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**Paper proposal for the Central European History Convention, July 17th-19th 2025,
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Paper title:

"So Says Muskat, Seldman's Widow From Marburg." Tracing the Career of a Jewish Businesswoman Under the Rule of Friedrich III

Abstract:

Until quite recently, Jewish women were all but invisible in medieval studies. A case in point is the fifteenth-century Jewish businesswoman Muskat Seldmanin from Marburg/Maribor: she was prominent enough for the future Emperor Friedrich III to include her in his notebook as one of his most important Jewish taxpayers, yet her true identity remained unrecognized for a long time because she was mistaken for a man in Alphons Lhotsky's edition of the notebook. However, the sources documenting her activities are remarkably rich, even if many of them have received little attention so far; they make it possible to trace the course of her career as well as her family and business networks over several decades.

Equipped with special ducal protection, Muskat was able to develop extensive activities as a creditor, partly in cooperation with her numerous children. Her reputation is reflected in the fact that outside Marburg/Maribor, where her late husband had also been a successful moneylender, her sons were referred to by their mother's name rather than the usual patronymic. Newly discovered source material now also makes it possible to identify Muskat with the Jewish 'matriarch' who, thanks to the pioneering research of Martha Keil, is known from the *Liber Judeorum* of Wiener Neustadt: Muskat had moved to Wiener Neustadt around the middle of the fifteenth century and remained so prominent there that some of her grandchildren were still identified with her name in Christian sources.

Using Muskat's career as an example, this paper seeks to analyse the opportunities and constraints – defined by Friedrich III's often shifting policies towards his Jewish subjects – of female Jewish business activity in late medieval Styria in its social, economic and political context.

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Paper Title: Private Banking Activities of Female Religious Organisations in the Later Middle Ages

Abstract: My paper will introduce the financial activities of female religious institutions in the later Middle Ages, with a focus on their role as large-scale lenders in the private credit markets of Central Europe. Drawing on a novel dataset of hand-collected and translated private annuity contracts from medieval manuscripts (1350–1500), the study explores why convents, rather than male-only religious institutions, emerged as prominent financial actors during this period. It further examines how convents contributed to the recovery and growth of urban economies following the Black Death, subsequent plague epidemics, and natural disasters of the fourteenth century, through their provision of credit.

Title: “Subtle and entrenched ways”: Networks of public debt and private credit in Transylvania, 1750 – 1800

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In 1750, the first wide-ranging fiscal census conducted in the Habsburg province of Transylvania, uncovered a problematic state of affairs: the Transylvanian Saxon estate had steadily accumulated over the course of the previous decades a staggering amount of public debt towards the Habsburg state. By the time Joseph II first visited the province in 1773, voices from the Habsburg administration identified the cause of this ever-growing indebtedness in “self-interested office-holding” (*eigennützige Amtirung der Officianten*). Complaints during the 1770s mentioned the Saxon estate’s “subtle ways of [...] making individuals indebted to itself, a procedure that seemed to have been entrenched a long time ago.”¹ In fact, financing a significant share of the public debts incurred by the nation was the capital advanced by no one other than its political and economic elites, leading to a paradoxical situation. Paralleling this development, urban Transylvanian Saxon society had become strongly indebted itself, as evidenced by probate records: half of those who passed away in the 1790s owed more than half of their wealth to creditors. The insidiousness of debt, mirrored by the strength of credit networks linking province and empire, and fueling the fiscal-military state, suggests that a parallel examination of these two issues might shed light on how private interests and state building intersected in nefarious, if not outright corrupt ways, during the second half of the eighteenth century. Thus, based on a variety of archival material – the 1750 census, probate records, private correspondence, memoirs - the present paper surveys the intertwined networks of public debt and private credit in Transylvania, focusing on those nodes who readily provided capital in both segments, their affiliations, ties to the plurality of administrations present in the province, and what “benefits” they might have derived from reaching central positions in the network.

¹ Ileana Bozac and Teodor Pavel, *Die Reise Kaiser Josephs II. durch Siebenbürgen im Jahre 1773*, vol. I, 2nd ed. (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Academiei, 2007), p. 160-161, 222.