

# Overcoming Dissent: Coercive and Persuasive Strategies that Won the Greek Orthodox Back to Church Union in Transylvania Around 1750

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**Abstract:** The Greek Catholic (Uniate) Church was a late addition to the confessional landscape in Transylvania. It was established at the end of the seventeenth century, as the principality came under the rule of the Habsburgs, in a quest for a wide Catholic majority that would enable the dynasty to claim political dominance. A generation later, calls for a return to the earlier religious tradition became overwhelming among the Greek-rite faithful. Starting with 1744, the opposition to Catholicism took radical and often violent forms. For the next five or six years, the situation seemed out of control, particularly in the regions of southern Transylvania. And yet, by the end of 1750, calm was reinstated almost universally. My article inquires into the causes of this surprising transformation, which historians have usually ascribed to either the repression of dissent by state authorities or to a blatant misinformation in the reports by the church leadership. I argue that the return to an irenic atmosphere was indeed real, albeit temporary, and never entirely attributable to the crackdown on the opposition. The sources speak time and again about the hardships endured by those who refused to acknowledge Catholicism, but their voice gives access to just one side of the story. The strategy was more complex, and it involved repeated missionary journeys to the communities which had ousted their priests before any significant appeasement could be achieved. Often alluded to, the actual unfolding of such visits was seldom recorded. The testimony concerning the failed reconversion to church union of the monks and priests in Sâmbăta de Sus (Felsőszombatfalva/Ober-Mühlendorf) provides one of the rare insights into how this happened. Elsewhere, the success

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can be measured in the countless declarations by village elders who proclaimed their return to the Greek Catholic Church together with those whom they represented. These long-neglected archival materials provide the essential context for understanding the religious upheavals of the subsequent decade.

**Keywords:** confessional conflict, repression, village communities, legal bonds, missionary preaching.

**Rezumat:** Biserica Greco-Catolică (Unită) a constituit o apariție târzie în peisajul confesional ardelean. Formată la sfârșitul secolului al XVII-lea, când Transilvania a intrat sub dominația Habsburgilor, ea a răspuns încercării de a coagula o majoritate catolică largă, care să permită dinastiei să preia controlul politic asupra principatului. O generație mai târziu, apelurile pentru revenirea la tradiția religioasă anterioară au devenit dominante în rândul credincioșilor de rit grec. Începând din 1744, opoziția față de catolicism a căpătat forme radicale și, adesea, violente. Pentru următorii cinci sau șase ani, situația a părut scăpată de sub control, mai cu seamă în regiunile sudice ale Transilvaniei. Cu toate acestea, până spre finalul anului 1750, calmul a fost reinstalat aproape pretutindeni. Studiul meu investighează cauzele acestei transformări surprinzătoare, pe care istoricii au atribuit-o, în general, fie reprimării de către autoritățile statului a dezacordului, fie dezinformării flagrante conținută de rapoartele conducătorilor ecleziastici. Argumentez în favoarea considerării ca autentică a revenirii la o atmosferă irenică, chiar dacă temporară, care nu poate fi atribuită exclusiv represiunii împotriva opoziției. Sursele vorbesc în mod constant despre suferințele îndurate de cei care au refuzat să recunoască apartenența la catolicism, dar vocea lor ilustrează numai o latură a realității. Strategia folosită a fost mai complexă și a implicat vizite misionare repetate în comunitățile care își alungaseră preoții, înainte de a se înregistra orice atenuare a tensiunilor. Adesea menționate, desfășurarea unor asemenea vizite a fost rareori reținută de documente. Mărturiile care privesc eșecul reconvertirii la unire a călugărilor și preoților din Sâmbăta de Sus (Felsőszombatfalva/Ober-Mühlendorf) oferă, de aceea, o perspectivă excepțională asupra modului în care se derulau acestea. În alte locuri, succesul poate fi măsurat prin intermediul nenumăratelor declarații date de bătrânii satelor care și-au anunțat revenirea în cadrele Bisericii Greco-Catolice, împreună cu cei pe care îi reprezentau. Aceste materiale de arhivă, multă vreme ignorate, furnizează contextul necesar pentru înțelegerea tulburărilor religioase din deceniul care a urmat.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** conflict confesional, represiune, comunități sătești, scrisori de îndatorire, predicăție misionară.

Part of the larger wave of Catholic reconquest in East-Central Europe, the establishment of the Greek Catholic (Uniate) Church in Transylvania was the direct result of the Habsburgs taking possession of the principality at the end of the seventeenth century. In a region long marked by religious pluralism since the Reformation, this move aimed to generate a Catholic majority for political purposes.<sup>1</sup> The new church drew its membership from former Orthodox believers, who had historically lacked privileged status and saw union with Rome as a path to greater social inclusion. Adopting Greek-rite Catholicism was largely a formal act, with little immediate impact on doctrine or religious practices for the space of a generation.<sup>2</sup> However, underlying tensions in the rural communities sparked into open conflict in 1744, as the Serb Orthodox patriarch's propaganda came into play. Over the following years, scattered acts of resistance coalesced into a widespread protest movement that took over the southern half of Transylvania, demanding the dissolution of church union and the full restoration of a Greek Orthodox diocese.<sup>3</sup>

Violence against legitimate parish priests, who were hurriedly replaced by clerics ordained outside Transylvania, went hand in hand with political

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<sup>1</sup> Mathias Bernath, *Habsburg und die Anfänge der Rumänischen Nationsbildung* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 49–62.

<sup>2</sup> Ovidiu Ghitta, "The Greek-Catholic Church from Transylvania and the Traditional Popular Religiosity," *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai. Historia*, 58, Special Issue (2013), 230–244; Radu Nedici, *Formarea identităţii confesionale greco-catolice în Transilvania veacului al XVIII-lea: Biserică şi comunitate* (Bucharest: Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti, 2013), 155–185.

<sup>3</sup> Augustin Bunea, *Din istoria românilor. Episcopul Ioan Inocenţiu Klein (1728–1751)* (Blaj: Tipografia Seminarului Archiepiscopalian Greco-Catolic, 1900), 187–204, 248–256; Augustin Bunea, *Episcopii Petru Paul Aron şi Dionisiu Novacovici sau Istoria Românilor Transilvăneni de la 1751 până la 1764* (Blaj: Tipografia Seminarului Archiepiscopalian, 1902), 60–237; Silviu Dragomir, *Istoria desrobirei religioase a românilor din Ardeal în secolul XVIII*, 2 vols (Sibiu: Editura şi tiparul Tipografiei Arhidiecezane, 1920–1930); Zenovie Pâclişanu, "Istoria Bisericii Române Unite", part 1, *Perspective*, 17 (1994–1995), 318–322, 345–357; Gheorghe Gorun, *Reformismul austriac şi violenţele sociale din Europa Centrală: 1750–1800* (Oradea: Muzeul Ţării Crişurilor, 1998), 165–179; Ovidiu Ghitta, *Naşterea unei Biserici. Biserica greco-catolică din Sătmăr în primul ei secol de existenţă (1667–1761)* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2001), 302–338; Greta-Monica Miron, "Acţiune ortodoxă – acţiune catolică. Efectele mişcării lui Visarion Sarai în Hunedoara, Haţeg, Zarand şi Alba," *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai, Historia*, 50, 2 (2005), 1–36; Greta-Monica Miron, *Biserica greco-catolică din comitatul Cluj în secolul al XVIII-lea* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2007), 73–142; Greta-Monica Miron, *Viaţă parohială şi diversitate confesională în Transilvania secolului al XVIII-lea. Studiu de caz: uniţi şi ortodocşi din comitatul Dăbâca* (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2015), 85–118.

expressions of dissent. The years 1748–1752 were characterized by an intense petitionary activity, with Orthodox delegates reaching as far as Sremski Karlovci, Vienna, and Moscow to present their grievances and plead their cause.<sup>4</sup> To the alarm of Habsburg authorities, Empress Elizabeth Petrovna backed the movement and questioned its western ally on the means used to impose Catholic conformity.<sup>5</sup> Yet, the government in Vienna decided to fend off any Russian claims and continued to deny concessions to the Transylvanian Orthodox.<sup>6</sup> Its attitude was encouraged by reports coming from the province during the early 1750s, which asserted that calm had been reinstated and that the Greek Catholic Church had recovered most of its earlier positions. This dominant optimistic mood is epitomized in the account submitted to Count Königsegg-Erps in May 1752 by the newly promoted bishop in Transylvania, Petru Aron.<sup>7</sup> Throughout the decade, the Habsburgs dismissed evidence on endemic dissent, maintaining that only a handful of Orthodox communities were still active. Consequently, they neither acknowledged nor responded to the demands the Orthodox community continued to put forth. The intransigence was ultimately responsible for triggering the second wave of violent uprising

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<sup>4</sup> Radu Nedici, “Religious Violence, Political Dialogue, and the Public: The Orthodox Riots in Eighteenth-Century Transylvania,” in *Economy and Society in Central and Eastern Europe: Territory, Population, Consumption*, eds. Daniel Dumitran, Valer Moga (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2013), 87–100; Radu Nedici, “Rethinking Religious Dissent in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Transylvania: Political Practices and the Plebeian Public Sphere,” *Analele Universității București. Istorie*, 53, 1 (2014), 101–124.

<sup>5</sup> Sergey Mikhaylovich Solovyev, *Istoriya Rossii s drevneyshikh vremen*, vol. 23: *Istoriya Rossii v tsarstvovanie imperatritsy Elisavety Petrovny* (Saint Petersburg: Tovarishchestvo Obshchestvennaya Polza, 1895), 639–642, 710–711; Silviu Dragomir, “La politique religieuse des Habsbourgs et les interventions russes au XVIIIe siècle,” *Balcenia*, 7, 1 (1944), 152–172.

<sup>6</sup> Mihai Săsăujan, *Politica bisericească a Curții din Viena în Transilvania (1740–1761)* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2002), 146–183.

<sup>7</sup> “In partibus Transmarusianis (ita dictis) in quibus quidem nec tempore disturbÿ adeo magna revolutio fuerat, jam gratia Dei res S[anct]æ Unionis composita est, Clerus et populus in Unione sub debita obedientia pacifice vivunt. Pariter, in reliquis Comitatus Cis Marusianis ubiq[ue] fere disturbia et controversiæ Dei gratia composita sunt. In Parochÿs et Eccle[si]is ubiq[ue] Uniti Parochi constituti sunt, non Uniti etiam ad professionem S[anct]æ Unionis accesserunt, et sub debita obedientia habentur,” Arhivele Naționale ale României, Serviciul Județean Alba (hereafter: SJAN Alba), Mitropolia Greco-Catolică Română de Alba Iulia și Făgăraș-Blaj, Arhiva Generală – Acte neînregistrate (hereafter: MRUB, AG–A.n.), file 3/1752, fol. 49r–v. Also quoted by Pâclișanu, “Istoria Bisericii”, part 2, *Perspective* 14–16 (1991–1993), 29, footnote 37.

between 1758 and 1761. Under renewed pressure at the height of the Seven Years War, Vienna eventually arrived at a compromise solution, granting toleration and appointing a bishop for the Greek Orthodox in Transylvania. In parallel though, a series of discriminatory regulations targeted them, in the attempt to preserve some margin of superiority for the Greek Catholic Church.<sup>8</sup>

The alleged return to irenic times at the beginning of the sixth decade makes for a surprising intermezzo in a period characterized otherwise by violent outbursts of intolerance. Historians working on the subject have challenged the trustworthiness of such reports. These were usually deemed to prove either the blindness of those in charge, no longer able to distinguish between reality and their own projections, or the coercive nature of the administration and its practice of covering up the truth to avoid troubling the upper echelons.<sup>9</sup> From a later perspective, while it appears the contestations subsided briefly around 1750, Orthodox propaganda had created a rift within the Greek-rite community that would prove impossible to reconcile. Notwithstanding, the Greek Catholic elite of the day was so downright convinced the anti-unionistic tide was reversible that one cannot attribute it all to deception.

It is my contention that most parishes had indeed returned to church union by the end of the 1740s, as the documents in the archives abundantly testify. Although the real impact is questionable and the effects were to be short lived, I argue this result was largely achieved through a combination of hardline measures devised by the state and the missionary journeys undertaken by Petru Aron and his closest collaborators. While the methods, not just the outcomes, may be subject to scrutiny, they nonetheless substantiated the persistent Catholic policies of the following decade. Within this framework, deferring the decision on Orthodox requests for religious freedom may be interpreted as a rational choice rather than an arbitrary denial.

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<sup>8</sup> Bunea, *Episcopii Aron și Novacovici*, 213–214.

<sup>9</sup> Dragomir, *Istoria desrobirei religioase*, vol. 1, 174–175, 189; *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 1–2, 7; Keith Hitchins, *The Idea of Nation: The Romanians of Transylvania, 1691–1849* (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1985), 85; Săsăujan, *Politica bisericească*, 164–165; Miron, *Biserica din comitatul Cluj*, 67–68.

## The documentary evidence

To corroborate the reports on success achieved among the Orthodox in Transylvania, the statements issued by those who converted back to union with Rome were regularly quoted.<sup>10</sup> Despite its relevance, this type of document has long evaded historians, who even raised questions about its authenticity.<sup>11</sup> It was by mere chance that I came across dozens of such declarations while pursuing research in the Hungarian National Archives in Budapest.<sup>12</sup> Mixed with other papers, there were no less than 86 pledges covering 59 villages in the southern districts of the principality, which stood at the very core of dissent during those years. Judging by their form and by the general content of the archival bundle they were part of, I suggest these had belonged to the archive of Petru Dobra and were transferred to the Transylvanian Treasury upon his death in 1751/1752. This explains both the overall geographical coherence of the pledges and their timeframe, with the earliest from December 1745 and the latest from January 1751, broadly overlapping with his mandate as protector of union. In addition, Dobra's name occurs frequently in the papers, which were mostly issued in his presence or by provincial clerks who cited his authority.

Nevertheless, the documents in question do not exhibit a consistent pattern, even though an official draft was circulated between the central and provincial bodies.<sup>13</sup> Apart from the few outliers in 1751, the pledges were compiled over a period of four years, from December 1745 to August 1749, and by many different scribes, each contributing their own phrasing. This likely accounts for both minor inconsistencies and more elaborate discrepancies. Language is another factor, with roughly half the records in Latin and the other half in Hungarian.

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<sup>10</sup> See the register compiled by Petru Aron on 18 February 1751, Dragomir, *Istoria desrobirei religioase*, vol. 1, Appendix, 101–105, and his later remarks in a memorandum from July 1759, SJAN Alba, MRUB, AG–A.n., file 3/1752, fol. 96r–v.

<sup>11</sup> Dragomir, *Istoria desrobirei religioase*, vol. 2, 2–3, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, Országos Levéltára (hereafter: MNL OL), F szekció: Erdélyi országos kormányhatósági levéltárak, Erdélyi Kincstári Levéltár, Erdélyi Fiscalis Levéltár (hereafter: F 234), XXV/a szekrény, fasc. 715 and 716.

<sup>13</sup> MNL OL, B szekció: Erdélyi Kancelláriai levéltár, Erdélyi Kancellária regisztratórája, Acta generalia (hereafter: B 2), no. 90/1749, fols. 19r–20r.

From a legal perspective, they constitute bonds and may be further separated into two categories. The first includes recognizances (*litteræ cautionales / fidejussoriales / vadimoniales*) issued for the liberation of one or more members of the community who had been arrested for their role in the protests against church union. Between two and ten to fifteen of their neighbours pledged those concerned would refrain from further actions and would show respect to the Greek Catholic Church and its personnel. At times, when all villagers came to the rescue of their imprisoned companions, they could also make collective promises, thus blurring the line between documents in this and the next group. The second category consists of bonds explicitly pledged by an entire community (*litteræ obligatoriae*), whose individual members were represented by their delegates, acknowledging their guilt and promising to return as faithful members to the Greek Catholic Church. More than once, they followed an initial recognizance, which hints to a phased approach toward reestablishing confessional peace. All the surviving documents in this collection are certified by the signatures and seals of the clerks recording the bond, usually two officials from the seat or county administration, depending on the jurisdiction. The lack of signatures or finger impressions from those delegates making the pledge, otherwise mentioned by Vicar General Aron in his report on the events,<sup>14</sup> may suggest Petru Dobra kept only duplicates for his archive. In this case, the destination and later fate of the originals remain unknown.

However, other elements come together to endorse Aron's recital. In his report of February 1751, the vicar general included the list of articles subscribed by the communities who professed union with Rome.<sup>15</sup> They correspond on the whole to the most extensive form found in some of the pledges,<sup>16</sup> with abridged versions also in use. Stylistic differences aside, communities were required to: (i) stop immediately all rebellious activities; (ii) end all communication with the clandestine Orthodox priests and other leaders of dissent and reconcile with the legitimate Greek Catholic parish priests; (iii) denounce all those who would continue to oppose pacification; (iv) pay all required dues to the Greek Catholic parish priests; (v) attend religious

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<sup>14</sup> "pro majori firmitate [...] suis subscriptionibus, propriisque digitis, loco sigilli signa formantes, roborando", Dragomir, *Istoria desrobirei religioase*, vol. 1: Appendix, 102.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1: Appendix, 104–105.

<sup>16</sup> I use as a benchmark the bond subscribed by the villagers of Săliște on 9 April 1749, MNL OL, F 234, XXV/a szekrény, fasc. 715, fols. 314r–315v.

service and receive the sacraments from Greek Catholic clergymen; (vi) prevent the collection of money destined to the leaders of dissent; (vii) observe all Christians celebrations and the obligatory days of fasting; (viii) send their children to be catechized by the Greek Catholic parish priests. Failure to conform to the above points automatically triggered a money penalty, which was set at 40 Hungarian florins (Hfl.) for individuals, including bail takers, but could entail a statutory fine of 200 Hfl. for released persons who relapsed or in case of collective offences.<sup>17</sup>

The following **Table** indicates the origin of those making the pledge, in alphabetical order,<sup>18</sup> together with the date or dates of the documents that mention them, for a timeline of events. I opted to include both recognizances and community bonds without further distinction, for even in the case of individual bails, the terms subscribed by the guarantors often made them promise to behave like faithful members of the Greek Catholic Church.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., the pledges undertaken in Alba Iulia (22 August 1747): “sub pœna ab ipso prærecensitisq[ue] caventibus seorsim, et singillatim 40 (quadraginta) f[llorenos] h[ungaricales] faciente in casu violationis præmissorum punctorum,” MNL OL, F 234, XXV/a szekrény, fasc. 715, fol. 73r–v; Poplaca (20 June 1747): “sub pœna seorsim et singillatim 40, id est quadraginta, simul vero Articulari 200, id est ducentos h[ungaricales] f[llorenos] faciente in casu violationis præmissorum punctorum in toto, aut saltem in parte eorundem fiendæ,” MNL OL, F 234, XXV/a szekrény, fasc. 715, fol. 220v; Cugir (3 August 1749): “ex tunc præfato Domino Directori licitu[m] sit sine ullo Iuris Processu, non obstantibus quibusvis Iuridicis Remedys medio suor[um] ad id admittendor[um], vigore harum, ex Bonis suprascriptor[um] Fide jussor[um] vinculu[m] Ducentor[um] Hungaricaliu[m] desumi facere,” MNL OL, F 234, XXV/a szekrény, fasc. 715, fol. 89r; Vințu de Jos (7 September 1746): “Ha peniglen vagy maga a Detentus, vagy a fellyeb meg irt Kezesék ezen Conditiotkot violálnák és meg nem tartanáék tehát maga a Detentus toties quoties két két száz forintokot fizessen, a kezesen penig külön külön negyven Magyar forintokot,” MNL OL, F 234, XXV/a szekrény, fasc. 716, nos. 1–30, fol. 21v; Sebeş (26 October 1748): “az violans személyyeken külön külön negyven Magyar forintokot, ha penig az Communitas közönségesen violalna, az Communitáson két száz Magyar forintokot exclusis quibusvis Iuridicis Remedys [...] exequáltathasson,” MNL OL, F 234, XXV/a szekrény, fasc. 715, fol. 81v.

<sup>18</sup> The table gives both the current Romanian name, as well as the historical Hungarian and German names of the localities, within brackets. To avoid overburdening the text, in all other instances when they appear, only the Romanian name is used.

<sup>19</sup> “pro Provided Popa Florián Neoterico [...] Cautionem præstiterunt, qualiter idem Popa Florian libertate restituendus, nulli Sacerdotali functioni sese immiscebit, donec ab iis quorum[m] interest facultatem non obtinuerit, et hoc sub pœna Articulari. Ac præterea ipsi etiam caventes omni tumultui, si quem hactenus exercuerunt renunciantes, antiquos Popas existimatione pristina prosequuntur, omnem honorem et obedientiam in Spiritualibus ipsi deferent,” MNL

Thus, regardless of whether they referred to a single person or an entire community, the pledges were an instrument to ensure a move away from dissent, not least by setting a personal example. It should be noted, however, that the list is assumably incomplete. The chronological gap from the summer of 1749 to the winter of 1751 might suggest that not all the pledges in the series had been archived at the time or that they were communicated to other institutions as well, where they were kept<sup>20</sup>.

**Table:** The place and time of bonds securing the return to church union.

Source: MNL OL, F 234, XXV/a szekrény, fasc. 715 and 716.

Location — Date(s)
Alba Iulia (Gyulafehérvár; Karlsburg) — 1747/8/22; 1749/2/22
Apoldu de Jos (Kisapold; Klein-Pold) — 1747/8/20
Ațel (Ecel; Hetzeldorf) — 1745/12/13
Băcăinți (Bokajalfalu; Bocksdorf) — 1747/7/11
Beriu (Berény; Lammdorf) — 1748/8/16
Bogatu Român (Oláhbogát; Bogaden) — 1747/5/13
Brateiu (Baráthely; Pretai) — 1745/12/13
Bulbuc (Bulbuk; Buldorf) — 1747/7/24
Cărpiniș (Kerpenyes; Keppelsbach) — 1749/7/7
Căstău (Kasztó; Kastendorf) — 1747/8/4
Câlnic (Kelnek; Kelling) — 1748/10/31
Cârța (Kerc; Kerz) — 1747/4/21
Cib (Cseb; Tscheben) — 1747/11/13
Ciugud (Maroscsüged; Schenkendorf) — 1747/10/14
Cornățel (Hortobágyfalva; Härwesdorf) — 1746/7/14
Cugir (Kudzsir; Kudsir) — 1748/8/20; 1749/8/3
Cut (Kútfalva; Kockt) — 1748/11/4
Deal (Dál; Dallendorf) — 1748/10/31; 1751/1/27

OL, F 234, XXV/a szekrény, fasc. 715, fol. 218r; “tam praescriptos eliberatos, quam se se, et universos Coincolas manuum stipulatione obligarunt ad sequentium Punctorum perpetuam, ac simultaneam observationem,” MNL OL, F 234, XXV/a szekrény, fasc. 715, fol. 239r.

<sup>20</sup> For a similar recognizance entered into by the Orthodox from Săliște in March 1750, see MNL OL, F szkeció: Erdélyi országos kormányhatósági levéltárak, Gubernium Transylvanicum (in Politicis), Commissio in Publico-Ecclesiasticis (hereafter: F 53), 29 csomó, fols. 266r–267r.

<b>Location — Date(s)</b>
Fântânele (Szebenkákova; Krebsbach) — 1749/4/30
Galeş (Szebengálos; Galisch) — 1749/3/8; 1749/4/3
Gura Râului (Guraró; Auendorf) — 1748/7/1
Jina (Zsinna; Sinna) — 1748/7/1; 1748/11/3; 1749/4/29
Lancrăm (Lámkerék; Langendorf) — 1748/11/5
Laz (Sebesláz; Laas) — 1749/5/16
Loman (Lomány; Lammdorf) — 1748/10/30
Ludoş (Nagyludas; Großludges) — 1747/8/20; 1749/7/9
Mada (Máda; Moden) — 1747/7/11; 1748/7/17
Mediaş (Medgyes; Mediasch) — 1745/12/13
Orăştie (Szászváros; Bross) — 1747/8/27; 1748/8/17
Orlat (Orlát; Orlath) — 1749/6/6
Petreşti (Péterfalva; Petersdorf) — 1748/10/31
Pianu de Sus (Felsőpián; Walachisch-Pien) — 1748/10/28
Poiana (Pojén) — 1749/7/8
Poplaca (Popláka; Gunzendorf) — 1747/5/12; 1747/6/20; 1748/6/26
Porumbacu de Jos (Alsóporumbák; Unter-Bornbach) — 1746/6/26
Pricaz (Perkász; Perkaß) — 1748/8/15
Răchita (Rekitta; Brunndorf) — 1748/10/28
Răhău (Rehó; Reichau) — 1748/10/30
Răşinari (Resinár; Reschinar) — 1747/6/26; 1748/7/1; 1749/1/13
Rod (Ród; Rodt) — 1749/7/15
Romos (Romosz; Rumeß) — 1747/8/6; 1749/8/2
Sadu (Cód; Zoodt) — 1747/6/19
Săcel (Szecsel; Schwarzwasser) — 1749/6/6
Sălişte (Szelistye; Großdorf) — 1748/6/26; 1749/4/9; 1751/1/17
Sebeş (Szászsebes; Mühlbach) — 1746/7/10; 1747/9/6; 1748/10/26
Sebeşel (Sebeshely; Klein-Mühlbach) — 1747/4/7; 1747/8/4
Sereca (Szereka; Elsterdorf) — 1748/8/14
Sibiu (Nagyszeben; Hermannstadt) — 1747/6/25; 1749/6/3
Silvaşu de Jos (Alsószilvás; Pflaumendorf) — 1747/1/10
Şard (Sárd; Kothmarkt) — 1746/8/7; 1746/11/28
Şibot (Alkenyér; Unter-Brodendorf) — 1748/8/26; 1749/8/5

<b>Location — Date(s)</b>
Tămășasa (Tamáspatak) — 1748/8/18; 1748/8/23
Tărtăria (Alsótárlaka; Tartaria) — 1747/8/26
Topârcea (Toporcsa; Tschappertsch) — 1747/6/21; 1747/8/20; 1749/7/9.
Turdaș (Tordos; Tordesch) — 1747/8/1
Vaidei (Vajdej; Neudorf) — 1748/8/16; 1749/7/30
Vale (Vále; Grabendorf) — 1748/6/26
Vinerea (Felkenyér; Ober-Brodsdorf) — 1748/8/26; 1749/7/31
Vințu de Jos (Alvinc; Unter-Winz) — 1746/7/27; 1746/8/14; 1746/9/7; 1748/11/6.

This data invites some comments. Recovering social peace looks like a seasonal activity. Most pledges originate in late-spring, summer, and autumn months, when travelling to the countryside was made easier by road conditions. If subscribed during the winter, the preferred time was December and early January, which aligns with Lent and the holy days after Christmas. The liturgical calendar in use among the Greek-rite Christians in Transylvania was still the Julian calendar, so for any calculation one must subtract eleven days from the date recorded by civil clerks. This point becomes important if linked with the activity carried out by Greek Catholic missionaries, who used to their advantage the heightened religious feelings of the people during the Christmas season.<sup>21</sup>

The many instances when the same community was interested by multiple pledges, at shorter or longer intervals, tells a double story. On the one hand, in the initial phase, only a small number of individuals served as guarantors for their imprisoned neighbours. Subsequent developments led to the engagement of the broader community, demonstrating the effectiveness of a gradual strategy to restore public trust in the union with Rome. Sebeșel is among the best cases in point. In April 1747, five of its inhabitants entered into a recognizance for the release of a person accused of illegally acting as an Orthodox priest in the village.<sup>22</sup> Four months later, in August, fifteen other parishioners took upon themselves and their families to refrain from further

<sup>21</sup> For other cases when holy days were used to induce believers to take a stance in the confessional conflict, see Miron, *Biserica din comitatul Cluj*, 84–85.

<sup>22</sup> MNL OL, F 234, XXV/a szekrény, fasc. 715, fol. 218r–v.

dissent and to return to attending the Greek Catholic church.<sup>23</sup> A similar progress also occurred in Rășinari, although at a greater gap between the two moments. At first, in June 1746, it were two laypersons and one cleric who provided the recognizance needed to free from prison a man charged with exercising priesthood unlawfully.<sup>24</sup> By July of the following year, the entire community mandated the village elders to pledge to put an end to previous disorders and to acknowledge union with Rome.<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, the double or triple entries in the table under the name of the same locality reflect circumstances in which different commitments were taken independently of each other. Such appears to be the case of the repeated bail agreements subscribed by the villagers in Vințu de Jos from July to September 1746 for the liberation of their fellows who had been arrested for taking part in the religious protests.<sup>26</sup> Equally, and arguably of greater significance, were the instances when earlier bonds were not honoured. Hence, it was necessary to ensure renewed pledges would keep the old agreements in place. The people of Jina were certainly not alone in repeating their pledge to act as devoted parishioners of the Greek Catholic faith in November 1748, after having made a similar promise only a few months earlier, in July.<sup>27</sup> In April 1749 they would find themselves facing the authorities again, this time pledging compliance with church union in exchange for the liberation of three dissenters who belonged to the village community.<sup>28</sup> And the script was again repeated less than two years later, in January 1751, when 33 deputies swore to attend Greek Catholic religious services to obtain the freeing of their village judge.<sup>29</sup>

Although substantial fines for individuals who breached the terms of their bonds were frequently publicised as a deterrent, the penalties do not appear to have been promptly enforced.<sup>30</sup> The only evidence preserved among

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<sup>23</sup> MNL OL, F 234, XXV/a szekrény, fasc. 716, nos. 101–177, fol. 71r–v.

<sup>24</sup> MNL OL, F 234, XXV/a szekrény, fasc. 715, fol. 230r.

<sup>25</sup> MNL OL, F 234, XXV/a szekrény, fasc. 715, fols. 235r–236r.

<sup>26</sup> MNL OL, F 234, XXV/a szekrény, fasc. 716, nos. 1–30, fols. 21r–26r, 63r–64r.

<sup>27</sup> MNL OL, F 234, XXV/a szekrény, fasc. 715, fols. 233r–v, 236r.

<sup>28</sup> MNL OL, F 234, XXV/a szekrény, fasc. 715, fol. 85r–v.

<sup>29</sup> Report by Vicar General Aron to the Transylvanian governor, MNL OL, F 53, 29 csomó, fol. 184r.

<sup>30</sup> Moderation was a value inscribed in numerous documents of the time, see e.g., Dragomir, *Istoria desrobirei religioase*, vol. 1: Appendix, 80–81; *Habsburgii și Biserica Ortodoxă din Imperiul Austriac (1740–1761): Documente*, ed. Mihai Săsăujan (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2003), 57, 305.

the documents in the aforementioned bundle refers to two later incidents, both from 1755, when opposition to the Greek Catholic Church was again on the rise. Orthodox dissenters in Poiana and Cărpiniș, who were found guilty of violating earlier pledges—with no clear indication of when these had been entered—, obtained a reduction in the penalty amount by agreeing to a schedule of payments.<sup>31</sup>

The **Map** provides an overview of the spatial distribution of the legal bonds in Dobra's papers. Pledges were mostly collected in the region south of the river Mureș, from rural and suburban communities spread unequally between the Saxon seats of Orăștie, Sebeș, Miercurea (Szerdahely; Reußmarkt), Sibiu, Mediaș and the district of Făgăraș (Fogaras; Fogarasch). The dozen villages from Alba (Fehér) and Hunedoara (Hunyad) counties that were also taken in belong geographically to the same core area, save for a handful of exceptions, which may be better explained by local ties rather than administrative processes. Beyond it, only Silvașu de Jos, isolated in the southwest, falls outside the boundaries of an otherwise well-defined area.

Its contours correspond to the region placed under Petru Dobra's care as one of the four protectors of union, a position created in 1746 by Empress Maria Theresa in response to the confessional troubles in Transylvania.<sup>32</sup> Owing to his experience in the office of chief prosecutor<sup>33</sup> and likewise to him sharing the same ethnic background as most dissenters, Dobra was ideally placed to attempt pacification in the Saxon lands, which had been the hotbed of unrest since 1744.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> MNL OL, F 234, XXV/a szekrény, fasc. 716, nos. 101–177, fols. 119r–120v. The documents in question are an exception to the chronologically homogenous collection, which ends in 1751.

<sup>32</sup> Bunea, *Episcopul Klein*, 194–202; Dragomir, *Istoria desrobirei religioase*, vol. 1: Appendix, 47–58.

<sup>33</sup> The official title was *director causarum fiscalium*, charged with protecting Crown properties, but also with prosecuting public crimes, see Zsolt Trócsányi, *Erdély központi kormányzata: 1540–1690* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1980), 363; Zsolt Trócsányi, *Habsburg-politika és Habsburg-kormányzat Erdélyben: 1690–1740* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1988), 142, footnote 382.

<sup>34</sup> The jurisdiction of each of the four protectors was arranged locally by the Catholic section of the Transylvanian Government; see the draft on 26 June 1746, MNL OL, F 53, vol. 1, fol. 32r, and the account submitted to Empress Maria Theresa on 3 July 1746, MNL OL, B 2, no. 330/1746, pp. 262–263.



### Enforced compliance

If reading the legal bonds as a snapshot in time, one is led to the inescapable conclusion of Petru Dobra's formidable accomplishment. During his tenure as protector of union, he was able to bring dozens of communities into submission. While their number was relatively limited compared to the Orthodox parishes that came into existence once toleration became official a decade later, these nevertheless included some of the major centres of dissent, like Săliște, Rășinari, Jina, Galeș, or Sadu. It can be reasonably presumed that the target was set on calming the tensions in the more turbulent parishes, with the rest likely to follow suit. But why did communities elect to comply and how exactly was their acquiescence obtained?

From the onset of the split between Orthodox and Greek Catholics in Transylvania, the Habsburg government had been keen to bring church and provincial authorities together in fighting the protests. The Catholic elite was heavily invested in the project of union with Rome and was the first to react to the troubles by calling Vienna's attention and suggesting the means to end them, including through the use of the military.<sup>35</sup> On 12 March 1745, Empress Maria Theresa issued the first in a series of rescripts on the matter, instructing Governor Haller to work jointly with Roman and Greek Catholic prelates to address the ongoing crisis. If needs be, the official could also demand the intervention of the imperial troops stationed in the principality.<sup>36</sup> Briefly outlined here, the plan involved the use of both persuasion and coercion to restore confessional peace and revert to an idealized Catholic sway. The temporary success of the late-1740s was the direct outcome of this strategy.

The hardline measures came in first. In recent decades, the Habsburg Monarchy had significantly increased Counterreformation initiatives across its territories, leading to the deportation of crypto-Protestants from Austria and the limitation of Protestant rights in Hungary.<sup>37</sup> Incidentally, the Orthodox in Transylvania launched their struggle in a context that was already markedly

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<sup>35</sup> Bunea, *Episcopul Klein*, 169–170 and MNL OL, F 53, 27A csomó, fols. 529r–531v.

<sup>36</sup> Bunea, *Episcopul Klein*, 187–188; Dragomir, *Istoria desrobirei religioase*, vol. 1, 150–154.

<sup>37</sup> Stephan Steiner, *Rückkehr unerwünscht: Deportationen in der Habsburgermonarchie in der Frühen Neuzeit und ihr europäischer Kontext* (Wien: Böhlau, 2014), 256–274; Joachim Bahlcke, *Ungarischer Episkopat und österreichische Monarchie: Von einer Partnerschaft zur Konfrontation (1686–1790)* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2005), 214–224.

tense. As a result, the state responded more punitively in the attempt to curb dissent than it would have had under different circumstances. However, it incriminated actions that disturbed public peace, rather than charging people for their religious behaviour, to avoid deepening the rift.<sup>38</sup> At this level, Petru Dobra's legal expertise proved paramount, as he meticulously prosecuted individuals and communities that challenged union with Rome.<sup>39</sup>

Many of the prominent participants in the protests were detained for various lengths of time, including during pre-trial procedures, with most cases occurring in the southern districts overseen by Dobra. Those jailed included clandestine Orthodox priests, village elders, and other individuals who took on community representation roles. While it immediately targeted the beheading of the opposition, the measure also acted as a leverage against communities, prompting the initial recognizances that paved the way for further talks toward pacification. During the early years of contention, bargaining was prioritized above all else, reflecting the authorities' reliance on legal agreements. This explains the leniency extended even to persistent dissenters such as Bucur Sasul from Galeș, who played a leading role in orchestrating the plot that led to public protests in the later months of 1748.<sup>40</sup> After remaining incarcerated through the winter, he was released in April 1749 following the posting of a community bond.<sup>41</sup> A similar turn of events allowed Vasile from Săliște and Moise Măcinic from Sibiel, two Orthodox priests who were involved in every major protest of the day against union with Rome, to walk free after serving time in Sibiu. Both were released in March 1750 on a recognizance entered by residents of Săliște, a list that also included two of the serving Greek Catholic parish priests.<sup>42</sup>

Villages with Orthodox majorities also incurred substantial fines due to the prolonged disputes over church union, which caused considerable frustration. The complaint presented by their delegates to the court in November

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<sup>38</sup> Bunea, *Episcopul Klein*, 250–251, 255; Dragomir, *Istoria desrobirei religioase*, vol. 1, 203–204.

<sup>39</sup> See his own testimony, MNL OL, B 2, no. 92/1749, fols. 27r–34r, and some of the complaints against him, Dragomir, *Istoria desrobirei religioase*, vol. 1, 209–212.

<sup>40</sup> Radu Nedici, “Cum să pornești o revoltă în veacul al XVIII-lea: Activism, adunări publice și propagandă în comunitățile ortodoxe din Transilvania (1740–1760),” *Revista Istorică*, 28, 5–6 (2017), 490–492.

<sup>41</sup> MNL OL, F 234, XXV/a szekrény, fasc. 715, fol. 87r–v.

<sup>42</sup> MNL OL, F 53, 29 csomó, fols. 266r–267r.

1748, detailing payments in excess of 8,000 Hfl., led to an investigation into Petru Dobra's handling of the funds.<sup>43</sup> In reports submitted during December 1748 and January 1749, the chief prosecutor and protector of union challenged the stated amount. He substantiated with receipts collections totalling only 2,453 Hfl. over the preceding three years, while also contending that additional funds were solicited by the Saxon magistrate but never reached the Treasury.<sup>44</sup> The six villages in the district of Săliște had been imposed the heaviest penalties, of which they paid 1,360 Hfl., plus another 721 Hfl. for the maintenance of the Greek Catholic parish priests.<sup>45</sup> Rășinari was second from the top, with 412 Hfl. collected in mulcts and another 600 Hfl. for the maintenance of the priests.<sup>46</sup> The remaining communities contributed lesser amounts, typically around 40 or 50 Hfl. each, if they paid at all.

In this sense, Petru Dobra's report also highlights the significant disparity between the fines mandated by law and the amounts actually collected, corroborating the earlier assessment about the minimal enforcement of the legal bonds. Statutory fines in Săliște and neighbouring villages amounted to 1,200 Hfl., of which only 500 Hfl. were ever paid; in Rășinari, out of 1,912 Hfl. in individual fines, only 212 Hfl. were collected.<sup>47</sup> Yet, despite managing to partially avoid them, mulcts represented a major incentive to enter a pledge, even for the largest and most prosperous villages. For instance, the delegates of the district of Săliște, who pledged their submission to the Greek Catholic Church in June 1748, made sure to include in the text of the bond their request to be exempted from paying the remaining fines they still owed.<sup>48</sup>

The third and perhaps most severe element at the state's disposal to intimidate communities into compliance was the sending of troops to be stationed for the time necessary in their territory. Lodged soldiers brought chaos and violence in the life of the villagers, as these would complain time

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<sup>43</sup> A copy of the petition, together with the list of money extracted from the rural communities, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Finanz- und Hofkammerarchiv (hereafter: OeStA FHKA), Alte Hofkammer, Hoffinanz Ungarn, Siebenbürgen Akten, Siebenbürgische Kameralverhandlungen (hereafter: AHK, HFU, 7bgn.), Karton 112, fols. 1546r–1552v. Also edited from a later copy by Dragomir, *Istoria desrobirei religioase*, vol. 1: Appendix, 70–71.

<sup>44</sup> OeStA FHKA, AHK, HFU, 7bgn., Karton 112, fols. 1560r–1562v; Karton 113, fols. 26r–75v.

<sup>45</sup> OeStA FHKA, AHK, HFU, 7bgn., Karton 113, fol. 27r–v.

<sup>46</sup> OeStA FHKA, AHK, HFU, 7bgn., Karton 113, fol. 26r–v.

<sup>47</sup> OeStA FHKA, AHK, HFU, 7bgn., Karton 113, fols. 26r., 27r.

<sup>48</sup> MNL OL, F 234, XXV/a szekrény, fasc. 715, fol. 237v.

and again.<sup>49</sup> They also turned out to be an unbearable financial burden, as bed and breakfast had to be provided by the Orthodox dissenters themselves for the duration of the soldiers' stay. Guilty of having hosted the delegates that travelled to Sibiu in December 1748 to ask for the publication of an alleged imperial rescript that offered toleration, the six villages in the district of Săliște were sentenced to provide for the maintenance of two military units. In April 1749, after less than a season had passed, the delegates from Săliște reaffirmed their previous commitment to union with Rome on behalf of the entire community. This renewed pledge also secured the release of two detained individuals—Dănilă Mile, the village judge, and Stan Borcea Vătaful.<sup>50</sup> In June 1749, the entire district petitioned the Transylvanian governor for the removal of the quartered troops, emphasizing their return to church union.<sup>51</sup> However, the two companies were not relocated until at least the end of 1749. A financial statement compiled by the Saxon magistrate determined that the aggregate expenditures of the villages of Săliște, Sibiel, Fântânele, Tilișca, Galeș, and Vale amounted to 7,450 Hfl. for quartering the troops over the period from February to December.<sup>52</sup> As this figure shows, lodging the imperial soldiers risked being tenfold more damaging than any fines imposed by the civil authorities.

### **Preaching the union**

Constraint, in its various forms and degrees of intensity, accounts for only half of the explanation on why the Orthodox believers toned down their resentment toward union with Rome. The other significant factor in this evolution were the missionary campaigns launched by Vicar General Aron, who held this position from 1745 until his promotion as bishop in 1753. During the initial phase of the Orthodox protests, given the legitimate bishop's departure from the diocese, Vienna employed the services of Bishop

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<sup>49</sup> Dragomir, *Istoria desrobirei religioase*, vol. 1: Appendix, 86–88.

<sup>50</sup> MNL OL, F 234, XXV/a szekrény, fasc. 715, fols. 314r–315v.

<sup>51</sup> Arhivele Naționale ale României, Serviciul Județean Sibiu (hereafter: SJAN Sibiu), Magistratul Orașului și Scaunului Sibiu, Seria Actelor Administrative (hereafter: Mag., Acte admin.), file 25/1749, fols. 4r–5v.

<sup>52</sup> SJAN Sibiu, Mag., Acte admin., file 25/1749, fols. 35r–61v.

Olshavskiy, from neighbouring northern Hungary, to comfort the Greek Catholics and gain an insider's perspective on the most suitable response to the crisis.<sup>53</sup> As dissent dragged on, Petru Dobra suggested in September 1747 that Vicar General Aron should be encouraged to undertake a canonical visitation of the most troubled deaneries of the diocese.<sup>54</sup> Subject to fierce contestation from numerous Greek Catholic archpriests over the ensuing months, Petru Aron had to defer any decision until calm could be reinstated within the ranks of the church.<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps this explains why there are no records of him playing a more active part until 1749, when he began his first tours of the province.<sup>56</sup> Working in close contact with the civil officials on the field, Aron's presence gave a boost to efforts of restoring confessional unity, as suggested by the upward trend of community bonds in the first half of 1749. Accounts from earlier that year demonstrate the close alignment between his spiritual message and the objectives of secular authorities. While taking residence in Sibiu, Petru Aron received the visit of the delegates from Jina, who in April 1749 pledged to abandon dissent and to reconcile with their Greek Catholic parish priests, in exchange for the liberation of three of their fellow villagers.<sup>57</sup> It was not an isolated incident, as evinced by the request presented to the Transylvanian Governor around the same time by the Orthodox inhabitants of the district of Săliște. They sought pardon for all offences against the Greek Catholic Church, having rejoined it during Lent and formally acknowledged their previous errors before Vicar General Aron.<sup>58</sup> The surviving bonds corroborate the chronology, two of the villages in question, Galeș and Săliște, having entered new pledges on 3 and 9 April, respectively.<sup>59</sup> More striking in this recital of the events is the appearance of the Jesuit Theologian alongside the vicar general. Notwithstanding some initial reservations about associating a Latin clergyman to counter the popular aversion toward

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<sup>53</sup> Ovidiu Ghitta, "Bishop Manuel Olsavszky and the unrest in the Romanian Uniate Church of Transylvania (the fifth decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century)," *Annales Universitatis Apulensis, Series Historica*, 11, 2 (2007), 180–181.

<sup>54</sup> MNL OL, F 53, 27A csomó, fol. 323r–v.

<sup>55</sup> Ghitta, "Bishop Manuel Olsavszky," 183–194.

<sup>56</sup> Bunea, *Episcopul Klein*, 255.

<sup>57</sup> MNL OL, F 234, XXV/a szekrény, fasc. 715, fol. 85r–v.

<sup>58</sup> MNL OL, B 2, no. 90/1749, fol. 17r–v.

<sup>59</sup> MNL OL, F 234, XXV/a szekrény, fasc. 715, fol. 87r–v, 314r–315v.

Catholicism,<sup>60</sup> the Jesuit was assiduously involved in fighting dissent. A register documenting the Greek Catholic priests in office in the Szekler seat of Mureş (Maros) noted that the Jesuit Theologian had received the profession of faith of one of those recorded in March 1746.<sup>61</sup> All in all, these instances prove once again the versatile approach to achieving social peace and particularly how Petru Aron's actions integrated those of the provincial administration.

The other frequent collaborator of the vicar general was Athanasie Rednic, one of the first Basilian monks in the monastery of Blaj, together with whom he visited the town of Făgăraş on Easter Sunday of 1749. Various reports had indicated this community as a major hub of opposition in the district. The privileged Greek traders could practice freely their Orthodox faith within the town and the chapel they used for their celebrations began to be attended by all those deserting the Greek Catholic Church.<sup>62</sup> Vicar General Aron took a stance against the consequences of this situation, which created an even playing field for the two religious competitors. In the ensuing account of his visit, Petru Aron reported that he summoned the Greek chaplain and suspended him from his functions for not obeying to his lawful authority. He equally preached to him by using evidence extracted from Orthodox liturgical texts—an approach reminiscent of the catechetical literature that was soon to be published under his direction—and was optimistic on the prospects of converting the chaplain to religious union. For the moment though, all Aron got was the chaplain's promise to desist from further officiating for the Orthodox community, thus eliminating one of the factors responsible for dissent.<sup>63</sup>

Although it would appear the vicar general relied on a strategy of intimidation, rather than taking the time to convince those he addressed, the subsequent events in Făgăraş prove that his message achieved its intended outcome. In March 1751, Kostandin, Greek Catholic chaplain of Făgăraş, wrote

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<sup>60</sup> Francisc Pall (ed.), *Inochentie Micu-Klein. Exilul la Roma: 1745–1768*, vol. II/1 (Cluj-Napoca: Fundația Culturală Română/Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 1997), 14–15.

<sup>61</sup> Traian Popa, *Documente privitoare la trecutul românilor din vechiul scaun al Mureşului*, vol. 1 (Târgu Mureş: Tipografia Concordia, 1925), 25–26.

<sup>62</sup> MNL OL, B 2, no. 111/1747, p. 330; MNL OL, F 53, 27A csomó, fol. 397r.

<sup>63</sup> MNL OL, F 53, 28 csomó, fol. 51r–v. Also edited from a later copy by Dragomir, *Istoria desrobirei religioase*, vol. 1: Appendix, 78–79.

with great bitterness about how the faithful had been turned away from the church by two or three Orthodox agitators, who misinterpreted the recent imperial decrees. His sorrow was heightened for he had only recently embraced church union after coming to appreciate the genuine teachings of the Church Fathers through the very liturgical texts he used in worship.<sup>64</sup> Thus, Kostandin and the anonymous chaplain of 1749 are very likely one and the same<sup>65</sup>. His testimony is a most transparent reference to the legitimizing discourse popularised by the Greek Catholic elite around 1750<sup>66</sup> and an exceptional confirmation of its success.

From Făgăraș, Aron and Rednic travelled next to the nearby monastery of Sâmbăta de Sus (Felsőszombatfalva/Ober-Mühlendorf), which enjoyed the protection of the heirs of the original founder, the Orthodox prince of Wallachia, Constantin Brâncoveanu. For decades, the community members had openly opposed church union,<sup>67</sup> so the vicar general used this as a reason to suspend the priests and monks under canon law. After delivering a long speech focused on demonstrating that the metropolitan of Wallachia could not claim any authority in Transylvania, as they maintained, Aron offered them to join the Greek Catholic Church. In exchange for recognizing his spiritual authority, the clerics were assured all bans against them would be lifted. The congregation asked for a time of reflection, especially since they could not decide this without first discussing it with their patron, Prince Brâncoveanu.<sup>68</sup>

Vicar General Aron and Athanasie Rednic persisted in visiting the southern parts of the diocese in the following years. According to a report presented in February 1751, over the previous two months, they had both

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<sup>64</sup> “Quoniam elapso tempore agnoscens ego Sacra Unionis veritatem, quod sit ipsa clara Sanctorum Patrum Doctrina, qua invenitur in nostris quoq[ue] Eccl[esiastic]is libris,” MNL OL, F 53, 29 csomó, fols. 196r–197v.

<sup>65</sup> Another mention of his conversion, SJAN Alba, MRUB, AG–A.n., file 3/1751, fol. 1r–v.

<sup>66</sup> Cristian Barta, *Tradiție și dogmă: Percepția dogmatică a unirii cu Roma în operele teologilor greco-catolici (secolele XVIII–XIX)*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2014), 53–65; Nedici, *Formarea identității confesionale*, 360–370.

<sup>67</sup> Gabriel Patacsi, “Die unionsfeindlichen Bewegungen der orthodoxen Rumänen Siebenbürgens in den Jahren 1726–1729,” *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 26 (1960), 373–374; Nedici, *Formarea identității confesionale*, 221–225.

<sup>68</sup> MNL OL, F 53, 28 csomó, fol. 51v–52r and Dragomir, *Istoria desrobirei religioase*, vol. 1: Appendix, 79–80.

toured the villages on the stretch of land between Făgăraș and Dobra, where much of the dissent was voiced.<sup>69</sup> On this occasion, the villages in the district of Săliște, which had repeatedly infringed on their earlier commitments, formally reiterated their allegiance to the Greek Catholic Church by submitting written pledges to the vicar general.<sup>70</sup> The exhortations cited by Petru Aron as the sole method employed to encourage the Orthodox communities' return to church union were more thoroughly documented for neighbouring Jina. On 25 December 1750, which was still some ten days away from Christmas according to the old-style calendar, the people of Jina convened in the local parish church to listen to an exposition of the Christian doctrine. It consisted of a break down on the meaning of church union with Rome, explaining that each of the articles of faith was an accurate interpretation of the teachings of the Church Fathers. This assertion was substantiated by referring to the printed publication of the articles of union, allowing individuals to verify the information independently.<sup>71</sup> The allusion hints to the first catechism published by the printshop in Blaj earlier that year,<sup>72</sup> which expanded upon the arguments already present in Petru Aron's discourse during 1749. The outline of the speech in Jina indicates that the small catechism was intended both as an independent text for private study and as an authoritative reference for the Greek Catholic elite to cite during public homilies. It is also worth noting that the compliance of Jina and likewise that of Sibiel, in the territory of Săliște, were achieved after the local leaders of unrest had been taken into custody by the provincial government, in a further display of collaborative action.<sup>73</sup>

A few months later, at the beginning of June 1751, Aron and Rednic returned to Făgăraș once more, this time proceeding northeasterly, to visit the

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<sup>69</sup> Bunea, *Episcopul Klein*, 255.

<sup>70</sup> "tota Sedes Szelistye, quæ caput erat totius mali, et origo, non solum verbis, sed et datis desuper ubiq[ue] contractualibus literis debitam imposterum, eamq[ue] perpetuam compromisit obedientiam," MNL OL, F 53, 29 csomó, fol. 187r.

<sup>71</sup> "Ad hæc explanavit illis negotium Sacræ Unionis, et quod omnia Sacræ Unionis Puncta sint impressa, et publicata, ut unus quisq[ue] cognoscere valeat, quoniam illa aliud non sit, nisi ipsa Fides, et Doctrina SS. Patrum n[ost]rorum." MNL OL, F 53, 29 csomó, fol. 380r-v.

<sup>72</sup> *Floarea adevărului pentru pacea și dragostea de obște*, in *Floarea adevărului pentru pacea și dragostea de obște. Păstoriceasca poslanie sau Dogmatica învățatură a Besearicii Răsăritului*, ed. Meda-Diana Hotea (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2004), 107-167.

<sup>73</sup> MNL OL, F 53, 29 csomó, fols. 184r, 187r-v, 378r-v.

parishes in some of the Szekler seats<sup>74</sup>. After closely monitoring the situation from afar for some time, the vicar general decided this was the appropriate moment to confront the community of the monastery in Sâmbăta de Sus. His prior accusations had led to the arrest of the Orthodox priests active in and around that village. In early May 1751, several villeins from the estate in prince Brâncoveanu's possession came forward to pledge a recognizance for the liberation of eight of the imprisoned clergymen, vowing they would refrain from any future acts against union with Rome.<sup>75</sup> As in other similar situations, this moment set the stage for the next step—the attempt to restore confessional peace across the entire parish.

On 8 June 1751, the dissenting priests and monks from Sâmbăta de Sus and other neighbouring villages were summoned to Făgăraș, to appear before Vicar General Aron. Here they listened to Athanasie Rednic's preaching about the four articles of union, who not only explained their meaning extensively, but also illustrated their truthfulness by resorting to the Holy Scriptures.<sup>76</sup> The approach used to legitimize the Greek Catholic faith aligns with earlier examples and highlights the thoroughness of the arguments presented by Aron and Rednic in the late 1740s. However, the initial favourable reception of this demonstration suffered a reversal of fortunes, when the Orthodox clerics simply refused to give in to church union.<sup>77</sup> This led to a reopening of the disciplinary procedure against them, with a trial date set for the ecclesiastical court and threats of imprisonment until the hearing. Monk Vasile from Sâmbăta de Sus escaped only on a recognizance, while leniency was recommended by the civil authorities for the others involved.<sup>78</sup> Eventually, the trial was held in Blaj on 25 January 1752 in the absence of the defendants (monk Vasile and fourteen other priests) and concluded with their conviction on charges of

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<sup>74</sup> MNL OL, F 53, 29 csomó, fol. 98r.

<sup>75</sup> MNL OL, F 53, 29 csomó, fol. 112r.

<sup>76</sup> "eadem occasione Patre Hyeromonacho Athanasio quatuor Sacrae Unionis Puncta ipsis interpretante, et non tam verbis explanante, quam etiam ex Sacris Scripturis veritatem evincente, et ab oculis illis ponente, ipsimet quoque præfati Sacerdotes, et Callugeri easdem Sacras Scripturas perlegentes," MNL OL, F 53, 29 csomó, fol. 115r.

<sup>77</sup> "primum quidem crediderint, et vera esse pronunciarint, ex post vero verba sua retractantes ab agnita veritate recesserint," MNL OL, F 53, 29 csomó, fol. 115r.

<sup>78</sup> MNL OL, F 53, 29 csomó, fols. 113r, 98r.

violating the Byzantine canon law.<sup>79</sup> Elected in the meantime to bishop, Petru Aron asked the Transylvanian Government for assistance in capturing and punishing the culprits.<sup>80</sup>

## Conclusions

This outcome of the protracted dialogue with the main opponents of church union in Sâmbăta de Sus encapsulates the two complementary lines of action used to tackle and potentially resolve Orthodox dissent. Missionary activities led by various ecclesiastics went hand in hand with money sanctions and threats of force issued by agents of the Habsburg state. The documents created during Petru Dobra's tenure as protector of union (1746–1751) speak in more detail about the latter tactics. Most of the nearly sixty villages from the southern districts of Transylvania which are covered by bonds declaring their partial or full return to church union did so following the internment of certain community members for their resistance or to avoid other collective punishments. The crackdown was however doubled by a genuine effort to present those communities with a positive narrative about union with Rome. While only accidental glimpses survive of it from before 1749, the legitimizing rhetoric got its definitive shape once Petru Aron took the undisputed control over the diocese.

There was a certain degree of success of this strategy, chiefly noticeable in those cases when an initial recognizance was followed by a community-wide bond, giving a very precise representation of how support for church union expanded within the parish limits. Regardless of their motives, at the beginning of the sixth decade, the Greek-rite Transylvanians leaned toward a compromise solution and away from the conflict that ravaged their communities after 1744. At the same time, the chronology of the bonds themselves and their constant remaking, at times at intervals shorter than a season, suggests the confessional context remained highly volatile. Notwithstanding, the Greek Catholic hierarchy and the officials of the Habsburg Monarchy took every pledge at face value and never questioned the deeper reasons pushing people

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<sup>79</sup> MNL OL, F 53, 29 csomó, fols. 109r–111v. A different copy of the trial minutes, Arhivele Naționale ale României, Serviciul Județean Cluj, Colecția de documente Blaj, file 139, pp. 1–4.

<sup>80</sup> MNL OL, F 53, 29 csomó, fols. 98r, 107r–v.

to subscribe or abandon them. The authorities sought evidence that dissent could be overcome and, as the bonds provided that comfort, everyone just hoped things would turn out well.

It amounted, in other words, to a self-inflicted deception with serious consequences for the immediate future. The inflexible religious policy toward the Orthodox in Transylvania throughout the 1750s stemmed from the triumphalist reports at the start of the decade. Vicar General Aron and Governor Haller proclaimed an almost complete victory of Greek-rite Catholicism over dissent, fuelled by the increasing pile of pledges from the rural world. By transforming a dynamic process, with its inherent fluctuations, into a fixed representation of success, the Habsburg bureaucracy became constrained by the very legal framework it had established. Bonds created a false image of conformity, with every Orthodox believer allegedly absorbed back into the Greek Catholic Church. Viewed through this distorting lens, reality could be more easily challenged. Despite continued Orthodox hopes in a negotiated solution, the authorities stubbornly refused any dialogue with parties they regarded as either no longer existent or as acting solely as instruments of external propaganda. This shortsightedness was to have devastating effects, pushing the most radical opponents into the arms of Russia and leading to rampant unrest by the end of the decade.