, or more properly the difference in precious metal content. It was partly due to such differences in the *poltura* exchange rate that payment in these coins frequently resulted in losses or – somewhat more rarely – profits;<sup>67</sup> accordingly, the "*poltura* loss" was almost an accounting term.

If we include "*poltura* coins" (*polturapénz*) and the *polturás garas* as actual *polturas*, then we must conclude that the number in circulation must have been much higher than the unknown quantity of *póltoraks*. The most likely endpoint for the *polturapénz* is 1663, when the minting of the inflationary 30-grosz Polish coin,<sup>68</sup> the *złotówka*,<sup>69</sup> began. Previously, "*poltura* coins" included one-, one-and-a-half-, three- and six-grosz coins (*grosz*, *póltorak*, *trojak* and *szóstak*). This means that higher-value "*poltura* coins" were other Polish coins valued in *póltoraks*.<sup>70</sup> The *dukka*, a coin well known in Hungary and widely used in

64 László Makkai, *I. Rákóczi György birtokainak gazdasági iratai (1631–1648)*, Budapest, 1954, 313.

65 "Anno 1641 die 28 Augusti az warben arany, taller es poltura penz vagyon f.1145, sellingh vagyon f. no. 46." Makkai, *I. Rákóczi György*, 126.

66 *Polturas* valued at two and a half denars constituted the vast majority – 92.5% – of these coins. MNL PML Nagykörs szk. 1645. 158.

67 János Buza, *Magyarországi és erdélyi pénzürtékek a 16–17. században. Közép-európai kitekintéssel*, Budapest, 2021, 238.

68 "XXX – GRO(ssi) – POL(onicales)" Ignacy Zagórski, *Monety Dawnej Polski*, Warszawa, 1845 [Reedycja, Warszawa, 1977] 60. See also: Emeric Hutten-Czapski, *Catalogue de la collection des médailles et monnaies polonaises*, I, St. Petersburg – Cracovie, 1871, 302–303.

69 Andrzej Mikołajczyk, *Obieg pieniężny w Polsce środkowej w wiekach od XVI do XVIII*, Łódź, 1980, 16.

70 In the princely house of Borsi, there were "*poltura* coins" worth 904 forints and 89 denars in 1638, an amount that may be divided by three, the number of denars to the *poltura*, i.e.

Transylvania, where coins by that name were also issued locally, was sometimes known colloquially and even in written form as the “double *poltura*”.<sup>71</sup> In the cash account of the merchant guild of Rimaszombat (Rimavská Sobota, Slovakia), there were “Polish four-*polturas*” worth 790 forints in 1675, and “little *polturas*” worth 250 forints. The “four-*polturas*” were obviously Polish six-grosz coins and “little *polturas*” were actual *póltoraks*.<sup>72</sup> A coin simply called the “four-*poltura*” (i.e. not “Polish”) was mentioned in Kecskemét in 1684.<sup>73</sup> The prices published by the capital of Ung County in 1666 started with the rates for coins: the *poltura* was to be accepted at three denars, the *sesták* [= *szóstak*] at four *polturas* and the *dutka* [= *trojak*] at two *polturas*.<sup>74</sup> As context, it should be noted that similar decrees setting the value of coins had been issued in Austrian and Bohemian lands since 1659,<sup>75</sup> and the bilingual (Czech and German) decree<sup>76</sup> of spring 1666 bears an engraving of the *złotówka*, the Polish 30-grosz coin. Its Polish name was not adopted, and it was mentioned as the *Pollnisch Ort* or *Polsky Ort*.<sup>77</sup> It reached Transylvania quite quickly, being mentioned among small-denomination coins as the “new *ort*” at the Diet of Nagysink<sup>78</sup> (Cincu, Romania) in early 1664.<sup>79</sup> As a new coin, it did not meet

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90,489:3 = 30,163. Although equivalent to more than 30,000 *polturas*, the money must have included three- and six-grosz Polish coins.

71 “Double *polturas* paid, f. 53 d. 40.” MNL PML Nagykőrös szk. 1645. 245/300. This means 1,068 *dutkas* at the rate of five denars or 890 at six denars.

72 Rimavská Sobota, Štátny okresný archív v Rimavskej Sobote, cehalia 1975, without page numbers.

73 Tibor Iványosi-Szabó, Pénzforgalom Kecskeméten 1662–1711 között, *Századok* 114 (1980) 92.

74 Lajos Merényi, Nemes Ungh vármegye limitációja az eladandó s veendő marhákról in Anno 1666, *Történelmi Tár* 3 (1894) Nr. 17, 554.

75 “Polturackh oder Bromberger”, “einfacher polnischer Dutich”, “doppelter polnischer Dutich”. Wien, Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv, Patente 1652–1653. N. 55. Wien, 31 March, 1659.

76 Wien, den 3 Mai, 1666. Prague, Štátny ústředny archiv v Praze, PT 189.

77 Buza, Pénzértékek, 249.

78 The Diet of Nagysink 31 January, 1664 – 24 February, 1664. János Bethlen, *Erdély története 1629–1673*, transl. by Judit P. Vásárhelyi, notes by József Jankovics, Budapest, 1993, 201. From monetary history perspective, see: János Buza, Az Erdélyi Fejedelemség pénzértékei és a nagysinki országgyűlés, *Erdélyi Múzeum* 77 (2016) 56–67.

79 “The Emperor’s *garas*, the *sustáks* newly minted [in] Poland, together with those called *new orts* and *Leopoldrinuses* will, by our action in accordance with Your Majesty’s gracious resolu-

with success in the principality, and some urged the confiscation of the four- and ten-*poltura* Polish coins.<sup>80</sup> This is quite surprising, because no ten-*poltura* Polish coin was minted and the Transylvanian estates were quite familiar with Polish coins. The “ten-*poltura*” was in all probability the *złotówka*, which had similar metrics to a fifteen-kreutzer coin called the *Leopoldrinus*,<sup>81</sup> after its issuer, Leopold I. Since the *poltura* was very common in Hungary, the fifteen-kreutzer was in some places called the “ten-*poltura garas*”, and in areas under Ottoman rule usually the “old *garas*”. In Upper Hungary, the *złotówka*, which was issued in large quantities,<sup>82</sup> was known as *Tinfi*, *Timfi* or *Timffi*<sup>83</sup> after the name of Andreas Tympf.<sup>84</sup> It was never popular in commerce. The prevalence of Polish coins in Upper Hungary caused the *Timphos* to be classed as a “*poltura* coin”: officials of the mining town of Körmöc (Kremnica, Slovakia) considered that since few small-denomination coins were minted in the town, “only *polturas* were included in payments in Besztercebánya (Banská Bystrica, Slovakia), namely one-, two-, four- and twelve-fold *polturas*.”<sup>85</sup> The term “twelve-fold *poltura*” also occurred on the Great Plain, under Ottoman rule, and in Kecskemét it was noted in 1682 that “the twelve-*poltura* is counted as ten *polturas*.”<sup>86</sup> Since neither a ten- nor a twelve-*póltorak* was minted in the Kingdom of Poland, we must consider the real value of the coin when attempting to identify it. The “*złotówka/tymf*” was in fact worth only eighteen rather than thirty *grosz*, while the *póltorak* was equivalent to one and a half

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tion, be taken according to their values from every estate in the Country, sub poena ducentorum florenorum.” EOE, XIII., Budapest, 1888, 282.

80 From the Rákóczi family archive. Handwritten notes of Tibor Antal Horváth.

81 “15 Kreuzer. Diese Münzsorte, das Herzstück des Einrichtungswerks von 1559 und Symbol der aus ihrer Kreation hervorgegangenen Irrungen” Eduard Holzmair, *Der Umfang der österreichischen Münzprägung in den Jahren 1659–1680*, *Numismatische Zeitschrift* 89 (1974) 54.

82 Gumowski, *Handbuch*, 60.

83 Buza, *Pénzértékek*, 248–249.

84 Max Kirmis, *Handbuch der polnischen Münzkunde*, Posen, 1892, 147–148.

85 Domokos Kosáry (szerk.), Antal Péch, *Alsó-Magyarország bányamívelésének története, 1650–1750*, III/2, Budapest, 1967, 800.

86 Iványosi-Szabó, *Pénzforgalom*, 91–92.

*grosz*, which gives us the answer:  $18:1.5 = 12$ , and so the popular name “twelve-*poltura*” was indeed the *złotówka/tymf*.<sup>87</sup>

Fifteen-*krajcár* coins popularly known as “ten-*polturas*” could be Austrian, German, Hungarian, Silesian, etc. but “twelve-*polturas*” were probably always Polish. The same cannot be said of the large *krajcár*-based coins known as the “forty-*poltura*” (forty-*poltura* large *garas*) and the “twenty-*poltura*” (twenty-*poltura* large *garas*).<sup>88</sup> These came from the Holy Roman Empire, where they were minted after 1667 with respective face values of two thirds and one third of a thaler.<sup>89</sup> In the east of the country they were valued in the familiar *polturas* rather than *krajcárs*.

The “*poltura* coins” we have discussed may be listed in ascending order of value as *poltura* (= *póltorak*), “two-*poltura*” (= *trojak, dutka*), “four-*poltura*” (= *szóstak, suszták, sekták*), “ten-*poltura*” (= *Fünftehnkreutzer*, fifteen-*krajcár*, old *garas*), “twelve-*poltura*” (= *złotówka, tymf*, new *ort*), “twenty-*poltura*” (twenty-*poltura* large *garas*) [= *Dritteltaler*] and “forty-*poltura*” (forty-*poltura* large *garas*) [= *Zweidritteltaler*, German *zlot*] coins.

The three-*krajcár* and 1/24 thaler coins that appeared in the 1610s and became discredited in the first half of the 1620s were known as *polturas* in the Kingdom of Hungary and the Principality of Transylvania. Polish *póltoraks*, of value one-and-a-half *grosz*, were first minted in 1614 and subsequently issued in large quantities. They were known in Hungary and Transylvania as “bitkowsky *polturas*” after the city of Bydgoszcz, and were initially treated with suspicion. Eventually, however, they were fully accepted in public circulation, as were other *polturas* minted on the Polish model.

In many parts of Hungary, the *poltura*, in addition to a physical means of payment, became an accounting unit in place of the “forint”, an amount of money equivalent to 100 denars. The “*polturás garas*” coins were either multiples

87 This is also implied by the German name of the *złotówka* – *Achtzehngröschler*. Schrötter, *Wörterbuch*, 6–7.

88 “De cursu monetae caesariae ...” 1679. Tóth–Barsi, *Borsod Vármegye statútumai*, 35.

89 Lajos Huszár, *Deutsche Gulden in Ungarn im 17. Jahrhundert*, in Tony Hackens – Raymond Weiler (ed.), *Actes du 9ème Congrès International de Numismatique*. Berne, septembre 1979, Louvain-la-Neuve – Luxembourg, 1982, 975–980. As a recent publication on this issue, see the chapter entitled “A zlot – slot – silbergulden”. In: Buza, *Magyarországi és erdélyi pénz-értékek*, 193–204.

of the *poltura* or coins that were valued in *polturas* by the authorities and accepted by the public.

Further research into *polturas* is needed, and the study of coin finds could provide a more nuanced and complete picture.<sup>90</sup> For now, we must treat the word *poltura* with caution wherever we find it in written sources: for example, the “new old *poltura*”<sup>91</sup> was “new” only in the early 1620s, and the qualifier “old” refers to age rather than size. It was not a *póltorak* or any kind of Polish coin, but one of the multiples of the kipper kreutzers.<sup>92</sup>

90 Some examples: István Gedai, *Lengyel pénzek Magyarországon a XVI–XVII. században*, in *A Miskolci Herman Ottó Múzeum Évkönyve, XXII–XXIII*. Miskolc, 1985, 37–50; Ferenc Pap – Judit Winkler, *Erdélyi és külföldi pénzek Erdélyben*, in Lajos Huszár – Ferenc Pap – Judit Winkler, *Erdélyi éremművészet a 16–18. században*, București, 1996, 123–130.

91 György Kerekes, *Bethlen Gábor fejedelem Kassán 1619–1629*, Kassa, 1943, 302.

92 János Buza, *Schreckenberger – „öreg poltura” (1621) – a népi pénznevek történetéhez*, in Csaba Tóth (szerk.), *Napról napra virágzó szorgalommal. Tanulmányok Gedai István 90. születésnapjára*, Budapest, 2024 (*Bibliotheca Humanitatis Historica* 22) 115–123.





Pál Fodor is renowned in his own country and internationally as a scholar of Ottoman history. His works are essential reading for anyone aiming to understand the empire of the “Turks” and how it developed at every stage. His studies on the ideology of the holy war, the self-definition of the Ottoman elite, stability and change in the history of the sultanate, and the empire’s late-sixteenth-century financial crisis and the attempts to resolve it all display the depth of his erudition and the great breadth of his sources. He has actively participated in investigations to find the burial place of Süleyman I near Szigetvár and to locate and reconstruct the events of the Battle of Mohács in 1526. His friends and colleagues have produced this *Festschrift* on the occasion of his 70th birthday to express their personal gratitude and their great respect for his activity as a scholar and as an academic leader.

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