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ARTICLES

Martin HOMZA, Svätopluk as a Historical Figure: An Attempt at Reconstruction.....	5
Diana MARINESCU, The Jesuit College from Kamenetz and Its First Attempt to Organize a Jesuit Mission in Moldavia (1610) According to New Evidence Found in the <i>Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu</i>	48
Radu NEDICI, Overcoming Dissent: Coercive and Persuasive Strategies that Won the Greek Orthodox Back to Church Union in Transylvania Around 1750	64
Attila M. DEMETER, Liberty Through Uniformity (The emergence of the Nation-state in the French Revolution)	89
Andrei LOZA, The Portraits of Michael the Brave Discovered by Nicolae Bălcescu in Paris.....	109
Ovidiu GHITTA, Hermann Oberth at the University of Cluj. A Necessary Clarification.....	132
Kinga-Melinda TAMÁS, Outstanding Figures in the Life and History of the University Library of Cluj: József Sebestyén K. (1878-1964)	144
Alexandru-Mihai MĂRIEŞ, The City as an Ideological Palimpsest: Reactualizing the Middle Ages and Colloquial Nationalism in the Urban Toponymy of Cluj-Napoca	174

DISCUSSION

Michał Wasiucionek, <i>Înalta Poartă și Țările Române. Rivalități și alianțe în secolul al XVII-lea</i> [The Sublime Porte and the Romanian Principalities. Rivalries and Alliances in the 17th Century] (București, Humanitas, 2024), 360 pages (Vasile Mihai OLARU)	189
(Ovidiu Cristian SUĂTEAN).....	197

BOOK REVIEWS

- Martyn Rady, *Habsburgii. Ambiția de a stăpâni lumea* [The Habsburgs. The ambition to rule the world] (București: Ed. Corint, 2023), 592 pages (Ovidiu Cristian SUĂTEAN)..... 201
- Alex Drace-Francis, *Istoria mămăligii. Povestea globală a unui preparat național* [The Making of Mamaliga. Transimperial Recipes for a Romanian National Dish]. Translation by Anca Bărbulescu. Bucharest, Humanitas, 2023, 290 pages (Radu MÂRZA)..... 205
- Bert Roest, Pietro Delcorno (eds.), *Observant Reform and Cultural Production in Europe: Learning, Liturgy and Spiritual Practice*, Radboud University Press, Nijmegen, 2023, 302 pages (Paula ȘTEFAN)..... 208
- Kateryna Dysa, *Ukrainian Witchcraft Trials: Volhynia, Podolia, and Ruthenia, 17th-18th Centuries* (Budapest-New York: CEU Press, 2020), 254 pages (Alexandra-Maria BUZĂ) 214
- Natalie Zemon Davis, *Listening to the Languages of the People. Lazar Sainéan on Romanian, Yiddish and French* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2022), 200 pages (Maria CRĂCIUN) 220
- Michal Ďurčo, *Cesty a diaľnice na Slovensku v medzivojnovom období. Nástup automobilovej doby v znamení Československej Republiky* [Roads and Highways in Slovakia during the Interwar Period. The Beginning of the Era of the Automobile under the Sign of the Czechoslovak Republic]. Bratislava, VEDA vydavateľstvo SAV - Historický ústav SAV, 2020, 230 pages (Radu MÂRZA)..... 227
- Didier Rey, *Le timbre-poste, une mémoire de l'histoire européenne 1840-2020*. Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2025, 431 pages (Radu MÂRZA)..... 234

Svätopluk as a Historical Figure: An Attempt at Reconstruction

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Abstract: The article is part of a larger monograph on Svätopluk I, which maps Svätopluk I as a) a historical figure; b) European historiography on the most successful ruler of the Western Slavs in the 9th century, and c) the image (*imago*) of the ruler as retrospectively created by medieval writings across Europe. In this text, Martin Homza focuses on presenting Svätopluk as a historical figure based on existing sources and available metahistorical texts. During his reign, the first Moravian archbishopric and bishopric in Nitra were established. At the same time, a network of church administration was created, and Christianity gained significant ground in the rest of Europe, which had been pagan until then. This expansion was made possible by internal (political and economic stabilization of his personal power) and external factors, the most important of which was Svätopluk's pragmatic policy towards the East Frankish rulers. This brought him not only multiple recognition of his de facto rule, but also acceptance into the wider Carolingian family. However, the most important recognition came from the papacy of the time, which accepted him (and with him his empire) as its only son – *unicus filius* – under its patronage. This was a historical precedent for the creation of what we now call Central Europe, and in the plans of the popes of the time, it was contrasted with the *Regnum Teutonicorum* and called the Kingdom of the Slavs – *Regnum Sclavorum*. However, these bold plans suffered in the last two years of Svätopluk's reign when he allowed himself to be drawn into a military confrontation with his *compater* Arnulf, the East Frankish ruler. The unexpected death of Svätopluk I, the subsequent unfortunate reign of his sons, as well as the

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6 Martin Homza

invasions of the Old Hungarian tribal confederation and the Bavarians, brought about the temporary collapse of this project. The restoration of the kingdom on the Middle Danube under the patronage of St. Peter, this time with a new dynasty, came around the year 1000.

Keywords: Svätopluk, Imperium Christianum, Papacy, Moravia, Regnum Sclavorum, Central Europe

Rezumat: Articolul este parte dintr-o monografie mai mare, în pregătire, despre Svätopluk I. Lucrarea îl urmărește pe Svätopluk I ca personalitate istorică, analizează istoriografia despre cel mai de succes stăpânitor al slavilor apuseni, respectiv urmărește imaginea lui, așa cum au conturat-o retrospectiv scrierile medievale din Europa. În acest studiu, pe baza surselor și a textelor metaistorice avute la dispoziție, autorul se concentrează asupra prezentării lui Svätopluk ca personalitate istorică. În timpul stăpânirii sale a luat naștere prima arhiepiscopie a Moraviei și episcopia de la Nitra. În același timp, s-a constituit o rețea a administrației ecleziastice, iar creștinismul s-a impus într-o mare măsură într-o parte, până atunci păgână, a Europei. Această expansiune a fost posibilă datorită unor factori interni (stabilizarea politică și economică a puterii sale personale) și externi; dintre aceștia din urmă, cel mai important factor a fost politica pragmatică a lui Svätopluk față de regii franci de răsărit. Această politică i-a adus recunoașterea de câteva ori a guvernării sale, dar și primirea în familia în sens larg a Carolingienilor. Oricum, cea mai importantă apreciere a venit din partea Papalității, care l-a luat pe domnitor (și împreună cu acesta întregul său imperiu) sub patronajul său în calitate de unic fiu – *unicus filius*. Acesta a fost un precedent istoric pentru crearea a ceea ce astăzi numim Europa Centrală; în planurile papale, era numit Regatul Slavilor – *Regnum Sclavorum*, în contrast cu *Regnum Teutonicorum*. Aceste proiecte curajoase au avut de suferit în ultimii doi ani de domnie ai lui Svätopluk, atunci când s-a lăsat antrenat într-o confruntare militară cu *compater*-ul său Arnulf, stăpânitorul franc de răsărit. Moartea neașteptată a lui Svätopluk I, domnia nefericită a fiilor săi, precum și atacurile uniunii de triburi ale vechilor maghiari și ale bavarezilor au dus la prăbușirea temporară a acestui proiect. Restaurarea proiectului regatului de la Dunărea de mijloc, sub patronajul Sfântului Petru, dar sub o nouă dinastie, s-a produs în jurul anului 1000.

Cuvinte-cheie: Svätopluk, Imperium Christianum, Papalitate, Moravia, Regnum Sclavorum, Europa Centrală.

Svätopluk I, as the most prominent member of the Moravian Moimirids dynasty and certainly the most important representative of the political representation of the Western Slavs at the end of the ninth century, has no representative monograph in contemporary European historiography. Several attempts have been made to produce such a work, they have not reached the level they could and should have reached.¹ Thus, the topic of Svätopluk I remained scattered among a number of scholarly articles and commentaries in individual editions on sources from the ninth and later centuries.² The aim of this text is therefore to reconstruct the historical figure of Svätopluk I on the basis of existing contemporary and retrospective sources.³ Understandably, this cannot be done without referring to the current state of knowledge about this ruler.⁴

Svätopluk appears for the first time in the *Frankish royal annals* at the end of the 60s of the ninth century. *The Annals of Fulda* gives relatively accurate information on the exact place Svätopluk occupies within the Moimirid dynasty. They mention Rastislav as being his *avunculus*, i.e. uncle. This means that most possibly Rastislav's brother must have been one of Svätopluk's parents. The name of his possible father *Saramirus* / *Zsaramirus* / *Zuanimirus* / *Satimir* / *Satimerus* (Svätomir?), is mentioned in a single source, in the ninth

¹ See Lubomír E. Havlík, *Svätopluk. Veliký král Moravanů a Slovanů* (Brno: Jota, 1994); Witold Chrzanowski, *Świętopelk I Wielki król Wielkomorawski ok. 844–894* (Kraków: Avalon, 2010) and Matuš Kučera, *Kráľ Svätopluk 830?–846–894* (Martin: Matica slovenská, 2010).

² For instance Ján Steinhübel, *The Nitrian Principality: The Beginnings of Medieval Slovakia*, trans. David McLean (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2020), see chapter “Svätopluk's Realm,” 210–238.

³ See the summary overview of sources on Svätopluk in the article Lubomír Ďurina, “Svätopluk v stredovekých písomných prameňoch 9.–16. storočia podľa vydania *Magnae Moraviae Fontes Historici* štatistiky,” in Martin Homza et al., *Svätopluk v európskom písomníctve: Štúdie z dejín Svätoplukovskej legendy* (Bratislava: Post Scriptum, 2014), 567–648.

⁴ See my recent articles: Martin Homza, “Svätopluk v anglo- a nemeckojazyčnej historickej spisbe posledného obdobia,” in *Vita historiae dedicata. Zborník štúdií venovaný životnému jubileu prof. PhDr. Júliusa Bartla, CSc.*, ed. Miriam Viršínská (Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave, 2018), 166–176; id., “The Image and Interpretation of Svätopluk in the Eyes of Slovak Historians over the last Hundred Years and Short Remark at the End,” in *Constantine Letters*, 15, no. 2 (2022): 1–19; id., “Svätopluk in Czech and Czech-written Historiography. A Few Critical Remarks: Part One: Up to the 1960s,” *Constantine Letters*, 17, no. 2 (2024): 98–112; id., “Svätopluk in Czech and Czech-written Historiography. A Few Critical Remarks: Part Two: From the 1960s to the 1990th,” *Constantine Letters*, 18, no. 2 (2025): 1–15; id., “Svätopluk in Czech and Czech-written historiography. A few critical remarks: Part Three: From the late 1990s to the present day,” in print.

chapter of the *Gesta Regum Sclavorum* (hereafter *GRS*).⁵ Although this source was later contaminated by several cultural layers of the western Balkans traditions, the transcription of the name in the form of Svätomir is logical in view of the theme *-svet*. The same theme is not only found in the names of his son Svätopluk, but is also apparently the basis for the personal name Svätožizna. Since the time of Václav Novotný († 1932), the view that Svätožizna was the first wife of Svätopluk I has become firmly established in historiography.⁶ Svätožizna as a name emerges in two contemporary sources. However, it is not explicitly clear from either of them that she was Svätopluk's wife.⁷ On the contrary, the priority of the theme *-svet* is identical to that of the same theme in the first name Svätopluk. This repetition follows certain principles

⁵ *Gesta Regum Sclavorum* (hereafter *GRS*), vol. 1, ed., trans. and comment. Dragana Kunčer (Beograd: Institut za Istoriju Ostrog Manastir, 2009), columns 30–33a.

⁶ This theory was introduced, not without reason, into historiography by Václav Novotný, *České dějiny*, vol. 1/1 (Praha: Nákladem Jana Laichtera na Král. Vinohradech, 1913), 352–354.

⁷ The first is *the Book of Brotherhood of St. Peter's Abbey in Salzburg*. See *Das Verbrüderungsbuch von St. Peter in Salzburg: vollständige Faksimile-Ausgabe im Originalformat der Handschrift A1 aus dem Archiv von St. Peter in Salzburg*, ed. Karl Forstner (Graz: Akadem. Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1974), 32. Here, the name Svätožizna in the form ...*uuengizigna* appears immediately after the name Svätopluk *Zuuentibald* and before one other name, which could theoretically be understood as the name Wiching, in the form *Uuihi(n?)gh pr(esbiter)*. See Herwig Wolfram, ed., trans. and comment., *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum: das Weißbuch der Salzburger Kirche über die erfolgreiche Mission in Karantainen und Pannonien mit Zusätzen und Ergänzungen* (Ljubljana: Litera Picta, 2012), 292–293. Unfortunately, it is not possible to agree with Wolfram's interpretation that this is Svätopluk's wife. The placement of this information under the heading *Ordo ducum vivorum cum coniugibus et liberis* ("List of living dukes with their wives and children") may at first glance suggest such a solution, but it also refutes it, since the column where the rulers' wives are to be placed also contains the name of the aforementioned priest Wiching. See also edition and commentaries in "*Liber confraternitatum sahsburgensis vetustior Ordo ducum vavorum cum coniugibus et tiberis*/Kniha salzburského bratrstva starší," in *Magna Moraviae Fontes Historici* (hereafter *MMFH*), vol. 3: *Diplomata, epistolae, textus historici varii*, eds. Dagmar Bartoňková and Radoslav Večerka, the 2nd, rev. and expand. ed. (Praha: Koniasch Latin Press, 2011), 295. The second source mentioning Svätožizna is *the Gospel of Cividale (Codex Foroiulensis)*. See "Die Evangelienhandschrift zu Cividale," ed. Conrad Ludwig Bethmann, in *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichte*, vol. 2 (Hannover: Hahn'sche Buchhandlung, 1877), 120. On the fol. 4, there are three names *szuentiepidc. szuentezizna predezlaus*, preceded by *luiching pbr.*, apparently (U)uiching p(res)b(ite)r, i.e. Wiching, priest. See Wolfram, ed. trans. and comment., *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum*, 292–293 and "*Evangelium de Cividale*/Evangelium z Cividale," in *MMFH*, vol. 3, eds. Bartoňková and Večerka, 292.

of mnemonic construction of a system of dynastic names typical for one and the same dynasty. Its inner meaning is to emphasize the heredity and legitimacy of the power of a given family in a given community.⁸ The use of the same principle in two names therefore completely rules out the possibility that they were a married couple. The hypothesis about blood relation between Svätopluk and Svätožizna would also be confirmed by the probable spelling of the name Svätomir, supposed father of Svätopluk according to *GRS*, with the same theme *-svet*, on the first place. Last but not least, the same name Svätomir of the imaginary father of Svätopluk I also connects, through its second theme *-mir*, the historically documented Moravian ruler Moimir I, who was most probably the grandfather of Svätopluk I with Moimir II, the eldest son of Svätopluk I. He also has a son Svätopluk (II) with his second wife, who will be discussed below. This second son was named, unusually, after his living father.⁹ There is still much speculation in historiography about a third possible son of Svätopluk, mentioned only by Constantine Porphyrogenitus in his work,¹⁰ whose name may have been Predslav. It is not known whether these were all of Svätopluk's descendants. *GRS* mentions that Svätopluk "gave life to sons and daughters" (*genuitque filios et filias*). Their names have not been preserved. However, this does not diminish their importance in history. It must be assumed that, as in the case of their better-known female relatives from the Carolingian dynasty, it was they who secured the royal bloodline for the new dynasties, which was so necessary for the contemporary idea of the legitimacy of power.

Where and when Svätopluk was born or how his political career actually began it is not clear from the sources. However, some available data indicate that in 845–846, after the Treaty of Verdun, a great "castling" took place on Louis the German's eastern border. Most probably, when Rastislav was designated to the central Moravian throne, Svätopluk was also appointed to the vacant throne of Nitrian principality. It could happen in the year 846.

⁸ Anna Litvina and Fjodor Uspenskij, "Dynastic Power and Name-Giving Principles in Kievan and Muscovite Rus' (10th–16th Centuries)," *Micrologus*, 25 (2017): 95.

⁹ *GRS*, vol. 1, column 62. "Presbyteri Diocleatis Regnum Sclavorum/Letopis Popa Dukljanina Kralovství Slovanů", in *Magnae Moraviae fontes historici* (hereafter *MMFH*), vol. 1: *Annales et chronicae*, eds. Dagmar Bartoňková and comp. the 3rd ed. (Praha: KLP, 2019), 245.

¹⁰ Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, ed. Gyula Moravcsyk and transl. Romilly James Heald Jenkins, 2nd edition (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1967), 181.

A much-discussed source *Gesta regum Sclavorum* could indirectly testify to such a beginning of his political career. According to the text of this source, Svätopluk ruled for forty years and four months.¹¹ If this time is subtracted from the known date of Svätopluk's death in 894, then the beginning of his political career can most likely be dated to the mid-fifties of the ninth century.

Another issue is, where did Svätopluk's realm actually begin? There is no precise historical data on this, but most likely, the urban agglomeration of Nitra really was the center of Svätopluk's power.¹² Due to the latter written tradition given by Bohemian (Czech) chronicler Cosmas of Prague, one can assume it was the place Svätopluk would stay more permanently. In other words, Nitra might be his capital. The assumption that Nitra was the center of his power could also be confirmed by the fact that the city was also the seat of Wiching, a Swabian Benedictine, the first bishop of Nitra and Svätopluk's long-time confidant.

In 869, Svätopluk entered the scene of history by his own name when the Frankish annalists made note of him as a significant political figure.

In August King Louis gathered his troops and divided the army into three parts. The first he sent under his namesake [Louis the Younger] with the Thuringians and Saxons to crush the presumption of the Sorbs. He ordered the Bavarians to assist Carloman, who wished to fight against Zwentibald [Svätopluk], the nephew of Rastiz [Rastislav]. He himself kept the Franks and Alemans with him to fight against Rastiz. When it was already time to set out he fell ill, and was compelled to leave the leadership of the army to Charles, his youngest son and commend the outcome to God. Charles, when he came with the army with which he had been entrusted to Rastiz's huge fortification, quite unlike any built in olden times, with God's help burnt with fire all the walled fortifications of the region, seized and carried off the treasures which had been hidden in the woods or buried in the fields, and killed or put to flight all who came against him. Carloman also laid waste the territory [regnum / realm] of Zwentibald, Rastiz's nephew, with fire and war. When the whole region had been laid waste the brothers Charles and Carloman came together and

¹¹ *GRS*, vol. 1, column 60. "Presbyteri Diocleatis Regnum Sclavorum", 245.

¹² Dušan Třeštík, *Počátky Přemyslovců: Vstup Čechů do dějin (530–935)* (Praha: Lidové noviny, 1997), 279: "We do not know exactly where Svätopluk's regnum was located. The Nitra Principality is usually thought of in this respect, but it is not certain." On the other hand, he writes: "However, we can locate Rastislav's regnum relatively precisely."

congratulated each other on the victories bestowed by heaven. Meanwhile, Louis, their brother, came against the Sorbs, and after he had killed a few, forced the rest to turn and run. Many of them were killed, and the Bohemians, whom the Sorbs had brought to fight for pay, were partly killed, partly forced to return to their homes with dishonor, and the remainder surrendered.¹³

It is in connection with a large expedition Louis the German undertakes against misbehaving Rastislav (*Rastiz*). The south wing of this expedition was entrusted to the eldest son of Louis II the German, Carloman. Prefect and Duke of Carantania. Carloman attacked Svätopluk's *regnum* from this direction. There are not many possibilities he could have attacked from other than the south, i.e. from the friendly part of the empire, where another Slavic prince Kocel of Pannonia was still active at that time. As is well known, the Principality of Pannonia was created by removing it from the political jurisdiction of the Duchy of Carinthia.¹⁴ Moreover, this Pannonian ruler Kocel, cannot be said to have been friendly to the Moimirids. If only because the Moravians killed his father Pribina in 860.¹⁵ This also clearly shows that the *Regnum Zuentibaldi* which Carolman invaded was located north of the Danube and east of the Small and White Carpathians (*Malé Karpaty*, *Biele Karpaty*) and can be reliably identified with the Principality of Nitra.¹⁶ The same source (*the Annals of Fulda*) subsequently in the year 870 even implies what competencies there Svätopluk had about him.

¹³ *The Annals of Fulda: Ninth-Century History*, vol. II, trans. and ed. Timothy Reuter (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 1992), 60. “*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*”, in *MMFH*, vol. 1, eds. Bartoňková and comp., 67–112 (here p. 82–83).

¹⁴ Matej Klika, “Pannonia as a Space and the Importance of Pribina in the Integration Process of the Pannonian Area into the Frankish Empire”, in *Slovakia and Croatia*, vol. I: *Historical Parallels and Connections until 1780*, eds. Martin Homza, Ján Lukačka and Neven Budak (Bratislava and Zagreb: Department of Slovak History, 2013), 49–59 and older text by Charles R. Bowlus, “The Military Organisation of Carinthia and Pannonia (818–846)”, in *Gesellschaftsgeschichte: Festschrift für Karl Bosl zum 80. Geburtstag*, vol. 1, ed. Ferdinand Seibt (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1988), 168–178.

¹⁵ “The Conversion of the Bavarians and the Carantanians,” trans. John Eldevik. https://www.academia.edu/37973825/The_Conversion_of_the_Bavarians_and_Carinthians.docx (accessed: November 9, 2025). For a deeper insight into this issue, see Wolfram, ed., trans. and comment., *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum*, 320.

¹⁶ Steinhübel, *The Nitrian Principality*, 186–188. The author even considers Svätopluk as a co-ruler of Rastislav in Great Moravia.

12 Martin Homza

Zwentibald [Svätopluk], Rastiz's [Rastislav's] nephew, took thought for his own interests, and commended himself and the kingdom he held to Carloman.¹⁷

There must be an understanding that in connection with this expedition Svätopluk concludes a separate peace agreement with Carloman. It is also understandable, Rastislav reproaches Svätopluk for having concluded that separate peace. It resulted in the mentioned internal conflict between them, which ended up with Svätopluk handing over Rastislav to the East-Frankish King Louis the German. How this came about is described in one of the most adventurous stories ever told in *The Annals of Fulda* by the year 870. It is therefore worth quoting it here.

Rastiz [Rastislav] was furious at this and laid ambushes in secret for his nephew [Svätopluk]; he plotted to strangle him at a banquet when he was not suspecting any attack. But by the grace of God he was freed from the peril of death. For before those who were to kill him had entered the house, he was warned by one who knew of the plot, and set out as if to go hawking, and so evaded the ambush laid for him. Rastiz saw that his plot was revealed and followed after his nephew with soldiers to capture him. But by the just judgement of God he was caught in the snare he had set, for he was captured by his nephew, bound and brought to Carloman, who sent him under a guard of soldiers to Bavaria lest he should escape and had him kept in prison until he could be brought to the king's [Louis the German] presence.¹⁸

What the Conclusion of a Separate Peace Between Svätopluk and Carloman Reveals

Reality that Svätopluk made a separate peace first of all proves he had the authority to do so. This also speaks of the relationship between Nitria and Moravia. To describe it, let me quote the eternal "enfant terrible" of Slovak historiography of the last third of the nineteenth century, Jonáš Záborský († 1876). Záborský whose relations of the Nitrian principality to

¹⁷ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 62 and "Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské," 84.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

the Morava principality compared to Poland's relationship with Russia in his time, i.e. "a never ending and incurable ulcer that torments the body".¹⁹

Imprisonment of Svätopluk I. and Ascension to the Central Princely Seat of the Moravians

In the same year 870 Rastislav was sentenced to death, but after the pardon granted by the East-Frankish king Louis the German himself, the prince of Moravia was blinded and confined in a monastery.²⁰ But also Svätopluk was imprisoned. The situation in Moravia becomes very opaque. For new administrators, new imperial margraves arrived. One of them was William I, the other Engelschalk I. Both brothers came from the influential Bavarian Wilhelminers kindred, which was apparently related by blood to the Pribinas.²¹ The duplication of offices once more indicates the dual character of Great Moravia. Otherwise, one would have been enough. Moreover, as it was Kocel who should have been given Nitria for it was his original property because of his father Pribina's heritage. The fact that he did not, highlights something else: The East-Frankish Empire had learned that strengthening one party – Moravia – at the expense of the other – Nitria – could easily backfire. So, the East-Franks made a Solomonic decision. That solution was, indeed, sending William and Engelschalk I who most probably were not only related to Kocel,²²

¹⁹ Jonáš Záborský, *Dejiny Kráľovstva Uhorského od počiatku do časov Žigmundových*, ed. Timotej Kubiš. (Bratislava: Slovart, 2012), 24.

²⁰ *History and Politics in Late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe: The Chronicle of Regino of Prüm and Adalbert of Magdeburg*, trans. and ed. Simon MacLean (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2009), 170: "[Louis the German] ordered him [Rastislav] to be blinded and put into a monastery".

²¹ Hans Dieter Tönsmeier, "[...] *in castro Chezilonis noviter Mosapurc vocato* [...]": Die Beziehungen des pannonischen Fürsten Kozel zu Bayern und der Beginn der Ethnogenese der Slowaken," *Zeitschrift für Bayerische Kirchengeschichte*, 76 (2007): 37–77 and id., "Die Fürsten von Nitra und ihre Beziehungen zur bayerischen Hauptstadt Regensburg im 8. und 9. Jahrhundert: eine frühe Manifestation der Ethnogenese der Slowaken," *Zeitschrift für bayerische Kirchengeschichte*, 90 (2021), 1–28.

²² For more details see Hans Dieter Tönsmeier, "[...] *in castro Chezilonis noviter Mosapurc vocato* [...]": 37–77 and id., "Die Fürsten von Nitra und ihre Beziehungen zur bayerischen Hauptstadt Regensburg": 1–28. Recently see: Florin Curta and Sébastien Rossignol, *Medieval East Central and East Europe* (Toronto/Buffalo/London: University of Toronto Press, 2025), 47.

but they also represented his policy. This assumption about the cooperation between Carloman's line of Carolingians and representatives of the Pribinas and Wilhelminers is also supported by other information from a later period. Namely, in the 880s, when Kocel was most possibly already dead and Arnulf son of Carloman was in possession of all Carantanian principality, Arnulf appointed the sons of William II and Engelschalk II as the new administrators of Pannonian Transdanubia. The situation in Moravia itself looked grim from the perspective of the Moravian Slavs in 870. There was no potential successor to Moimirids. In the difficult situation in which the Moravians found themselves, a man named Slavomir (*Sclagamar*) appeared. Slavomir was a priest. He was ordained before St. Constantine and Methodius arrived or before both of Slavic missionaries went to Rome. Therefore, he was one of those Franco-Slavic clergymen, like St. Gorazd and others. Being a priest, Slavomir was asked by the Moravians – to rise up against the ruling Frankish power. Slavomir concocted a huge uprising, which forced the East-Frankish king to release Svätopluk. With this new circumstance in the year 871, Carloman went with Svätopluk to straighten things out in Moravia. What happened next? Svätopluk defected from the side of the Franks to the side of the Moravians. Here, too, the testimony of *the Annals of Fulda* is very telling:

Immediately he [Svätopluk] denied his fidelity and forgot his oath, in Slavic fashion, and turned his thought and his powers not to driving out Sclagamar [Slavomir] but to revenging the injury which Carloman had done him. Then he attacked in great force the Bavarians' camp – they suspected no evil and had were not keeping a sharp watch. He took many alive as prisoners, and killed the rest, except for a few who had prudently left the camp beforehand.²³

The First Slavic Alliances of Svätopluk I

Subsequently Svätopluk sided with the Moravians and became their ruler. On the one hand, the Moravians choose him among themselves to be their prince (*knieža* / *кѣнѣзѣ*). On the other hand, however, the *Pax Francorum* / *Pax*

²³ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 65–66 and “*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*,” 86–87.

Francica (the Frankish Peace)²⁴ makes it necessary for elected princes – and this applies also to the Moimirids – to be recognized by the empire as well. It was not so easy for Svätopluk to gain such recognition.

In an attempt to restore the previous *status quo*, the East-Franks first undertook a series of military expeditions. First of all, the Czechs (Bohemians) took part in them in coalition with the Moravians. This could point to some close Moravian-Bohemian relations. In this respect, *The Royal Frankish Annals* mention a “a wedding” among the Moravian Slavs sometimes around the end of autumn 871. The bride was to be “the daughter of a Bohemian dux”.²⁵

The question has been thematized in historiography, especially in the nineteenth/twentieth century. Although there is no evidence that this was the marriage of Moravian Svätopluk and Czech Svätožizna, this idea has taken hold in historiography, as I pointed out above. There are scientists even today, who not only find it obvious that this was the case, but build further nonsensical conclusions on this whole fanciful hypothesis.²⁶ Thus, the Czechs sided with Svätopluk in 872. And it is also known that even in the following years Svätopluk remained victorious in the military confrontation with Carloman. Later, still in the first half of 874, also the Lusatian Serbs and another Polabian Slavic tribe – the *Siusli* (Suselci) rebelled against the East Franconian Empire, which in all likelihood was due to the previous military successes of Svätopluk.²⁷

Looking at the situation Louis the German had with his sons – Louis the Younger, Carloman and Charles – as well as with other centrifugal forces he had to face, it is obvious that at one point Louis the German had no choice but to make peace with Svätopluk. Interestingly, a foreigner, priest (*presbyter*) John of Venice (*Johannes de Venetiis*) – apparently in the service of the Pope –

²⁴ For some general idea of the Carolingian world order, see Marios Costambeys, Matthew Innes and Simon MacLean, *The Carolingian World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), chapter “Inventing the Carolingian Empire: Politics and Government, 800–840”.

²⁵ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 66–67 and “*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldké*,” 88.

²⁶ Steinhübel, *The Nitrian Principality*, 210–211. The author not only knows that this bride was Svätožizna, but also that she came from the family of the Premyslids and her brother was the first baptized Bohemian prince, the semi-legendary Borivoj. Against this bold assertion, however, are the *Annals of Fulda* themselves, which in their ninth-century archetype do not recognize any Borivoj. See English translation of this source, which by the year 872 mentions the following Bohemian princes *Zwentislan*, *Witislán*, *Heriman*, *Spoitimar*, and *Moyslán* as five Bohemian *duces* and allies of Svätopluk (*The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 68).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 68–73 and “*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldké*,” 89–91.

is given the task to negotiate this peace. The same man supposedly managed to get St. Methodius out of prison in Bavaria a year earlier. St. Methodius subsequently took over his Pannonian archbishopric and Svätopluk and his Moravians "...entrusted to him all the churches and clergy in all the towns."²⁸

The Treaty of Forchheim in 874: the Recognition of Svätopluk as a Prince of the Moravians by King Louis the German

The conclusion of the Forchheim contract determined not only the rule of Svätopluk, but also the development of Central Europe for centuries to come.²⁹

[King Louis II the German] spoke with Carloman and Louis [III the Younger/ the Saxon] his sons in the villa of Forchheim and there he received the ambassadors of Zwentibald [Svätopluk] who sought peace and promised fidelity. The head of the embassy was John, a priest of Venice, who even confirmed whatever he said with an oath so that the king might have all doubt removed and believe what he said, namely that Zwentibald would remain faithful to the king all the days of his life and would pay the tribute ordained by the king annually, if he were only allowed to live peacefully and rule quietly. The king also heard the messengers of the Bohemians and gave them leave to depart, and after this he took himself to Bavaria.³⁰

Despite the fact that there is a relatively extensive amount of secondary literature,³¹ regarding the issue of the peace treaty between Louis II the German and Svätopluk, I will take the liberty of simplifying the matter. Svätopluk, represented by John of Venice, formally promised to submit his *regnum* to Louis

²⁸ "The Life of Methodius," in *Medieval Slavic Lives of Saints and Princes*, ed. and trans. Marvin Kantor (Michigan [MI]: Michigan University Press, 1983), 119 and "Žitije Mefodija/Život Metodějův", in *MMFH*, vol. 2, the 2nd edition, ed. Dagmar Bartoňková and Radoslav Večerka (Praha: KLP, 2010), 133.

²⁹ Lubomír E. Havlík, "The Relationship between the Great Moravian Empire and the Papal Court in the Years 880–885," *Byzantinoslavica*, 26, no. 1 (1965): 100–122.

³⁰ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 75 and "Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské," 91 (here also other secondary literature to the topic of the Treaty of Forchheim).

³¹ See Havlík, "Velká Morava a Franská říše," *Historické štúdie*, 8 (1963): 129–180 and footnote no. 543 in the "Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské," 91–92.

the German, which was confirmed with a pledge to pay annual tribute³² to the East Frankish Empire. It is precisely this treaty (which promised Svätopluk's personal fidelity³³) – which guarantees an East-Frankish ruler stability on his eastern border up to his death and the same treaty which enables Svätopluk to attack the areas that are not considered to be part of the empire. Svätopluk apparently preferred to exchange peace in the west for continued expansion in the east. In the end, he was not alone. Roughly only eight decades later, the same pattern would be followed by Boleslav I the Cruel of the Premysl dynasty. Another sixty years later, Boleslav I the Brave of the Piast dynasty would follow in their footsteps. And so, this scenario was repeated by the kings of Hungary and later on in Polish history.³⁴ There was a plan to spread Poland to the east made by Marshal Józef Piłsudski in the Polish-Soviet War (1918–1923). A stable border with the Frankish Empire allowed Svätopluk to gain control over “no man's land” in the north, northeast, and southeast of his empire. Some sentences from *The Life of St. Methodius* well characterizes a new quality of the period that came after the Treaty of Forchheim according to the optics of the Moravians:

And Prince Svätopluk and all the Moravians received him [St. Methodius]. They entrusted to him all the churches and clergy in all the towns. And from that day forth, God's teachings grew greatly and the clergy multiplied in all the towns. And for that reason the Moravians began to grow and multiply, and the pagans to believe in the true God, casting aside their lies. And the Province of Moravia began to expand much more into all lands and to defeat its enemies successfully, as they themselves are always relating.³⁵

³² The issue of the payment of tribute by the Czechs to the Frankish Empire was last discussed by Dušan Třeštík. See Třeštík, *Počátky Přemyslovců*, 69–73.

³³ *Fidelitas* (“fidelity”) is a key term that can help understand how the Carolingian monarchy functioned in the ninth century. In the truest sense of the word: “personal fidelity was seen as the social glue that would hold the empire together.” See: Costambeys, Innes and MacLean, *The Carolingian World*, 185: “Fidelity was seen as the social glue that would hold the empire together.” See also Susan Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 31–38.

³⁴ See my study on this subject: Martin Homza, “O niekoľkých prienikoch *Haličsko-volynskej kroniky* s uhorskou a poľskou kronikárskou spisbou 13. storočia,” in *Haličsko-volynská kronika: Neznáme rozprávanie o rodine kráľov a kniežat východo-strednej Európy*, ed. and trans. Martin Homza a Nora Malinová (Martin: Libri Historiae and Matica slovenská, 2019), 23–50.

³⁵ “The Life of Methodius,” in *Medieval Slavic Lives*, ed. and trans. Marvin Kantor, 119 and “*Žitije Metodija/Život Metodějův*,” in *MMFH*, vol. 2, ed. Bartoňková and Večerka, 133.

There must be an understanding that any war needs to have some legal basis – today and back then. The official justification for this massive campaign, as in the case of Charlemagne, was the spread of Christianity. One can say that in Forchheim, Svätopluk was given the Carolingian rights to spread Christianity to areas where Christianity had not yet been permanently rooted. From *The Life of St. Methodius* it is possible to deduce what precise areas these were. The given description corroborates expansion of Svätopluk I after 874:

A very powerful pagan prince settled on the Vistula and began mocking the Christians and doing evil. Communicating with him, Methodius said: 'My son, it would be better for you to be baptized of your own will in your own land, so that you will not have to be baptized against your will as a prisoner in a foreign land; and remember me. And so it came to pass'.³⁶

There are some scientists who question the conquest of the Vistulian principality by Svätopluk's Moravians after 874. Indeed, the text contained in *The Life of Saint Methodius* is not entirely precise in this regard. However, a number of other indirect pieces of evidence and indications confirm that this did happen.³⁷ In the first place, archaeological research has found Great Moravian imports in Transnistria, at the Dnipro River Valley in Ukraine and even along the Upper Volga and Oka valleys.³⁸ Which confirms the presence of the Moravians on these territories in the late ninth century or at least

³⁶ "The Life of Methodius," in *Medieval Slavic Lives*, ed. and trans. Marvin Kantor, 121 and "Žitije Mefodija/Život Metodějův", in *MMFH*, vol. 2, ed. Bartoňková and Večerka, 134. Wording of the source clearly shows that the Moravians already had their own oral tradition and talked about their glorious victories.

³⁷ Jacek Poleski, "Contacts between the Great Moravian Empire and the tribes of Lesser Poland – a short episode or common roots?," in *The Cyril and Methodius Mission and Europe – 1150 Years Since the Arrival of the Thessaloniki Brothers in Great Moravia*, ed. Pavel Kouřil (Brno: Archeologický ústav Akademie věd ČR, 2014/2015), 182–199 (the summary to the discussion see p. 182). A separate issue that cannot be addressed here due to space constraints is the spread of rotunda-type church buildings. See László Daragó, Balázs Máté and Géza Varga, "Analysis of Medieval Rotundas in the Former Kingdom of Hungary Considering Central European Corresponding Monuments," in *Periodica Polytechnica Architecture*, 51, no. 2 (2020): 124–141. However, I provisionally assume that their earliest layer of spreading is related to the expansionist and Christianization policy of Svätopluk I and St. Methodius. It would be a materialization of their current power.

³⁸ Svetlana Rjabceva, "The Contact of Great Moravia with Eastern Europe," 162–169.

confirm some cultural and commercial contacts with the Moravians. Cracow, Wiślica, the region of the future Chervyen / Červenské (Red Ruthenian) castles, is a quite logical direction for Svätopluk's expansion in the first stage of his reign, which can be framed by the years 874–882.

From an economic point of view, this area was particularly interesting to the Moravians as a source of slaves, furs, etc. That means for Svätopluk to gain his share of trade on the route later by the historians identified as "trade route between Europe (Cordoba / Regensburg) and the Abbasid Caliphate passed via the Khazar Khaganate".³⁹ It is a large part of the Silk Road, which goes to Baghdad and continues further to China.⁴⁰ Of course, Svätopluk also wanted to have a share of this route to himself and the Treaty of Forchheim gave him the rights he needed to do so.⁴¹

As an alternative to Svätopluk's expansion to the northeast, there is the direction of the Tisa River basin. These areas were also still unbaptized. However, the ruler of the Moravian Slavs may also have been attracted by the salt reserves there. By gaining control over its extraction, Svätopluk could free himself from economic dependence on the East Frankish Empire, as salt was one of the strategic raw materials of the world at that time and Salzburg strictly guarded its salt monopoly on the Danube route. However, penetrating the eastern slopes of the Carpathian Mountains threatened potential conflict with the first Bulgarian tsardom.⁴² Today's science basically has no doubt that the Moravians eventually gained some form of control over certain areas of present-day Transylvania. However, the chronology and the scope of this

³⁹ For the significance of this trade, see Thomas S. Noonan, "Some Observations on the Economy of the Khazar Khaganate," in *The World of the Khazars: New Perspectives: Selected Papers from the Jerusalem 1999 International Khazar Colloquium hosted by the Ben Zvi Institute*, ed. Peter B. Golden, Haggai Ben-Shammai and András Róna-Tas (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007), 207–244.

⁴⁰ See Ibn-Khordadbeh, "Książka dróg i prowincji (Kitāb al Masālik w'al Mamālik)," in *Źródła arabskie do dziejów Słowiańszczyzny*, vol. 1, ed. Tadeusz Lewicki and Franciszek Kupfer (Wrocław/Warszawa/Kraków: Ossolineum, 1956), 77, where you can find a detailed analysis of the entire journey from Spain to China.

⁴¹ Ján Pauliny, ed., trans. and comment., *Arabské správy o Slovanoch (9.–12. storočie)* (Bratislava: Veda, 1999), 8. (See especially the account by Ibn-Khordadbeh, *The Book of Roads and Kingdoms*, 92–96.)

⁴² Peter Ratkoš, "K otázke hraníc Veľkej Moravy a Bulharska," *Historický časopis*, 3 (1955): 206–218 and Matúš Kučera, "Veľká Morava a Bulharský štát (k politicko-teritoriálnym vzťahom)," *Historica: Zborník Filozofickej fakulty Univerzity Komenského*, 37, (1981): 15–45.

dominance remains unclear. The exact border between Bulgaria and the then Moimirids monarchy is not clear. Whether the Moravian Slavs managed to control any of the salt mines (Turda, Ocna Mureș, Praid, Dej) it is not clear. However, it is likely that they at least controlled the lower reaches of the Mureș and Criș rivers. The border would then be the Bihor Mountains, also known as the Apuseni.⁴³

The Meaning and Functions of the first Archbishopric of the Slavs

Peace between Louis II the German and Svätopluk I was mediated by the Papal curia. The representation of Svätopluk's side by papal legate John of Venice during negotiations in Forchheim testifies to Moravian ruler's positive relationship with the Papacy. It materialized in the form of a special ecclesiastical province. The fact that Svätopluk obtained his own archbishopric indicates that he fulfilled all the conditions necessary for him and his *regnum* to be considered part of the great Latin and Christian world – *Imperium Christianum*. The other mutual benefits of this alliance were to become apparent in a short time.

Establishing the first Slavic Church metropolis was in opposition to previous imperial ecclesiastical Christian policy in this part of the world. The author of *The Life of St. Methodius* put it in a single sentence, which St. Methodius is said to have uttered in his defense at the memorable trial conducted against him by the Bavarian bishops. When they offended him: “‘You are teaching in our territory.’ St. Methodius answered: ‘If I had known it was yours, I would have remained far away; but it is Saint Peter’s.’”⁴⁴ The first Archbishop of the Slavs here spoke in accordance with the contemporary idea of Roman policy whose main aim in Central Europe was the restoration of the former Ecclesiastical Province of Illyricum.⁴⁵

⁴³ Alexandru Madgearu, “Salt Trade and Warfare: The Rise of the Romanian-Slavic Military Organization in Early Medieval Transylvania,” in *East Central & Eastern Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Florin Curta (Ann Arbor [MI]: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 103–120.

⁴⁴ “The Life of Methodius,” in *Medieval Slavic Lives*, ed. and trans. Marvin Kantor, 117 and “*Žitije Metodija/Život Metodějův*,” in *MMFH*, vol. 2, ed. Bartoňková and Večerka, 131.

⁴⁵ See for instance František Dvorník, “Metodova diecéza a boj o Illyricum,” in *Ríša Vel'komoravská: Sborník vedeckých prác*, ed. Ján Stanislav (Praha: Leopold Mazáč, 1933), 162–225.

The other unmistakable aspect of the new quality in Central Europe, which can be dated from the release of St. Methodius from Bavarian internment in 873 to his death in 885, is that the Illyrian province was restored by Rome in a new guise. This was the recognition of the use of Old Church Slavonic in the Holy Liturgy. For a certain period of time, this aspect significantly distinguished Svätopluk's *regnum* culturally from the unifying tendencies of the Latin West. Old Church Slavonic proved to be not only a successful tool for evangelization, but also for political and Church integration and over all a symbol of specific Slavic cultural identity. The cooperation between the Slavic ruler and the archbishop confirmed by the Holy See will set a precedent for other Slavic rulers willing to follow the example of Svätopluk and St. Methodius in the years and centuries to come.

A few words about Pope John VIII's bull *Industriae Tuae*

The successes of Svätopluk I in the military-political sphere and in spreading Christianity did not go unnoticed by the successors of St. Peter in Rome. The best evidence of this is a letter known as *Industriae Tuae*, i.e. "Your zeal", which Pope John VIII wrote to Svätopluk in 880.⁴⁶ I devote myself to a detailed analysis of this letter, which has several levels, elsewhere.⁴⁷ Here, I will only mention that this text, in the history of the Papacy up to that point, unusually evaluates Svätopluk's achievements by accepting him as his "beloved" (*dilectus*) and even "the sole son" (*unicus filius*) under the special papal patronage of St. Peter. John VIII does not ignore the fact that this happened only after Svätopluk "despised the rulers of this world." This was undoubtedly a mutually beneficial interaction.⁴⁸ The newly established alliance with the Holy See meant the definitive integration of the Danube Slavs into

⁴⁶ *Codex diplomaticus et epistolaris Slovaciae* (thereafter *CDSI*), vol. 1, ed. Richard Marsina (Bratislava: Veda, 1974), no. 30, 23–24. The best recent analysis of this letter see Madallena Betti, *The Making of Christian Moravia (858–882): Papal Power and Political Reality* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 185–191. (p. 191: "John VIII's innovative and courageous choice enhanced the political authority of the new Slavic ruler, making his prerogatives equal to those of the Carolingian kings.")

⁴⁷ Martin Homza, "Vznik strednej Európy: pápežstvo a Svätopluk I.," *Slovenský časopis historický*, 5, no. 1 (2025): 3–43.

⁴⁸ Lubomír E. Havlík, "The Roman Privilege 'Industriae tuae' for Moravia," *Cyrrilomethodianum*, 7 (1983): 23–37.

the union of contemporary European *Christianitas*. For Svätopluk and his people, however, this meant nothing more and nothing less than that he was beginning to free himself from political dependence on the East Frankish Empire. Although Svätopluk always expressed a favorable attitude towards the East Frankish Empire, he derived his legal rights from the Papacy.

At the same time Rome's policy towards Svätopluk was not so unusual in the ninth century. The popes acted similarly in the case of the Bulgarian king Boris⁴⁹ and the Croatian prince Branimir,⁵⁰ but also in the case of Alfred the Great of England.⁵¹ In short, this relationship of patronage is not exclusive. But within the *Imperium Christianum*, it does give preference to the authority of the pope over that of the emperor.

Although there are certain differences between the privileges mentioned, it is clear that they form part of a longer-term strategy in papal policy. This was already evident in the document *Dagome iudex*, in which the Polish prince Mieszko I received papal protection over the emerging Poland.⁵² It is not entirely clear how, at the beginning of the eleventh century, the restored kingdom in the middle Danube, known as the Kingdom of Pannonia (Hungary), came under the patronage of the Holy See. However, I consider it certain that without the legal precedent of the letter *Industriae Tuae* to Svätopluk I, this would never have happened. Thanks to this document, at the end of the ninth century, a new respected Christian ruler and with him a new Slavic monarchy took root on the map of Europe. As I have attempted to indicate in brief above,

⁴⁹ Havlík, "The Slavic Balkan States in the 9th Century – The Foreign Political Situation of Croatia and Bulgaria between Byzantium, the Papacy and the Franks," in *Rapports et rapp. tchecoslovaques pour le IV^e Congres de l'Assoc. Internat. d'etudes du sud-est europeen*, ed. Karel Herman and Jozef Vladár (Praha: Ústav československých a světových dějin ČSAV, 1979), 93–105.

⁵⁰ John Van Antwerp Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Sixth to the Late Twelfth Century* (Michigan [MI]: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 261. See also Mate Zekan, "Branimir's Croatia in the Letters of Pope John VIII (Fragment of a Study)," *Most*, no. 1–2, (1990): 276–281. See also Betti, *The Making of Christian Moravia*, 130–131.

⁵¹ *The Anglo-Saxons Chronicle*, trans. James Ingram (London: 1823), according *The Project Gutenberg Etext of The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, AD 883*, <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/657/pg657-images.html> (accessed February 20, 2025). See also Richard Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (London and New York: Longman, 1998), 395 pages (here 176–193 and 190–91).

⁵² Przemysław Urbańczyk, *Mieszko Pierwszy Tajemniczy* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2012), 369–386.

this had a decisive historical and legal significance for the development of Europe.⁵³

Getting back to Svätopluk, the same policy has allowed him to reach a stable balance between the West and the South, or/and East. In other words, on the one hand he remained part of the Western Latin universe, but on the other hand he derived the legitimacy of his royal power from the Roman Holy See in Rome, not from Imperial Aachen.⁵⁴

Svätopluk and the East-Frankish Kingdom

In order to maintain this balance, Svätopluk had to strictly adhere to the provisions of the Forchheim treaty. And indeed, while Louis the German lived – he died in 876 – Svätopluk complied with the terms of their agreement. In the same year 876 Carloman, son of Louis II, ascended the throne of the East Frankish Empire. Under his sovereign rule, according to the *Chronicle by Reginon of Prüm* representing the thinking of the contemporary Frankish Empire, – Bohemia, Moravia, Carinthia, and Pannonia were to belong to the East Frankish Empire.⁵⁵ Carloman did not live long. He died in 880. *The Royal Frankish Annals* mention that when Carloman marched against his relative and emperor Charles the Bald to Italy in 877, there were Bavarians and “various Slav peoples” in his army.⁵⁶ It is likely that his army consisted mainly of Slavs from their own Moravian and Nitrian principalities.

Svätopluk Becomes a Member of the Carolingian Kindred

Such a scenario could be justified by the newly established family ties between Svätopluk and Carloman. Many may find it strange and surprising

⁵³ Betti, *The Making of Christian Moravia*, 190–191: “John VIII’s innovative and courageous choice enhanced the political authority of the new Slavic ruler, making his prerogatives equal to those of the Carolingian kings.”

⁵⁴ Havlík, “Velká Morava a Franská říše,” 129–180 and Havlík, “The Relationship between the Great Moravian Empire and the Papal Court,” 100–122.

⁵⁵ *History and Politics in Late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe*, 177 and “Reginonis abbatis Prumiensis Chronicon / Kronika průmskeho opata Reginona,” in *MMFH*, vol. 1, eds. Bartoňková and comp., 120.

⁵⁶ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 82–83 and “*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*,” 92.

to call Svätopluk – one of the Moimirids – a Carolingian. This could be seen particularly in the complex relationships with the Duke of Carinthia, later King of East Francia and Emperor Arnulf, son of Carloman. The familiar relationship between Svätopluk and Arnulf can be documented at a minimum in two and maximum three ways.⁵⁷

The first and the second can be found in the testimony of Regino of Prüm, a chronicler of the late Frankish Empire:

In fact, he [Svätopluk I] raised from the holy font Arnulf's son, who was born to him by a concubine, and named him Zwentibald after him.⁵⁸

The ruler of the Moravian Slavs was to become the godfather of the eldest son of the Duke of Carinthia. The boy was even given a baptismal name – Zwentibold, which is a Germanized form of the Slavic prince's personal name Svätopluk. In this case, one can speak about spiritual family relationships arising from baptism (*spiritualis cognatio*) between them. This resulted in an “adoptive” integration of Svätopluk into the spiritual kindred of the Eastern Carolingians, which had legal and social consequences. Svätopluk became a spiritual relative of Arnulf, which symbolically elevated his status to that of other Carolingians. So, he was not a Carolingian by birth, but through this spiritual bond and political gesture, he was elevated to the level of their closest allies.

It is quite telling that no one⁵⁹ did not sufficiently assess the significance and solemnity of this ecclesiastical-legal act, and even Simon MacLean, the

⁵⁷ See Heinz Dopsch, “Arnolf und der Südosten – Karantaniern, Mähren, Ungarn,” in *Kaiser Arnolf. Das ostfränkische Reich am ende des 9. Jahrhundert*, eds. Franz Fuchs and Peter Schmid (München: Beck, 2002), 143–186 and Herwig Wolfram, *Arnulf von Kärnten. Eine biographische Skizze* (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2024), 19–26.

⁵⁸ *History and Politics in Late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe*, 207 and “Reginonis abbatis Prumiensis Chronicon,” 123.

⁵⁹ German historiography has focused more on the fact that this was the first instance of a godfather's name being transferred to his godchild in the Western Church. This custom was previously known only in the Eastern Christian tradition. See Michael Mitterauer, *Traditionen der Namensgebung: Namenkunde als interdisziplinäres Forschungsgebiet* (Wien/Köln/Weimar: Böhlau, 2011), 39 and 106. See also Gerd Althoff, “Zur Bedeutung der Bündnisse Svatopluku von Mähren mit Franken,” in *Symposium Methodianum: Beiträge der internationalen Tagung in Regensburg (17. bis 24. April 1985) zum Gedenken an den 1100. Todestag des Hl. Method*, eds. Klaus Trost, Ekkehard Völkl and Erwin Wedel (Neuried: Hieronymus, 1988), 13–21.

latest translator of Regino into English, primarily focused his commentary on the second relation between Arnulf and Svätopluk. It is included in the same passage of Reginon's chronicle: "... he [Arnulf] had been joined to Zwentibald in close friendship,"⁶⁰ i.e. on *gratia familiaritatis*, "the grace of familiarity" between them. It is not entirely clear which of these two bonds was stronger. However, in accordance with Gerd Althoff's opinion, it seems that friendship was enhanced by spiritual kinship also in this case. It seems that one strengthened the other.⁶¹

In addition, historiography or better yet, historical tradition has also preserved a third connection between the Carolingians and the Moimirids, according to which Svätopluk was to marry Arnulf's sister. Whether this really happened is unclear. The only thing that is certain is that the given marriage can be read about relatively late, namely in the first chronicle written in Czech at the beginning of the fourteenth century, also known as the *Chronicle of Dalimil*. It is texted as follows: "*Král moravský cesařovu sestru za sobú jmějieše*" (The Moravian king married the emperor's sister).⁶² It can be said the third bond between Carolingian and Moimirid is possibly just a part of a later fable. But there are some other indications which could prove this relation. The first is included in the Bavarian tradition. The earlier mention of Gisyla, Arnulf's sister, appears in the *Notes on the Bishops of Passau* from the mid-fourteenth century.⁶³ Later *Bavarian Annals* written by humanist historian Johannes Aventinus († 1534). Accordingly this also has Svätopluk to be the husband of Arnulf's sister: "Svätopluk takes a wife Arnulf's sister Gisela."⁶⁴ The second one came from the fact that Arnulf's eldest son took the name of his godfather at his baptism. On the one hand thus, the one and only Slavic princely bithematic name entered the closed system of personal names of the Carolingians. (It seems that this extraordinary event also

⁶⁰ *History and Politics in Late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe*, 207.

⁶¹ Gerd Althoff, *Family, Friends and Followers: Political and Social Bonds in Medieval Europe*, trans. Christopher Carroll (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 84.

⁶² "Kronika takřečeného Dalimila," in *MMFH*, vol. 1, eds. and trans. Bartoňková and comp., 295.

⁶³ See "*Notae de episcopis Pataviensibus/Záznamy o pasovských biskupech*," in *MMFH*, vol. 1, eds. Bartoňková and comp., 261: "... cui [to Svätopluk] imperator Arnulfus sororem suam Gysilam matrimonio legali coniunxerat."

⁶⁴ Aventini "*Annales ducum Boiorum*," in *MMFH*, vol. 1, eds. and trans. Bartoňková and comp., 409.

contributed to the later spread of this name in Western Europe.⁶⁵) On the other hand, Svätopluk I also had a son who was given the baptismal name Svätopluk (II). The situation in which any male descendant in any Slavic dynasty from the ninth to the twelfth century was named after his still-living ancestor, in this case his living father, is unsystematic.⁶⁶ However, it was normal among the Carolingians of the ninth century.⁶⁷ Finally, there are several references in the *Fulda Annals* to the cruel fratricidal war between Moimir II of Moravia and his brother Svätopuk II, which culminated in this event in 899:

Not long after this the Bavarians again confidently invaded the lands of the Moravians and plundered and laid waste wherever they could, and rescued the boy Zwentopulk, the son of the old dux Zwentopulk, from the dungeon of the city in which he was held with his men, set fire to the city, and brought him out of pity back into their own country.⁶⁸

Although the anonymous author does not write about the reasons that Emperor Arnulf had for intervening on behalf of Moimir's younger brother, it is perhaps reasonable to assume that the fate of his potential blood relative (Arnulf's nephew?) may also have played a role.

The question that bears asking is when did such a strong bond between Arnulf and Svätopluk become established? Historians consider two crucial dates. The first one is around the year 876.⁶⁹ The latter, which led to

⁶⁵ Eduard Hlawitschka, "Die Verbreitung des Namens Zwentibold in frühdeutscher Zeit. Personengeschichtliche Beobachtungen und Erwägungen," in *Festschrift für Herbert Kolb zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Klaus Matzel and Hans Gert Roloff (Bern: Peter Lang, 1989), 264–292.

⁶⁶ See for instance Litvina and Uspenskij, "Dynastic Power and Name-Giving Principles," 89. Here also other literature to the topic. For more on the issue of giving personal names, see the here chapter "The Semantic Power of the Name Svätopluk as the Basis for The Legend of Svätopluk".

⁶⁷ Charlemagne did this when he named his second son after himself. See Mitterauer, *Traditionen der Namengebung*, 74.

⁶⁸ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 139 and "*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*," 108.

⁶⁹ Austrian professor Herwig Wolfram assumes in several of his texts that this happened as early as 870. See Wolfram, ed., trans. and comment., *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum*, 294.

the formally recognized annexation of Bohemia, is around 889–890. I am more inclined to accept the first option. As already mentioned, in the same year it is supposed the army of Svätopluk helped Carloman during his military campaign in Italy in 876.

The Political Relationship of Svätopluk and Arnulf of Carinthia

Although it may seem exaggerated to some, the relationship between Arnulf and Svätopluk contributed significantly to how Europe is divided today. For this reason, it is necessary to discuss it in all its complexity and contradictions. While they lived in peace, the whole territory thrived. But when they went into conflict, it ultimately brought destruction to both sides.

It is likely that when Carloman became the *de facto* and *de jure* sovereign ruler of the East Frankish Empire in 876, his eldest son Arnulf acquired the territories previously administered by his father, namely Carinthia and part of Pannonia. It can be said that he began his political career as the Duke of Carinthia and the southwestern neighbor of Svätopluk. In the same year, as I wrote above, one can also assume the beginning of the first phase of their political ties, which, thanks to the family and friendly relationship, can also be characterized as cordial.

It can also be said that between 876 and Carloman's death in 880, the political interests of the two rulers had significantly different priorities. They gained new momentum just after the death of Carloman, when yet another son of Louis the German, Charles III the Fat, ascended to the East Frankish throne. Soon, even became crowned and anointed (*consecratus*) emperor.⁷⁰ The new political situation led Charles III the Fat to seek closer cooperation with Svätopluk in order to weaken his nephew's political aspirations. On the contrary, this indicated Arnulf to seek new allies against Svätopluk.⁷¹ The mutual hostility that resulted from the new balance of power around the middle

⁷⁰ "Annales Bertiniani," ed. Georgius Waitz, in *Monumenta Germaniæ Historica: Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in Usum Scholarum Separatim Editi* (thereafter *SS rer. Germ*), vol. 5 (Hannoveræ: Typis Culemannorum, 1883), 151. *The Annals of St. Bertin: Ninth Century Histories*, vol. 1, trans. and annot. Janet L. Nelson (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 1991), 222.

⁷¹ Simon MacLean, *Kingship and Politics in the Late Ninth Century: Charles the Fat and the End of the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 124–128. Herbert Schutz, *The Carolingians in Central Europe, Their History, Arts, and Architecture: Cultural History of Central Europe, 750–900* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2004), 125–130.

Danube was logically reflected in the domestic matters and foreign affairs of new rivals.

Pannonia ultimately became the bone of contention between the former close (family) friends. The conflict, which finally broke out in 882 and went down in history as the Wilhelminer War, can also be characterized as a struggle between forces representing the politics of Christian universalism and the diverse particularistic interests of powerful families on the eastern periphery of the empire founded at that time in *illo tempore* by Charlemagne and his successors. Svätopluk and Arnulf can be considered major players in this game, as they possessed what in Frankish terminology could be described as special *regna*. However, smaller but influential figures such as Margrave (*comes terminalis*) Aribo and his son Isanrich, or their original relatives and later greatest opponents Wilhelm II and Entgelschalk II, who held the same position, also moved on the chessboard. Svätopluk joined one or the other side in this game according to his own needs and interests.

Charles III the Fat was the last of the Carolingians who managed to renew Charlemagne's dream of a unified Latin power collaborating with Papal Rome – the restored Christian Roman Empire – *Imperium Christianum*. Opposite him stood the particularist-oriented Arnulf, Charles the Fat's nephew. It was him whom after 876, when Kocel, the last member of Pribina dynasty, disappeared from the historical scene, was given privilege to rule also over Pannonian Principality. In this way he became a neighbor of the Bulgarians. The relationship with Bulgaria is, of course, another great concern to Svätopluk himself, for he also had a common border with the Bulgarian Empire somewhere in the Tisa Valley. Therefore, the further development of Svätopluk's policy now also depended on Arnulf's moves in the southeast direction.

The Wilhelminer War and the Incorporation of Pannonia into Svätopluk's *Regnum*

At the beginning of the last third of January 882, Louis the Younger, King of East Francia, died. This death objectively strengthened the position of Charles III the Fat, the last of the living sons of Louis II the German, who also became King of East-Frankish Kingdom. The Carolingians' dream of unifying the empire came true. With the strange man, but at least for a short time.

Around 882, the original balance of power between Svätopluk and Arnulf came to an end. With it, peace in the central Danube region also ended. In that year, Arnulf entrusted the Pannonian March or Eastern March (*Marcha Orientalis*) to Wilhelm II and Engelschalk II. The new margraves came from the Wilhelminer's kindred. As I have already mentioned, the same Wilhelminers were apparently relatives of the Pribina dynasty, mortal enemies of the Moimirids. From the point of view of Svätopluk, who fought against their fathers, coincidentally with the same names Wilhelm and Engelschalk, as the administrator of Moravia during its liberation in 871, such a policy was considered as hostile.⁷² With the same move, Arnulf also took the Pannonian March away from Aribo, who had the support of Charles III the Fat. In this situation, Aribo turned to Svätopluk for help and support and gave him his son Isanrich as a hostage. However, Svätopluk's military operations against the Wilhelminers did not begin immediately. His envoys had to return from the Worms Diet, where they were heard by the emperor in November 882. Here they negotiated legal authorization to begin military activities against the Wilhelminers. The results of Svätopluk's operation must have been drastic. So much so that the anonymous author of the *Annals of Fulda* lamented the fate of that part of the Pannonian March in verse. The surviving members of the clan subsequently sought refuge with Arnulf and became his people (*homines Arnolfi*).⁷³ This was the beginning of the first phase of the Wilhelminer War (882–884), in which Svätopluk earned a reputation, not without reason, as an exceptionally feared but also cruel military leader. *The Annals of Fulda* provide a fairly reliable account of the course of this war. Above all, they state the causes of the second phase of war very precisely. It sounds unbelievable, but among other things, they were also personal in nature and once more concerned the relationship between Svätopluk and Arnulf:

‘You [Arnulf] support my enemies; if you do not send them away, you will not be at peace with me either.’ He [Svätopluk] also made another accusation against him: ‘Your people have treacherously conspired against my life and

⁷² Lubomír Havlík, *Slovanské státní útvary raného středověku politické postavení, společenská a vládní organizace státních útvarů ve východní, střední a jihovýchodní Evropě od 8. do 11. století* (Praha: Academia, 1987), 89.

⁷³ *Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*,” 95–96. Parts of these events are missing in the English translation of the *Annals of Fulda*, trans. by Timothy Reuter.

also against my dominion [regnum] with the Bulgarians, who ravaged his kingdom the previous year. I want you to swear to me that this is not true.⁷⁴

Arnulf's potential alliance with the Bulgarians,⁷⁵ together with the attempted assassination of Svätopluk described in the *Annals of Fulda*, finally led Svätopluk to launch one of the largest military efforts that a Slavic ruler ever led in the ninth century. It took place in two stages, the first of which:

On this the dux [Svätopluk] collected troops from all the Slav lands in a short time and invaded Pannonia with a large army, killing cruelly and inhumanly like a wolf, and destroying and consuming with fire and sword a great part of it...

In the second one:

But in the same year that we set down these things the dux [Svätopluk] again gathered a multitude and brought a hostile army into Pannonia, so that if anything remained from the year before he could now swallow it up completely in his wolf's mouth. For he brought such a multitude on that expedition that in one place his army was seen to pass from the rising to the setting of the sun. He remained with an army of this size in Arnulf's kingdom for twelve days, plundering; then, just as he wished, returned safely, and afterwards also sent some of his army across the Danube.⁷⁶

There are various estimates of how many troops Svätopluk managed to gather for his first campaign against Pannonia.⁷⁷ However, I find the information provided by an anonymous author of the *Fulda Annals* about their origin

⁷⁴ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 109–10 and “*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*,” 96–97.

⁷⁵ Peter Ratkoš, “Východné oblasti Veľkej Moravy a starí Maďari,” in *Konferencia o Veľkej Morave a Byzantskej misii: Brno–Nitra 1.–4. X. 1963* (Nitra: Archeologický ústav Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1963), 105–107.

⁷⁶ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 110 and “*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*,” 96–97.

⁷⁷ Alexander Ruttkay, “Warfare in Great Moravia,” in *The Cyril and Methodius Mission and Europe – 1150 Years Since the Arrival of the Thessaloniki Brothers*, 77: “The mention of Svätopluk's army in Pannonia, which ‘was seen passing through the same place from dawn till dusk’ can also be used with caution as a hypothetical base for calculation of the total size of the armed retinue and the reserve: up to 5,000 equestrians and 15–20,000 foot soldiers.”

“from all regions of the Slavs” (*omni partes Sclavorum*) to be far more important, as it points that Svätopluk became an integrating figure among the Slavic-speaking military elites with a supra-regional character. In the glory that his victories brought him, one must seek one of the sources of the later development of the memory of this ruler.

Svätopluk and the Emperor Charles III the Fat: The Restoration of the Roman Christian Western Universe: the New Construction of Europe

The final result of all these two and half years of ongoing campaigns by Svätopluk was the formal annexation of Pannonia. Up to this point, Svätopluk had always directed his expansion forces into territories beyond the empire. This time, however, he attacks Pannonia, a territory with a long and complex historical, legal and Church tradition, at the moment considered as a part of the East-Frankish Kingdom. The conquest of Pannonia therefore must be seen as a significant violation of the Peace Treaty of Forchheim. It must therefore be reiterated that without the permission of the eldest of the Carolingians, Emperor Charles III the Fat, it could not have happened. Svätopluk met with Emperor Charles III the Fat in Kaumberg, at the place known as *Mons Comianus* to discuss this matter in November 884. The emperor confirmed the territorial gains of the Great Moravian Empire.

The emperor [Charles III the Fat] set out through Bavaria to the east, and coming to the River Tullnbach, had a meeting at Mons Comianus [the Kaumberg near Tulln]. To this there came among others the dux Zwentibald [Svätopluk] with his nobles and became by joining of hands, as is the custom, the emperor's vassal. He swore fidelity to him with an oath that as long as Charles should live he [Svätopluk] would never come into his kingdom with a hostile army.⁷⁸

Even an impartial observer will notice in the fragment “as long as Charles should live he [Svätopluk] would never come into his kingdom with a hostile army” complete accord with the Forchheim agreement (“[Zwentibald] would remain faithful to the king [Louis II German] all the days of his life”).

⁷⁸ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 110 and “*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldké*,” 98.

This time without any promise of paying annual tribute. However, also the other differences between these two legal acts would not go unnoticed. In Forchheim, Svätopluk, initially concerned for his own safety, was represented by the papal legate John of Venice. At the negotiations in Kaumberg, Svätopluk himself was right away in the presence of the emperor. Even more, the emperor “*sicut mos est, per manus imperatoris efficitur, contestatus illi fidelitatem iuramento.*” Svätopluk became the emperor’s man.⁷⁹ In other words, there was no longer anyone between him and the highest secular authority of his time. In the Western hierarchy, this meant that Svätopluk rose to the level of other Christian rulers of Europe, who were entitled to the title of *rex* – king – in the political nomenclature of the time. Svätopluk’s *commendatio* in Tulln was therefore not only an act of subordination, but more a diplomatic confirmation of partnership within the Carolingian order by the system of fidelity (*fidelitas*). From that time political status of Svätopluk’s *regnum* can be compared with *regna* of the other kings within Frankish Empire, i.e. East Franconia, Lorraine and West Franconia. I am not the only or the first one to see this encounter as Svätopluk being promoted to the rank of king and recognized by the highest secular authority of the then world, the emperor of the restored Roman Empire.⁸⁰

Svätopluk and the Pope Stephen V: Svätopluk Proclaimed *Rex Sclavorum*

The years 884–885 appear to have been decisive for the reign of Svätopluk I. Not only did Svätopluk gain Pannonia *de jure*, but his personal ranking at that moment surpassed the status of Arnulf, who for logical reasons could not be *homo imperatoris*. Under pressure from described events at the end of 885, Arnulf finally concluded peace with Svätopluk in the presence of the Bavarian nobility.⁸¹ However, the practical consequence of the previous war was that Svätopluk’s controlled territories came into close proximity to

⁷⁹ For a better understanding of the terms *fideles, homines, suis, vassi/vassalli*, see Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals*, 23.

⁸⁰ See for instance Idzi Panic, *Ostatnie lata Wielkich Moraw* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2000), 36 and ff. Havlík, “King Sventopluk’s of Moravia image in the Middle Ages,” *Critica storica*, 28, (1991): 172–173 and id., “The Relationship between the Great Moravian Empire and the Papal Court:” 100–122.

⁸¹ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 111 and “*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*,” 99.

ancient Italy. “The sole son” (*unicus filius*) of Rome, as Pope John VIII called Svätopluk, also brought the borders of his empire closer to the sphere of interest of the Papacy.

Prospective relations with the Roman Curia were disrupted by the death of St. Methodius, Archbishop of Pannonia and Moravia, on April 6, 885. With the accession of the new Pope Stephen V, in addition to the question of St. Methodius’s succession, other issues concerning the young Slavic Church also needed to be resolved. Among them were, in particular, the compatibility of the new Latin understanding of the Holy Trinity and the use of Old Church Slavonic in the liturgical practice of the Church in Great Moravia.

Even in resolving these complex issues, Svätopluk proved to be a pragmatic ruler. His reward was the new Pope Stephen V confirmed Svätopluk’s papal patronage, recognized him as King of the Slavs *de jure*, and, by the will of eternal divine authority, established the Kingdom of the Slavs. These certainties are confirmed by Pope Stephen V’s letter to Svätopluk, known in historiography as *Quia te zelo fidei* (“For in zeal for the faith”). The letter is best known for Pope Stephen V’s harsh reaction to the legacy of St. Constantine the Philosopher and his brother Methodius. For now, I would prefer to focus on something else in relation to Svätopluk.

Stephen, bishop, servant of the servants of God to Zuentopolco [Svätopluk], king of the Slavs. For in zeal for the faith thou hast consecrated thyself with all devotion to the prince of the holy Apostles, that is, to Peter, the key-bearer of the kingdom of heaven, and thou hast chosen his deputy before all the princes of this world to be thy chief patron, and thou hast at the same time, with the great men and the people of [thy] country, given thyself up to his protection, by unceasing prayers we beseech God, the giver of all good things, in whose hand rest all the rights of kingdoms, to strengthen thee with his favor...⁸²

In my opinion, these lines reflect the most crucial geopolitical event that in the Middle Danube territory saw in the ninth century. Maddalena Betti describes it as follows: “The comes, who enjoyed the royal prerogatives in John VIII’s correspondence, became a rex who ruled a regnum in Stephen V’s correspondence.”⁸³ On the other hand, it is the deciding voice in the debate

⁸² *CDSI* 1, ed. Marsina, no. 35, 27–29.

⁸³ Betti, *The Making of Christian Moravia*, 189.

among historians related to whether the concept of *Regnum Sclavorum* was an original Ottonian invention or a renewed concept from the Carolingian era.⁸⁴ Personally, I am convinced that the political imagination of the Kingdom of the Slavs is a product of the ninth century.

The author of the letter recognized Svätopluk into the rank of a king both ways directly – *expressis verbis* calling him *rex Sclavorum* and indirectly by the content of the letter itself. In doing so, the letter clearly emphasizes that the things of the (Slavic) kingdom come from God, the Giver of all goods, “in whose hand rest all the rights of kingdoms” (*in cuius manu sunt omnia iura regnorum*).

Kings and kingdoms are fundamentally two different things. A royal title is conferred *ad personam*. Its exercise belongs to a category limited by the time of its bearer’s life. Kings can be easily deposited. A kingdom whose rights derive from God is, by contrast, unlimited in time, that is, eternal.⁸⁵ Simply put, a kingdom, by the nature of its origin, exists even though it has no designed kings. In medieval political discourse, however, this means that, by God’s will, a Christian monarchy arose in the Middle Danube region, whose name was derived from the endonym of its dominant element – *Regnum Sclavorum*. This was undoubtedly a qualitatively higher level of political organization compared to Svätopluk’s *Regnum*, which was limited in time and space. The potential of this political concept came to fruition around the year 1000 in the restored Kingdom of Pannonia (Hungary).

⁸⁴ The topic of transmission between the end of the Carolingian dynasty and the beginning of the Liudolfing-Otto dynasty is quite often discussed in Western historiography. See for example Richard E. Sullivan, “The Carolingian Age: Reflections on Its Place in the History of the Middle Ages”, *Speculum*, 64, no. 2 (1989): 267–306 or Simon MacLean, “The Carolingian Past in Post-Carolingian Europe,” in *The Making of Europe: Essays in Honour of Robert Barlett*, eds. John G. H. Hudson and Sally Crumplin (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 1–14.

However, this discourse almost completely lacks any consideration of the extent to which the mechanisms of historical processes were transferred to the eastern edges of the Frankish Empire, or rather to the Kingdom of the Slavs. The exception that proves the rule is the still underappreciated work of Matúš Kučera, *Slovensko po páde Veľkej Moravy* (Bratislava: Veda, 1974).

⁸⁵ Ildar H. Garipzanov, *The Symbolic Language of Authority in the Carolingian World (c. 751–877)*. (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008), 102.

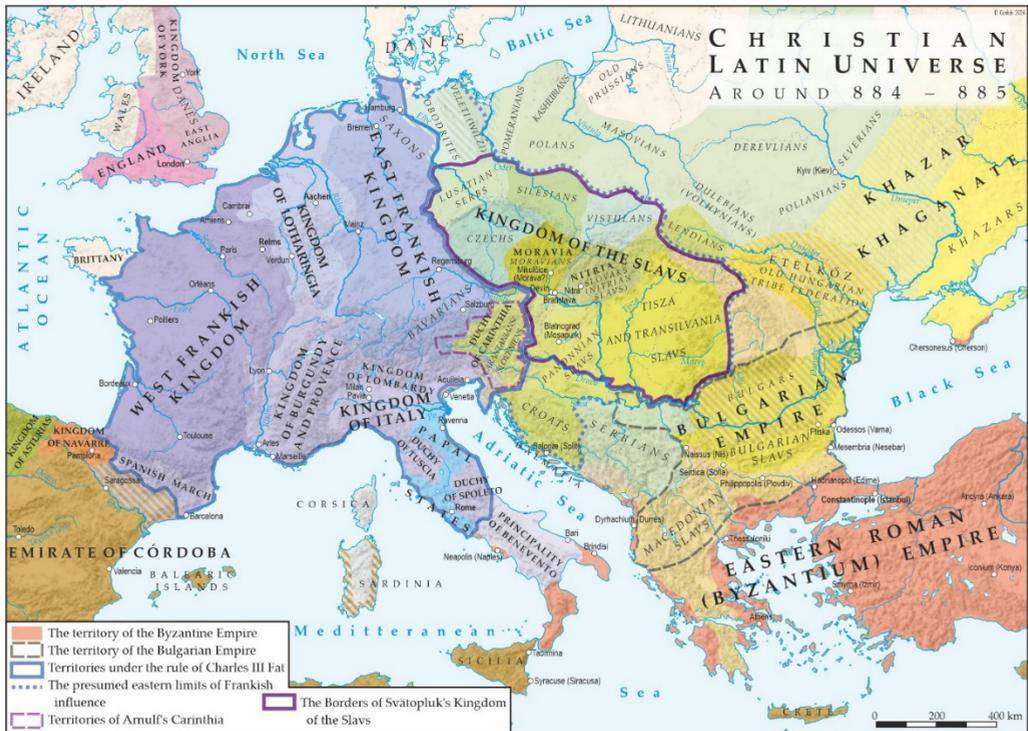
The same legal concept also bridges the dynastic instability that began to be visible in the Christian universe of the Latin West in the last decades of the ninth century. The Carolingians were no longer able to maintain their hereditary monopoly for royal and imperial power.⁸⁶ Instead, new families, more or less related to the Carolingians through the female line, came forward with ambitions to replace them in the royal office.⁸⁷ In the West Frankish Empire, they were represented already by Boso I and his son Louis III the Blind and in Italy king Berengar.⁸⁸ On the eastern edge of the more and more imaginary Western empire, it was Svätopluk. Ensuring the continued existence of the Christian monarchy therefore had to become a matter for the Papacy. Stephen V's formulation of the origin of the kingdom in God must be understood in this spirit.

The Pope's words about the divine origin of the kingdom, as will be discussed, have serious implications for the restoration of the kingdom on the Danube around the year 1000. Between the years 885/886 the *Imperium Christianum* consisted of four main provinces/kingdoms West Franconia, Lotharingia, East Franconia and Sclavinia.

⁸⁶ MacLean, "The Carolingian Past in Post-Carolingian Europe," 7.

⁸⁷ Existing historiographical frameworks often fail to adequately address the transitional period between the Moimirids and the dynasties that came to power in Central and East-Central Europe around the middle of the tenth century. See the sample methodological book on an analogical situation in the East Frankish Empire after the extinction of the Carolingians. Simon Groth, *In regnum successit. "Karolinger" und "Ottonen" oder "Ostfrankische Reich"?* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2017). See the methodological introduction "Zwischen "Karolinger" und "Ottonen": Das "Ostfrankische Reich", 1–30.

⁸⁸ More about these kings and emperors see Martin Homza. "The 'Realm of the Slavs' and the Coronation of Svätopluk King of the Slavs: Historical Fiction or Fact? A Few Sentences on the Origins of the Political Imagination of *Regnum Sclavorum*," *Hiperborea*, 11, no. 2 (2024): 127–150.



Christian Latin Universe around 884-885, map by Daniel Gurňák and Martin Homza

And this was the model Emperor Otto III would eventually get back to when he tried to renew the great universalistic program of the Carolingians and – resuming the political program *Renovatio Imperii Romanorum* – acknowledged that it would consist of four equal Christian provinces – kingdoms: Gallia, Roma, Germania and Sclavinia.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Johannes Fried, *Otton III i Bolesław Chrobry*, trans. Elżbieta Kaźmierczak and Witold Leder (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 2000), *passim*. German original Johannes Fried, *Otton III. und Boleslaw Chrobry: Das Widmungsbild des Aachener Evangeliers, der „Akt von Gnesen“ und das frühe polnische und ungarische Königtum: Eine Bildanalyse und ihre historischen Folgen: Frankfurter Historische Abhandlungen*, 30 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1989), a second revised edition of this work was published in Stuttgart in 2001.

Deterioration of Relations between Svätopluk I King of the Slavs and Arnulf, King of the East Franks

In the decade after 885, Svätopluk reached the peak of his power. On the other side it can be said that this period of his reign was also most determined by his relationship with Arnulf. As is well known, Arnulf did not become emperor until 896, two years after Svätopluk's death. It is not entirely clear what role Svätopluk ultimately played in the dethronement of Charles III from the East Frankish throne and his replacement by Arnulf in 887. *The Fulda Annals* only mention that Arnulf was helped to the East Frankish throne by the "Norici" and the "Sclavi".⁹⁰ The following information from the same source (*Regensburg continuations*) sheds more light on the matter. Namely that after his election as East Frankish king in 887, Arnulf celebrated Christmas and then Easter in 888 in Regensburg with the participation of *principes (...) magna parte Sclavanorum*, i.e., "nobles (...) great part of the Slavs".⁹¹ It is not entirely certain, but given the peace concluded between Arnulf and Svätopluk in 885, as well as their past friendship, it can be assumed that the unspecified Slavs who helped Arnulf to the throne were military reinforcements of the Moravian Slavs sent by Svätopluk. The most prominent among them then celebrated Arnulf's previous successes with him in Regensburg. This hypothesis would ultimately be confirmed by the peace between Svätopluk and Arnulf concluded in 890.

The meeting of Svätopluk and Arnulf on Mount Omuntesperch

The second period of good relations between Svätopluk and Arnulf culminated in a meeting between the two representatives of the decisive powers of the emerging Central Europe on Mount Omuntesperch.⁹² This period lasted from 885 to 892 and was characterized primarily by a pragmatic approach resulting from the mutual benefits of such relations. Svätopluk essentially continued the policy he had established towards his western neighbor in

⁹⁰ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 103 and "*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*," 93.

⁹¹ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 115 and "*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*," 99.

⁹² *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 119–120 and "*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*," 99–100.

Forchheim. It was advantageous for him mainly because it allowed him to continue his expansion into the unbaptized parts of northeastern Europe. In domestic politics, it helped him consolidate his power and build political and ecclesiastical structures of his realm. Arnulf needed good relations with Svätopluk because of the never-ending Norman invasions and also because of his undisguised ambitions to become the first among the living Carolingians.

In mid-Lent [March] the king [Arnulf] set out for Pannonia and held a general assembly with the dux Zwentibald in the place which is called Omuntesperch in the common tongue. There among other things the said dux, [Svätopluk] at the request of the pope, asked the king urgently that he should visit the church of St. Peter in the town of Rome, and should deign to rescue the Italian kingdom from the evildoing of Christians [Wido] and the threats of the pagans, and hold it for his own use to control it.⁹³

The assembly of the two rulers on Mount Omuntesperch, which took place sometime in the fasting time in early spring of 890, had several aspects. The most important ones to mention are ritual and political.⁹⁴ The author of this part of *the Fulda Annals* does his best to downplay the significance of this meeting. He calls Svätopluk a duke (*dux*). However, from the context of the source itself and complementary information known from the *Regino's of Prüm Chronicle*, it is clear that the assembly was a political meeting of equal partners – two kings. None of the sources mention anything about Svätopluk renewing his oath of fidelity to Arnulf. After all, there was nothing to restore, since no contemporary information about Svätopluk's oath to Arnulf. In essence, it was a qualitatively different meeting than the previous one with Emperor Charles III the Fat also on a hill, Mons Comianum, in 884. Even more, the newest meeting most probably took place on a mountain whose German name was derived from Saint Amand († 679). Although the identification of this place is the subject of lengthy debate, Ján Dekan assumed that it was probably the original name of the hill Pannonhalma⁹⁵ and I completely agree with this solution. Since ancient times, a meeting between two important

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Gerd Althoff, "Zur Bedeutung symbolischer Kommunikation für das Verständnis des Mittelalters," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 31 (1997): 370–389.

⁹⁵ Ján Dekan, *Slovenské dejiny*, vol. 2: *Začiatky slovenských dejín a Ríša veľkomoravská* (Bratislava: Slovenská akadémia vied a umení, 1951), 174.

political players on a hill has been a ritual act of political communication at the highest level. The congregation on the hill, which was not accidentally named after St. Amand († 679), the famous missionary among the Germanic-speaking peoples of the Frankish Empire and the first preacher of the Gospel among the Slavs. The choice had more than a symbolic character. In addition, it could also be seen as somewhat disadvantageous for the king of Easter Franconia. Arnulf had to cross the River Ráb and entered the territory of Svätopluk in the Transdanubian region.

Such an explanation would not be illogical. Arnulf needed something from Svätopluk. His minimum requirement was compliance with the terms of the Peace of Forchheim. The maximum demand could have been open military assistance from Svätopluk's Slavic army against the Normans. However, the *Fulda Annals* are silent on all this. Instead, they convey other information that is also important.

Namely the annals once more emphasize the Roman dimension of Svätopluk's politics. Svätopluk acts here as an intermediary for Pope Stephen V. His task is to convince Arnulf to get involved in the affairs of the Roman Curia in at least two respects. In taking decisive action against the King of Italy, Guy III of Spoleto, and in the fight against the Saracens. In return, although this is not explicitly stated in the text, it is likely that Arnulf was to receive the imperial title from the Pope. Nevertheless, Arnulf ultimately gave priority to resolving the Norman threat. And it was in this matter that he needed Svätopluk's help.

Svätopluk apparently did not send auxiliary military forces to Arnulf against the repeated destructive raids of the Normans. Instead, he apparently undertook to support his ally's summer military campaign materially. However, the question here is how to imagine it? An interesting opinion considering this was offered by the author of an article analyzing Aribo's letter to his "most pious king" Arnulf.⁹⁶ Recently it was translated and commented into

⁹⁶ This almost forgotten letter was brought to attention again by Hansmartin Schwarzmaier, "Ein Brief des Markgrafen Aribo an König Arnulf über die Verhältnisse in Mähren," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 6 (1972): 55–66. See also the modern edition of the letter *Epistolae Karolini aevi*, vol. VII: *Epistolae variorum 798–923* (*Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Epistolae*, vol. 9), ed. Isolde Schröder (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2022), no. 84, 196–198. The letter itself has been the subject of some peculiar speculation in recent years by Miroslav Lysý, "Právnická osoba v stredovekom práve platnom na území Slovenska," *Historia et theoria iuris*, 14 (2022): 97. The author translates the Latin *pecora* as swine and confuses it with cattle.

English in the *Word Press*.⁹⁷ From reading the above text, it appears that Svätopluk's assistance to Arnulf in his planned military campaign against the Northmen may have consisted in providing a significant number of cattle. It will sound strange, but in the words of the author of the mentioned article, they were to be used pulling "a military baggage train". If anyone would like to understand what such a "military baggage train" looked like in practice, they should read another online article by Jonathan Jarrett.⁹⁸ Like the author of the first mentioned paper, I find the idea of the Moravians delivering a large number of cattle to Arnulf for military purposes not only possible but also probable. Moreover, it is indirectly confirmed by the words of Abbot Regino of Prüm, who clearly states that in the battle by Aachen in the days before June 24, 991, the Northmen "... encountered and captured many wagons and carts in which provisions."⁹⁹

In addition, I would like to support this opinion with a few more considerations that arise from the wording of the letter itself.

We make it known to your ears that our representatives came from the eastern regions last Sunday and told us that all the Moravians together had ordered the cattle into the kind of service owed by their own serfs, and they are all joined together in friendship and give themselves to your service with no lordship due to any of the nobles.

My lord [Arnulf], they received Bishop Wiching and your other messenger with joy and they denied what had been told of them.

And everything [...] they [the Moravians] were in observation and every day they gather them [cattle] for your service.¹⁰⁰

Firstly, Wiching acts as the supervisor of the proper execution of the agreement from Ommuntensperch (Amandsberg?) as King Arnulf's representative. The same Wiching who was still the Bishop of Nitra at the time

⁹⁷ [s.a.], "Slavs and East Franks Love It So: Aribo's Letter to King Arnulf (891)", in *The Historians' Sketchpad*, <https://salutemundo.wordpress.com/2022/03/01/slavs-and-east-franks-love-it-so-aribos-letter-to-king-arnulf-891/>.

⁹⁸ Jonathan Jarret, "Carrying Things to War in Frankish Gaul", in *A Corner of Tenth-Century Europe: Early Medievalist's Thoughts and Ponderings*, <https://tenthmedieval.wordpress.com/2022/01/23/carrying-things-to-war-in-frankish-gaul/>.

⁹⁹ *History and Politics in Late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe*, 210.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted from [s.a.], "Slavs and East Franks Love It So...", [s.p.].

and, after the death of St. Methodius, the administrator of Svätopluk's Slavic archbishopric. At first glance, this may seem unusual, but it is understandable, given that Wiching still enjoyed the trust of both rulers at that time, and it was crucial for Arnulf and Svätopluk to have a single neutral person in this position who would guarantee the successful execution of the entire operation. Indeed, there was a lot at stake. One can imagine a joint Northman-Slavic attack would undoubtedly have devastating effects on the East Frankish Empire. Secondly, the significance of the whole event for Arnulf is only reinforced by the fact that the other level of control of the Frankish mission among the Moravians was exercised by Margrave Aribo. The same Aribo, who was considered as an expert on the situation in Svätopluk's kingdom. The fact that the mission proceeded according to plan is evidenced by the following lines from the letter, in which Aribo informed his king that his fears that the Moravians might betray him during his Northmen campaign are unfounded: "they denied what had been told of them." On the contrary, with all their vehemence and every day "they [the Moravians] gather them [cattle] for your service." It is difficult to assess the extent to which Arnulf's suspicions of Svätopluk's potential betrayal during his planned campaign against the Northmen were justified. The fact is that this letter, written sometime in the spring of 991, not only confirms the previous agreement from Ommuntesperch (Amandsberg?), but also adds other more than valid details.

As is clear from the above lines, the Moravians were providing *servicium* to Arnulf, not *tributum pacis*.¹⁰¹ Svätopluk never paid Arnulf a tribute. On the other hand, the difference between Arnulf's maximum demands (the participation of Svätopluk's Slavs in Arnulf's expedition) and the actual material assistance that Svätopluk ultimately provided to the East Frankish king, may have been the beginning of deeper misunderstandings between the two most powerful rulers of Central Europe at the end of the ninth century.

¹⁰¹ Peter Ratkoš, based on an incorrect reading of this letter, introduced into historiography the idea that Svätopluk and his Moravians were paying a regular *tributum pacis*. See Peter Ratkoš, "Cenný prírastok k prameňom o Veľkej Morave," *Slovenská archivistika*, 11 (1976): 177–179 and id., "Význam listu grófa Ariba kráľovi Arnulfovi z r. 891," in *Československé příspěvky pro VIII. mezinárodní sjezd slavistů Záhřeb 1978*, ed. Bohuslav Havránek (Praha: Academia, 1978), 209–217. Id., "Die Bedeutung des Graf-Aribo-Briefes an König Arnulf aus dem Jahre 891," *Studia historica Slovaca*, 12 (1982): 11–16. Some of Ratkoš's readings were later corrected by Ondřej Zavadil, "Dopis markrabího Ariba králi Arnulfovi," *Mediaevalia Historica Bohemica*, 11 (2007): 7–21.

The Fulda Annals, as an official source, remain silent on all these matters due to their usual bias against Svätopluk. Even more, in his description of the events of 891, their anonymous author (intentionally?) misinterpreted the inspection visit of Bishop Wiching and the second envoy, whose name is unknown, to the Moravians, sometimes in the spring of 991, with the subsequent information about a diplomatic mission aimed at negotiating new peace terms between Moravians and East Franks.¹⁰² Since the peace between them of 885 and 890 had not been broken in any way, the purpose of the new Frankish mission in spring 891 must have been about something else. Even more, the new peace conditions in the east did not make sense before Arnulf defeated the Normans in the northwest.¹⁰³ Only after this famous victory, which significantly strengthened the position of the East Frankish ruler on the domestic and foreign political scene, it is logical that Arnulf also wanted to reorganize relations with Svätopluk on a new level. Given the subsequent course of events, it can be assumed that the new specification of peace set by Arnulf for Svätopluk occurred just in early 892. They were not favorable to him. The King of the Slavs not only rejected them, but in the same year began to cause his opponent military concern.

This interpretation of the sequence of events is also consistent with the account of Regino of Prüm, which significantly supplements the information known from *the Fulda Annals*. The military unrest between Arnulf and Svätopluk started, according to him, just after June 26, 891. It was on this day that the victory battle between the East Frankish troops and the army of the Northmen took place.¹⁰⁴ Based on the above, it can be concluded that after resolving the most pressing problems in the north-west, the East Frankish king turned his attention to the east. It could happen just in the second half of 891.

¹⁰² *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 121 and “*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*,” 100.

¹⁰³ In 891, Arnulf managed to defeat the Normans (Danes). Two of their kings were killed. The victor sent sixteenth captured banners to Regensburg. *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 123.

¹⁰⁴ *History and Politics in Late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe*, 211 and “*Reginonis abbatis Prumiensis Chronicon*,” 123. The same author refers to the beginning of Svätopluk’s rebellion against Arnulf as early as 890. However, this account must be taken in the context of the previous text, in which Reginon describes Arnulf’s recognition of Bohemia under Svätopluk’s rule. More on this below.

This is where the final period of relations between the two major protagonists of Central European history at the end of the ninth century begins. It can safely be called the last great confrontation between them.

The Second War between Arnulf and Svätopluk 891–894

For a better understanding of the causes of Arnulf's second and final war with Svätopluk, it is necessary the last time to return to the circumstances of the peace between the East Frankish king and the king of the Slavs from Ommuntesperch (Amandsberg?), which has not been given much attention here so far. It is the second fundamental text that from aside reflects this extremely important event. The report from the *Chronicle of Abbot Regino of Prüm* sounds:

In the year of the Lord's incarnation 890, King Arnulf gave the command [ducatu] of the Bohemians to King Zwentibald [Svätopluk] of the Moravian Slavs. Hitherto, the Bohemians had rulers from among their own kind and people, and had kept the fidelity they promised to the kings of the Franks by inviolable agreement. Arnulf did this because, before he had been raised to the throne of the kingdom, he had been joined to Zwentibald in close friendship. In fact, he raised from the holy font Arnulf's son, who was born to him by a concubine, and named him Zwentibald after him. This matter [the granting of Bohemia to Zwentibald of Moravia] provided a considerable stimulus for discord and defections. For the Bohemians, on the one hand, withdrew the fealty that they had long kept, and Zwentibald, on the other, believing himself to have gained considerable strength through the acquisition of another realm and puffed up with the arrogance of pride, rebelled against Arnulf.¹⁰⁵

The information preserved by Regino, abbot of Prüm, is invaluable for defining the relationship between the two Central European monarchs, as well as Svätopluk's place in the power structure of the late Carolingians. Some of this has already been mentioned (the name of Arnulf's eldest son, Svätopluk as his godfather, and the *gratia familiaritatis* between Arnulf and

¹⁰⁵ *History and Politics in Late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe*, 207 and "Reginonis abbatis Prumiensis Chronicon," 122–123.

Svätopluk). I also indicated above that Regino says nothing about the relationship of vassalage or fidelity between the East Frankish king and the ruler of the Slavs on the Middle Danube.

However, his account sheds light on the terms of the peace that were agreed upon at Ommuntesperch. The price that Svätopluk demanded from his former friend and relative for peace, or eventually support of Arnulf's campaign against the Northmen, was the legalization of Svätopluk's previous possession of the Duchy of Bohemia.¹⁰⁶ Svätopluk's legal instinct is also evident in this step. The territories of those he conquered in the east simply belonged to him by virtue of his military control. In contrast, however, he had the annexation of countries that already had their own older legal status and formally belonged to the East Frankish Empire legally approved by the persons to whom they had previously formally and legally belonged. The seizure of the Transdanube region was thus legalized by Charles III the Fat during a meeting at Mons Comianus and by Arnulf of Bohemia on Mount Ommuntesperch. Based on a tradition preserved by the later Saxon chronicler Thietmar of Merseburg († 1018):

At one time, during the reign of Duke Swentepolk [Svätopluk] the Bohemians [Moravians] were our rulers. Indeed, our ancestors paid an annual tribute to the duke and he had bishops in his land, which is called Moravia.¹⁰⁷

It can be assumed that, at the same time as the Czech principality, the Lusatian Sorbs also entered into an alliance with Svätopluk. However, there are no sources documenting how long this alliance lasted or whether Arnulf also approved Svätopluk's annexation of this principality on Ommuntesperch (Amandberg?) Hill. However, this cannot be ruled out. In any case, around 890–891, Svätopluk's Slavic kingdom reached its greatest territorial extent (see map).

¹⁰⁶ Dušan Třeštík, for example, believed that Svätopluk had already conquered Bohemia around 884, and that in 890 Arnulf merely legitimized this claim. In alliance with the Moravians, they were to last only twelve years. See Dušan Třeštík, *Mysliti dějiny* (Litomyšl: Paseka, 1999), 140.

¹⁰⁷ English translation see *Ottonian Germany. The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg*, trans. David A. Warner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 303. "Thietmari Merseburgensis episcopi Chronicon/Kronika Detmara biskupa merseburského," in *MMFH*, vol. 1, eds. Bartoňková and comp., 150–151.

Epilogue

All of Svätopluk's territorial gains must have deeply troubled Arnulf. Therefore, his subsequent reactions are not surprising. The question is just whether his decisions were correct. One thing is certain, since he did not have the military potential to defeat Svätopluk, he called in a third force to the new level of the "Game of Thrones" – the Old Hungarian tribal confederation.

This act later led to the emergence of the black legend of Arnulf. According to this legend, articulated mainly in the chronicles of the eleventh century, the blame for the collapse of Charlemagne's dream of a unified Latin Christian empire fell on Arnulf. The reason for this was his invitation to the pagan Old Hungarian tribal confederation to fight against the Christian ruler of Moravia, Svätopluk.¹⁰⁸ It is not clear today which of the protagonists in this dangerous game for the achievements of Carolingian civilization ultimately made more mistakes. However, it is further known from *the Fulda Annals* that in January 892, Arnulf sent new envoys to Svätopluk, inviting him to another personal meeting. Svätopluk refused. The anonymous author did not state the reason why he did so. Instead, he accused Duke (*dux*) Svätopluk of "betraying his fidelity" to the king "in his fashion".¹⁰⁹

As early as 1963, Lubomír E. Havlík pointed out that historical science has no source that would prove Svätopluk's promise of loyalty to Arnulf.¹¹⁰ Therefore, the stylization of *the Fulda Annals* rather reveals Arnulf's political intentions in the east after his victorious war with the Northmen. It was the formal subjugation of Svätopluk, which, if possible, would also lead to the weakening of Svätopluk's real power. This is not surprising. Arnulf, now the sovereign ruler of the East Frankish Empire, after five years of his reign, was finally able to enforce against Svätopluk the authority that Svätopluk had been bound to his predecessors on the East Frankish throne since the time of Louis the German. As I have mentioned above, the more objective Regino of Prüm assesses the initial relations between Svätopluk and Arnulf as *gratia familiaritas*. With regard to the previous relations between the East Frankish

¹⁰⁸ Stefan Albrecht, "Das großmährische Reich in der Historiographie des römisch-deutschen Reiches," in *The Great Moravian Tradition and Memory of Great Moravia in the Medieval Central and Eastern Europe*, eds. Robert Antonín et al. (Opava: Slezská univerzita, 2014), 46–49.

¹⁰⁹ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 122–23 and "Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské," 100–101.

¹¹⁰ Havlík, "Velká Morava a Franská říše," 171.

kings and Svätopluk, he also speaks of Svätopluk's rebellion against Arnulf. Nevertheless, it is only possible to rebel against a superior entity. From Svätopluk's point of view, however, Arnulf was not his superior. He had already the political recognition of both sacral and earthly authority – the pope and the emperor. Assuming that his coronation and anointing by the papal legate “according to the custom of Roman kings” did indeed take place in the autumn of 885, as claimed in Chapter IX of *Gesta Regum Sclavorum*,¹¹¹ and as vaguely recalled by Reginon of Prüm, “he [most possibly Svätopluk] had been raised to the throne of the kingdom”¹¹²; his political status was equal to that of Arnulf. Therefore, it is not surprising that Svätopluk simply did not bother to attend the meeting with Arnulf, which was apparently planned to take place on Arnulf's territory this time.

So much for the reasons that led to the final epilogue. It ended with the death of Svätopluk I in 894. Before that, however, Svätopluk dealt his opponent several painful blows. But first things first. According to *the Fulda Annals*, from the moment Svätopluk rejected his offer for a planned meeting, Arnulf prepared an extensive military coalition against him. This also included certain elements of economic diversion. The logical ally number one was Braslav, Duke of the Posavian Principality. However, the strategic force that was supposed to break Svätopluk's power in the middle Danube was to be the Old Hungarian tribal confederation. In addition to the traditional forces of the Frankish Empire, which included the Franks, Bavarians, and Alemanni, Arnulf apparently also relied on the help of the Bulgarians. This probably did not happen, and it is questionable whether the Frankish mission ultimately succeeded in persuading the Bulgarian Tsar Vladimir to block salt supplies to Svätopluk from Transylvania. *The Fulda Annals* are very vague on this subject. In any case, the effect of these military preparations was ultimately open warfare, which Svätopluk faced from three directions, according to the traditional pattern of Frankish invasions into the Middle Danube region. The fourth front was then created by the newly coming nomadic confederation of the old Hungarians. Military operations of this kind were subsequently repeated in 893. History records that Svätopluk had lived, and his army emerged undefeated.

¹¹¹ See Martin Homza, “The ‘Realm of the Slavs’ and the Coronation of Svätopluk,” 127–150.

¹¹² *History and Politics in Late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe*, 207 and “Reginonis abbatis Prumiensis Chronicon,” 122.

Svätopluk I died unexpectedly in 984. The exact date is unknown. *Gesta regum Sclavorum* states that the most holy King (*rex sanctissimus*) Svätopluk took to eternity on March 17.¹¹³ A diametrically different opinion was expressed in his report on the death of Svätopluk by the anonymous author of *the Fulda Annals*. He described the Moravian duke (*dux*) as “the source of all treachery” (*vagina totius perfidiae*).¹¹⁴ Ultimately, these two radically different opinions laid the foundations for the creation of the *Black* and *White Legends of Svätopluk*, as I will refer to the system of positive and negative narratives about Svätopluk.¹¹⁵ The same discrepancy in the assessment of Svätopluk’s reign continues to this day.

Svätopluk apparently died without being aware of the fact that his lifelong work will see destruction shortly afterwards. Moimir II, the oldest son of Svätopluk and successor on the Moravian throne died around 906 and after him the Moimirid dynasty perished by the sword. About five years later Louis the Child, son of Arnulf became extinct, and with him disappeared the dynasty of the East-Frankish Carolingians.

¹¹³ *GRS*, vol. 1, ed., trans. and comment. Kunčer, column 62. “*Presbyteri Diocleatis Regnum Sclavorum*,” 245. Strange enough the editor of *MMFH*, vol. 1 translated the idiom *Rex sanctissimus* as “the most venerable king”.

¹¹⁴ *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and ed. Reuter, 129 and “*Annales Fuldenses/Letopisy Fuldské*,” 103.

¹¹⁵ Martin Homza, “Stredoveké korene Svätoplukovskej tradície u Slovákov (čierna a biela Svätoplukovská legenda),” in *Sloboda a vlasť*, vol. 1: *Jubilejník na počesť Jozefa M. Rydlu, člena Slovenského ústavu*, eds. Viliam Jablonický and Ladislav Vančo (Bratislava: Libri Historiæ, 2025), 455–541.

The Jesuit College from Kamianets-Podilskyi and Its First Attempt to Organize a Jesuit Mission in Moldavia (1610) According to New Evidence Found in the *Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu*

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Abstract: Shortly after the foundation of the Jesuit College from Kamianets-Podilskyi in Southern Poland at the beginning of the 17th century, the Polish Jesuits tried to establish a permanent mission in Moldavia, too. Analysing new evidence discovered in the Jesuits archives in Rome, the present paper tries to reconstruct the circumstances of the Jesuits’ arrival in Iași in 1610, their meetings with the Prince Constantine Mohyla (1607-1611), the voivode of Moldavia, with his mother, Lady Elisabeth Mohyla, and with the Court, the missionary expeditions undertaken in the surroundings of the capital, as well as the events that followed the dethronement of the ruler and the installation of Stephen II Tomşa (1611-1615) on the throne by the Turks, including the attempts of the Mohyla family – now refugees in Poland – to seize the power again in Moldavia.

Keywords: Jesuit missions, Kamianets-Podilskyi Jesuit College, Moldavia, the Mohyla family

Rezumat: Imediat după fondarea Colegiului iezuit din Camenița, iezuiții polonezi de la nou-înființata instituție au încercat să pună bazele unei misiuni stabile și în Moldova. Pe baza unor documente inedite descoperite în arhivele generale ale iezuiților de la Roma (*Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu*), articolul de față reconstruiește împrejurările sosirii iezuiților la Iași în 1610, întrevederile acestora cu domnitorul Constantin Movilă (1607-1611), cu doamna Elizabeta Movilă și cu Curtea, expedițiile misionare întreprinse în împrejurimile capitalei, precum și

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evenimentele care au urmat detronării domnitorului și instalării lui Ștefan Tomșa al II-lea (1611-1615), inclusiv tentativele Movileștilor, refugiați în Polonia, de a prelua din nou puterea în Moldova.

Cuvinte-cheie: misiuni iezuite, colegiul iezuit din Camenița, Moldova, familia Movilă

The idea of founding a Jesuit College to Kamianets-Podilskyi, in the most southern part of Poland, had already appeared at the end of the 16th century: in 1590, during the 5th provincial congregation of the Jesuits from Poland, the idea of founding a new college had been particularly discussed and the results of the debate were sent to Rome the Superior General of the order. According to the acts of that congregation, the reasons why the Polish Jesuits were considering the small city of Kamianets as a possible location for their College were practical and strategical: it was a commercial city in Podolia, it was situated at the crossroad of some important commercial roads, it was a city inundated often by Wallachians,¹ Armenians, Turks and other nations which could benefit from the work of the missionaries, and last but not least it was a place which raised hopes of founding in the future another college; however, given the fact that there was not yet been sent a mission in order to explore the place and the possibilities and to negotiate the founding of a new college, it was advisable that some experienced Jesuit went to Kamianets and made the inquiry.²

It took almost two decades from the discussion of this idea in the congregation to the actual founding of the new college. On the 4th of May 1608 the very same Iustus Raab who had been dispatched as a missionary in Moldavia in 1588³ came to Kamianets with some other companions (*socii*).

¹ When using the word Wallachians (*Valachi*) in their accounts, the Jesuits did not mean the inhabitants of Wallachia, the historical Romanian province in the South of nowadays Romania (capital: Bucharest), but the inhabitants of the North-Eastern province, Moldavia, i.e. the Moldavians.

² Archivum Romanum Societatis Jesu (hereafter: ARSI), *Congregationes*, v. 44: *Congregationes Provinciae (1587-1591)*, f. 102rv.

³ For further information regarding the the first Jesuit mission in Moldavia in 1588-1594 see Diana Marinescu, "La prima missione dei gesuiti in Moldavia (1588-1592) secondo alcuni documenti dell'Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu," *Ephemeris Dacoromana*, vol. XXII (2020): 69-94.

They were received by the chapter held in the front of the cathedral; the bishop admitted them “ad munus concionandi, catechisandi, exhortandi, confessiones audiendi ac alia munia Societatis obeunda;” so the Jesuits began their activity in the city under favorable circumstances, converting not only Catholics, but also Ruthenians, Armenians or Wallachians.⁴ Next year, the College received a place, a stone building and more wooden facilities worth 4000 florins, as well as books and supplies; in 1610, since the number of the Jesuits present at the College had increased, they received an episcopal *sacellum* and the church of the cathedral in order to fulfill the ministries of the Society.⁵

The new Jesuit College was officially founded in Kamianets on November 17th, the feast day of St. Gregory the Wonderworker (the first Sunday after this feast would remain in the memory of the Jesuits as the founding date of the College).⁶ The history of the College kept in the Roman archives of the Society of Jesus expose briefly the motives of the founding of the College: firstly, Kamianets was a commercial city which enjoyed a great ethnical and religious diversity. Then, not all its inhabitants were Catholic, so the non-Catholic could benefit from the pastoral work of the Jesuits. The Calvin ruler of Kamianets favored the Calvins, who had already established a Calvin school, thus the Catholics who did not wish to send their children to the that Calvin school were asking insistently the founding of a Catholic school as a counterweight, a Jesuit College capable of opposing the Calvin propaganda. Another reason which highly impacted the decision of founding this College was the fact that Kamianets, a city in the very Southern part of Poland, was extremely close to two regions which had a very important missionary prospective: Moldavia (*Valachia* in the manuscript) in the South, which was only two leagues far away from Kamianets, and Russia in the East, which could be another place for dispatching a mission.⁷

⁴ ARSI, *Fondo Gesuitico* (hereafter: *F. G.*), *Collegia 1452, busta no. 83, no. 10, Collegia. Kaminiac Podolski*, year 1608. As the pages were not numbered in the original document, the reference to this volume will include only the year as noted down by the Jesuits.

⁵ *Ibid.*, years 1609-1610.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.* Regarding the inauguration of the missions in Moldavia and Southern Poland see also ARSI, *Historia Societatis*, vol. 89, 1591-1616, ff. 385v-386v.

Shortly after the foundation of the new College the Jesuits inaugurated the mission from Moldavia, too. The occasion appeared in 1610 when an official delegation was sent to Moldavia by the city of Kamianets in order to solve some administrative issues: “instituta est missio in Valachiam occasione nuntiorum qui ex Palatinatu Podolien<sis> ratione administrationis iusitiae ac praedonibus mittebantur.”⁸ The Polish delegation was formed by seven people (both horsemen and pedestrians)⁹: officials of Kamianets and Jesuit Fathers. It is not excluded that Iustus Rabb, the Jesuit who had inaugurated the Kamianets mission two years before, was part of this expedition; moreover, it is not excluded that the idea of re-founding a mission in Moldavia belonged to him given the fact that he was an active part during the first Jesuit mission sent to Moldavia in 1588 and, as such, he was familiarized with the context, the possibilities and the missionary prospectives presented by Moldavia.¹⁰ The delegation made a good impression on the ruler of Moldavia and on the Court, that is why by Christmas the Jesuits came again to Iași to offer their spiritual aid to the Catholics in Moldavia. On this occasion they received rich fabrics for the liturgical vestments, a silver chalice and a paten as a gift from Lady Elisabeth Mohyla, the mother of the Prince of Moldavia, as well as several vessels of wine for the professors who taught at the College in Kamianets.¹¹

These two expeditions are narrated in detail in several *litterae annuae* sent by the Jesuits to the Superior General in Rome. Before relating the meeting with the Prince, we should expose the reasons why the Jesuits had chosen to dispatch a mission to Moldavia as they result from these documents. The pages which open the narration of this mission have an extensive description of the country, of its inhabitants, of their customs and practices, of the natural resources, of the languages as well as other practical details which did not escape to a Jesuit eye trained to register every single detail regarding the place of a possible mission. Thus, we learn that the main reason for which the Jesuits

⁸ ARSI, *F. G., Collegia 1452, busta no. 83, no. 10, Collegia. Kaminiac Podolski*, year 1610.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Unfortunately, all we know about the final years of this Jesuit is that he took part at the 13th Provincial Congregation of the Jesuits in Poland which took place between the 1st and the 3rd of August 1611 (ARSI, *Congregationes*, v. 53, f. 235v), and that he died in 1612 in Kraków: Ladislaus Lukács, *Catalogi personarum et officiorum Provinciae Austriae S. I.*, vol. I (Roma: Institutum Historicum S. I., 1978), 760.

¹¹ ARSI, *F. G., Collegia 1452, busta no. 83, no. 10, Collegia. Kaminiac Podolski*, year 1610.

from Kamianets reached Moldavia is not only the geographical proximity – the Moldavian border was only *duobus milliaribus Germanicis* far away from Kamianets –, but also the language, the surroundings and the customs of the country.¹²

The first aspect presented by the Jesuits in their accounts was the natural richness of Moldavia: the country had very fertile land which produced lots of grains, its inhabitants were producing plenty of wine and honey, there were so many sheep and cattle that every single day thousands of animals were directed towards Poland and from there to Germany and to various other places in Europe;¹³ as such, for the Jesuits this place was the perfect spot for the foundation of a permanent mission. Furthermore, a mission in a country whose inhabitants were speaking a kind of *valde corrupta* Latin was for sure easy to conduct. Yes – the Jesuits wrote – it was true that the language spoken by the commoners was mixed with words originating in the languages of the neighboring countries, especially Greek and Slavic, but it was equally true that for an Italian familiarized with Latin, who additionally knew a little bit of Greek, the language was easy to learn.¹⁴ On the other hand, one must observe that the Jesuits sent to Moldavia were Polish, not Italians. However, given their vocation and formation, they mastered Latin, so they could learn easily the Wallachian language. Regarding the people's skills in letters, we are told that amongst the population only the merchants and some *primores* knew how to read and write while no one was trained or skilled in the other sciences and doctrines, not even the clergymen who used to learn the alphabet only to be able to officiate the religious services and to administer the sacraments. Even though there was plenty of monasteries belonging to the order of Saint Basil and even if they had a lot of monks – three hundred and even five hundred each – the monks used to deal rather with trade than with the things pertaining to the monastic rule and to religious life.¹⁵ In conclusion, given the illiteracy and the lack of catechisation, a mission in those places was a must.

¹² ARSI, *Polonia* (hereafter: *Pol.*), vol. 51(1), f. 225v.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

On the other hand, according to the Jesuits the political situation was instable: the province was ruled by a voivode elected by the people,¹⁶ at least in theory, but in practice he was imposed to the population by the Polish, Hungarians or Turks.¹⁷ There was not such a thing as the first born succeeding to his father to the throne, and the country “*ferè semper illa fuit quasi pradae exposita,*”¹⁸ being often invaded by the neighbouring nations: Wallachians, Cossacks, Hungarians, Polish or Turks. But, as the *Hospodar*¹⁹ was vassal (*feudatarius*,²⁰ *cliens Polonorum*²¹) of the King of Poland and because he kept always around him several hundred Polish soldiers, in the first phase the mission would deal with these Polish and afterwards it could be extended amongst the *schismatic* Moldavians: for the Jesuits this was the perfect occasion to correct the errors of those Moldavians who were very set up against de Roman Church:

(...) tum si quid in ipsimet incolis Deus effici voluerit ad veram in illis fidem et morum honestatem propagandam ex occasione oblata indicabitur et tentabitur. Nam certe vix aliqua spes in iuvandi istos homines diuturno schismate graeco graviter contra Ecclesiam Romanam obfirmatos nisi hac occasione per Polonos Catholicos qui cum illis habitare incipiunt.²²

The circumstances of their first expedition in Moldavia, the warm welcoming made by the *Hospodar*, the second expedition in December, the mission made amongst the Catholics in Moldavia are narrated by this *litterae annuae* in the smallest details. The occasion for the mission appeared in fall, when the noblemen from Podolia decided to send to Moldavia, in the name of the entire region, a delegation made up from three noblemen to negotiate

¹⁶ This piece of information is very interesting given the fact that historically in Moldavia it was not the people who traditionally chose the rulers. Since the Jesuit testimony was a direct one, it is to be discussed why this piece of information appears in their accounts (maybe an echo from an ancient tradition originating in the 15th century, maybe take from some older Polish chronicles?)

¹⁷ ARSI, *Historia Societatis* (hereafter: *Hist. Soc.*), vol. 89, 1591-1616, f. 386v.

¹⁸ ARSI, *Pol.* 51(1), f. 225v.

¹⁹ The term used in the original document to designate the ruler of Moldavia, the voivode.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ ARSI, *Hist. Soc.*, vol. 89, 1591-1616, f. 386v.

²² ARSI, *Pol.* 51(1), f. 225v.

some political and administrative issues. Between the multiples points of the delegation two were particularly important: firstly, an issue regarding the judicial matters (they were asking the chastisement of the pillagers who used to attack Podolia from the borders of Moldavia), which was the main reason of setting up the embassy, and secondly the promotion of the new-founded Jesuit College in Kamianets. The members of the embassy were charged in the name of the whole aristocracy from Podolia to inform the *Hospodar* and all the Moldavians about the establishment of this College and to invite the Moldavian youth to enroll to its courses, so that

(...) melius cum litteris mores honestos omnemque civilitatem et cum Polonis maiorem animorum coniunctionem conciperent altiusque ab ipsa exteneris educatione combiberent, et firmius retinerent.²³

The issue had been discussed entirely in Kamianets in September, the messenger convincing the Rector of the College, Father Stanislaus Radizmski, to join the expedition which in the end comprised seven people.²⁴

The envois left Kamianets on the 10th of October and reached Iași four days later, spending the night at the house of the captain of the Polish soldiers in service to the *Hospodar*. The next day the carriage of Constantine Mohyla, the voivode of Moldavia, carried them to the Court where they had a short private meeting with him: the messengers greeted him, they were answered in Wallachian, then they were invited to sit near to the ruler who addressed them several official questions directly in Polish.²⁵

They revealed their missive only the day after, at the official meeting held in the presence of the voivode, the whole Court and the guards. After exposing the administrative issue which was the main cause of the expedition in Moldavia, one of the three Polish noblemen attacked the second point: the Jesuit issue. The discourse of the messenger had two aims: firstly, the recruitment of new students for the new Jesuit College in Kamianets, secondly the fund-raising for this College.

The messenger began by making a general overview on the Jesuit order, pointing to its role in the entire Christendom in the promotion of the

²³ ARSI, *Pol.* 66, f. 51r, *Pol.* 51(1), f. 226r.

²⁴ ARSI, *F. G.*, *Collegia 1452*, busta no. 83, no. 10, *Collegia. Kaminiac Podolski*, year 1610.

²⁵ ARSI, *Pol.* 66, f. 51r.

Christian faith in churches as well as in the promotion of a good education amongst the commoners (of course, it was impossible for the messenger to know that probably it was not the first time that the young Prince Constantine Mohyla meet the Jesuits: indeed, six months before, in April 1610, two Jesuits from Cluj took refuge in Moldavia, one of the missionaries establishing afterwards to Bacău.)²⁶ Then the Polish messenger exposed the circumstances which led to the establishment of the Jesuits to Kamianets through the efforts of the bishop of the city, Stanislaus Procknicki, the one who assiduously recommended the Jesuits to the Moldavians; afterwards he introduced to the audience the Rector of the College, Fr. Stanislaus Radzimski, and concluded by exhorting the audience “ut ex uno Sanctam hanc Religionem agnoscant omnes et amare incipient suosque illi filios ad erudiendum tradant quod iam nos Poloni omnes facimus perlibenter.”²⁷ At the very end of his discourse, the messenger exhorted the Moldavians *ad pietatem et liberalitatem* following the example of the noblemen in Podolia, asking them to help the Jesuit fathers *in fundatione ac fabrica* of the College. Subsequently, the discourse was noted down (the Jesuit was the one who dictated it), the messengers requesting that the particulars of their missive be written in the chart of the mission and translated into Wallachian: “puncta proponerent in linguam valachicam vertenda.”²⁸

It seems like the discourse of the messengers had a great impact on the Moldavian boyars: besides their benevolent attitude and some question they asked in the end regarding the Society of Jesus, they made some donations too: 400 florins were assigned to the College as alms (*nomine eleemosine*), the Rector of the College received a wine barrel in the name of the mother of the Prince while some boyars who intended to send their sons to study at the new College in Kamianets offered other four vessels of wine and several vessels of honey.²⁹

It seems that the official meeting at the Court was followed, in the very same day or afterwards, by a private meeting³⁰ with Lady Elisabeth Mohyla

²⁶ ARSI, *Hist. Soc.*, vol. 89, 1591-1616, f. 386r-388r.

²⁷ ARSI, *Pol.* 66, f. 51v.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ The document from *Pol.* 66 does not mention this meeting. Instead, it is mentioned in vol. *Pol.* 51(1). In order to rebuild the chronology of the expedition I used both sources.

who, according to the accounts of the Jesuits, used to help his young son in governing the province.³¹ Just as in the case of the meeting at the Court, the messengers exposed their missive and recommended the new College to the Princess. Following the discussion with the Rector of the College, the Princess committed to entrust two of her sons, the voivode's brothers, to the Jesuits to be educated in the College from Kamianets: "duos filios principis fratres in scholis Societatis erudiendos daturam se pollicita est,"³² and she gifted the Jesuit present with a chalice and a paten.³³ Furthermore, according to the testimony of the captain of the Polish guard at the Court, it seems that the Princess treated with the Prince and the Divan so that they grant the Society of Jesus a regular income in Moldavia which could be received annually: "Retulit nobis postea D. Capitaneus Polonicus ipsam Domnam ferventer cum filio et Senatu egisse ut Societati certi redditus assignentur in Valachia singulis annis recipiendi."³⁴

According to the Jesuit accounts, this first mission of the Kamianets College in Moldavia had a very positive impact on both sides. Not only the noblemen, the commoners or de Polish from Moldavia received the Jesuits with great enthusiasm, but the Jesuits themselves, realizing what potential had the country and particularly the capital for their missionary activities,³⁵ could foresee that this mission was opening a path. The following eight days after the meeting at the Court, the Rector of the College devoted himself to the mission both in the capital and in the countryside, reporting his activities to Rome: the administration of the sacraments amongst the Catholic faithful (especially confession and Eucharist) and the conversion of those who were conducting a sinful life (the letters present the case of a certain chief over the soldiers who was cohabitating with a *nobilem domnam*: the Jesuit convinced him to give up this sinful relation and to partake again in the sacraments of the Church.)³⁶

At the fervent request of the Polish soldiers, the Rector of the College made a second missionary travel in Moldavia near Christmas, remaining in

³¹ ARSI, *Pol.* 51(1), f. 226r.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ ARSI, *F. G., Collegia 1452, busta no. 83, no. 10, Collegia. Kaminiac Podolski, year 1610.*

³⁴ ARSI, *Pol.* 66, f. 51v.

³⁵ ARSI, *Pol.* 51(1), f. 226r.

³⁶ ARSI, *Pol.* 66, f. 51v.

the country until the first days of 1612.³⁷ On Christmas Day the Catholic church from Iași was full again – the Catholics could not miss the opportunity to listen the preach of the Jesuit, to confess their sins and to receive the Holy Communion. Moreover, the Jesuit prepared for baptism an Arab who had fled the Ottoman Empire,³⁸ re-converted to the Christian faith a Moldavian who had converted to Islam twelve years before and convinced several prostitutes to give up their shameful life and get married;³⁹ on this occasion, the missionary realized once again the extent of the missionary potential amongst so many nations if the Jesuits would succeed in establishing a permanent residence in the capital of Moldavia.⁴⁰ Likewise, he informed about the state of the other Catholics in the country and realized that there is a huge need of priests even though far away in the mountains towards Transylvania there were plenty of Catholic villages "quibus nulla infectio haeresis aut schismatis hactenus potuit nocere nam permanserunt catholici."⁴¹

The Jesuit was received on this occasion too by the Prince and by his mother, even though in a more intimate and less informal ambience: he spoke directly to the Prince, without any interpreters or intermediaries, "quod non nisi amicis insignibus conceditur."⁴² Following the discussion with the Prince and the Moldavians, the Jesuit was convinced that the basis for the promotion of the Catholic faith was already set since they believed that the Roman faith is as true as the Greek one, expressing openly their desire that the two faiths be again one:

Illud non leve ex conversatione cum Valachis ad promovendam <reli>gionem Catholicam iactum est fundamentum quod ipsemet Princeps et fere omnes proceres fateantur solam <fi>dem Romanam et Graecam esse veram, reliquas haereticorum sectas nomine christiano indignas, et quod aliqua <...> fuit ut Romana et Graeca fides agnosceretur una, hoc dicebant, nunc etiam se cupere et aliquando futur<a>m <...>batur.⁴³

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ ARSI, *Pol.* 51(1), f. 226r.

³⁹ ARSI, *Pol.* 66, f. 52r.

⁴⁰ ARSI, *Pol.* 51(1), f. 226r.

⁴¹ Ibid., f. 226v.

⁴² Ibid., f. 226r.

⁴³ Ibid.

Nonetheless, the missionary managed on this occasion too to gather rich donations for the College in Kamianets: a wealthy and notable Moldavian (*insignis dominus*) from the household of the Prince, who previously had lived in Poland, had converted to Catholicism and was very fond of the Jesuit order, donated to the College an excellent vessel of wine, another Moldavian bought for the altar a silk fabric worth 100 florins, and another one donated silk for a priest's garment and bought a silver chalice for the College.⁴⁴

Given the success of the two missionary expeditions from 1610 and the enthusiasm which transpires from the *litterae annuae*, from the Jesuits' perspective the mission in Moldavia was a fact, a reality. During the first half of the next year, even if they could not conduct a new missionary expedition in Moldavia because of the raids of the Tartars and of the Cossacks (*Schytyas*), the Jesuits were very confident regarding its aftermaths and future:

(...) nihilominus pacatis rebus erit continuanda; imo et de Residentia Societatis cogitandum, ad quam sola regionis illius tranquillitas desideratur; nam incolarum animi sunt admodum propensi in Societatem, locus quoque ac redditus designati, nec tamen omnino illis desumus.⁴⁵

As one can see, we can discuss about a Jesuit residence to which the Moldavians already destined a place and permanent income, that is why we can consider that the mission was fixed once for all: only the political hardships could prevent it. Unfortunately, these political troubles were not to cease too soon, that is why the following years the mission was rather intermittent and instable. However, the interest of the Jesuits regarding the mission in Moldavia did not cease: they always kept an eye on the political changes in the neighbor country as we can see from the recordings present in the *litterae annuae* from the Kamianets College.

During the following years, several missionaries were designated for the mission in Moldavia. A short mention from 1611 informs us about a new Jesuit charged with the Moldavian mission; unfortunately, because of the political troubles in Moldavia he did not succeed in reaching the place of the mission: "Franciscus Zgoda desigantus missionis Valachicae ad milites presidarios, sed Valachicae Moldavicae perturbat<iones> expeditionem

⁴⁴ ARSI, *Pol.* 66, f. 52r.

⁴⁵ ARSI, *Pol.* 51(1), f. 244r.

impedierunt.”⁴⁶ Zgoda was to reach Moldavia only in 1612 together with another *socius*.

At the end of 1611, the voivode Constantine Mohyla was deposed by the Turks and replaced with Stephen II Tomşa (1611-1615, 1621-1623). Being unable for the moment to flee in Poland, where a lot of noble families to whom he was related could help him, the Prince withdrew in the fortress of Khotyn together with his mother, Lady Elisabeth Mohyla, and a part of the filo-Polish Moldavian aristocracy which supported the Mohyla family.

The situation at the border was not favourable: because of the raids of the Moldavians who supported Tomşa and of the Tartars, the city was being plundered, the buildings set on fire, many people had already been taken into captivity, and the peasants who had escaped, after gathering the few things they had, abandoned their villages and fled with their families in the neighborhoods of Kamianets.⁴⁷ This was the context when the Jesuits from Kamianets decided to send two missionaries to Khotyn to grant spiritual assistance to the Polish soldiers established there with the Mohyla family: since it was a very cold winter and the political situation was one of the worst, those Catholics were dying without sacraments.⁴⁸ Despite their insistence to be sheltered inside the fortress, the captain of Khotyn, fearing a new raid of the Moldavians, refused their request, justifying that the place was not safe. Eventually, the missionaries were hosted by a local landlady in her house; from there, they were to enter daily the fortress to celebrate Mass.⁴⁹ The fears of the Jesuits became true: in the same very night, the Moldavians disguised in Tartars (*Scythas*) rushed in the city, setting the fair on fire and robbing anyone found in their route. The episode is described in detail in *litterae annuae*: the Jesuits tried to run towards the fortress, one of them managed to hide, but the other one was caught by the invaders who undressed him and stole his old and worn clothing, his hat, his shabby furry coat which protected him of the cruel coldness... and even his tattered underwear.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ ARSI, *F. G., Collegia 1452, busta no. 83, no. 10, Collegia. Kaminiac Podolski*, year 1611.

⁴⁷ ARSI, *Pol.* 66, f. 54r.

⁴⁸ ARSI, *Pol.* 51(1), f. 249r.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 249v. The event is also briefly narrated in ARSI, *F. G., Collegia 1452, busta no. 83, no. 10, Collegia. Kaminiac Podolski*, year 1612: *incursio haec nostros parum cautos Hocimi in missione (arx est Valachica) vexavit et unum vestimentis spoliavit.*

The efforts made by Stephen Potocki to put again his brother-in-law on the throne were vain. In the summer of 1612, the army commended by Potocki was defeated in the battle at Cornul lui Sas, near the Prut river: the army was dispersed, many soldiers were brought in captivity by the Turks, others were thrown in the Prut river and either drowned or were pierced with arrows while they were trying to swim in order to put themselves to safety.⁵¹ According to the account, Stephen Potocki became a prisoner and Constantine Mohyla was caught by the Tartars and drowned in the waters of the Dnieper river.⁵²

These events affected the Jesuits, too. In 1612 there were two missionaries in Moldavia: fr. Franciscus Zgoda and Martinus Miruszowicz, *coadiutor*. It is likely that they had accompanied the army of Stephen Potocki in his attempt to regain the throne on behalf of his brother-in-law; indeed, a short note in the acts of the College shows that the two missionaries were caught in Wallachia *cum exercitu polono* and taken into slavery in the parts of the Tartars.⁵³ Martinus Miruszowicz was set free after twenty-four weeks by the magnificent Stanislaus Zolkiewsky in exchange of a ransom worth 400 *aureis*; afterwards he returned to the College⁵⁴ and from there he went to mission in the area of Bessarabia: a note from 1620 informs us about his death in Bessarabia.⁵⁵ As far as Father Franciscus Zgoda is concerned, he was sold to a Christian Tartar and transported to Caffa and Kherson where he was redeemed by the same Stanislaus Zolkiewsky for the same ransom of 400 *aureis*.⁵⁶

Since the same year, 1612, the Jesuits received from Moldavia 100 florins *in pecunia* and fabrics for the liturgical vestments estimated at 100 florins,⁵⁷ one can presume that despite all these hardships, the mission did not cease its existence. In the acts of the College the Jesuit noted a donation made by a woman from the city,⁵⁸ the widow of *Ioannes Apothecarius*, who offered

⁵¹ ARSI, *Pol.* 66, f. 54rv.

⁵² *Ibid.*, f. 62r.

⁵³ ARSI, *F. G.*, *Collegia 1452, busta no. 83, no. 10, Collegia. Kaminiac Podolski*, year 1612.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, year 1620.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, year 1612.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ The name of the city is not specified, that is why we cannot know if the note speaks about a widow from Kamianets or a widow from Iași; the information appears right away after the information regarding the donation of the Moldavian Prince; in the documents of the

“calicem argenteum cum patena ac apparatus pro sacerdote sacrum facturo pro anima mariti.”⁵⁹

Even though in all those years the mission had rather an intermittent character, the impression that visit from 1610 and discourse of the Superior of the College remained alive in the hearts of the Moldavian boyars who had fled with Lady Elisabeth Mohyla and who had sought shelter in Podolia after Constantine Mohyla’s dethronement. The written accounts of the Jesuits inform that the Moldavian boyars used to come in secret to ask for advice from the Superior of the College and that they had entrusted their sons to the Jesuits to be educated:

(...) primarii Proceres Moldaviae (qui post pulsum Constantini Hospodarum in Podoliam secesserit) ad Superiori Collegii in suis secretis consiliis venire et de gravissimis negociis cum illo conferre soliti erant: qui ite ob magnam opinionem quae de Soceitate conceperant filios suos instituendos commiserunt.⁶⁰

Kamianets had become the shelter of these wandering boyars and the place where they conspired with the Polish, Lady Elisabeth Mohyla and her sons the dethronement of the tyrant Stephen Tomşa and the restauration of the Mohyla family. After acceding to the throne, Tomşa had begun to oppress the country and kill the boyars accusing them of treason. *Litterae annuae* narrate a very suggestive episode: on the 5th of October⁶¹ (year not specified), learning about a plot which aimed to kill him, the voivode ordered that all the plotter boyars be impaled together with their wives and children (he did not spare his own innocent brother) then ordered that they were decapitated, stuffed and hanged on the wall in the throne room:

Stephanus Tomsza (sic mentito nomine appellatus) per fraudem Princeps Moldaviae a Turca creatus, ob multas caedes et tyrannidem quae his temporibus in Proceres Valachiae bonis eorum inhians exercebat exosus omnibus factus suis subditis quos eo perduxit ut coniu<ati>o<n>e facta certis e medio sui

Kamianets College, the information related to Moldavia are not always written separately from the ones related to Kamianets.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ ARSI, *Pol.* 66, f. 61v.

⁶¹ In original: *dies tertia nonas Octobris.*

ad necem illi inferendam destinavit. Instat dies tertia nonas Octobri facinori perficien<di> destinatus proditur interea coniuratio Tyranno, nominatur authores quo ipse aliud cogitantes omnes fere comprehendi iubet et crudeliddimae palis una cum uxoribus et liberis (execrandum facinus) infigi iubet, etiam fratri proprio impius Tyrannus quod huius coniurationis esset non partens quem una cum liberis et coniuge eodem supplicio affici curavit. Et ne quid crudelitati deesset cadaveribus in stipite relictis capita amputari, pellibusque detractis ac faeno palcisque repletis in sua sala ad parietem ordine suspendi curavit.⁶²

It seems that the incident terrified the boyars from the Court. A part of them, fearing the suspicions of the voivode, fled to Poland, seeking protection from Lady Elisabeth Mohyla; in the next period the runaways, Elisabeth Mohyla and her two sons plotted to dethrone and chase away Stephen Tomşa to save the country from oppression and to revenge Constantine Mohyla's death.⁶³ Lady Elisabeth sent a messenger to her sons-in-law, Michael Wisniewicki and Samuel Korecki, proposing them to help Alexander Mohyla to gain the throne of Moldavia by providing him military aid. Her plan was simple: since the Polish laws forbade them to bring paid soldiers outside the realm, her sons-in-laws should secure some troops made of the many Cossacks who were living on the two noblemen's properties from Ukraine and Zaporizhzhia, as well as of the veteran soldiers who were living freely and who did not care the laws; the troupes were to be led personally by her sons-in-law while her Ladyship engaged in financing the expedition to which she assigned the hereditary assets of her sons.⁶⁴ The plan was carried accordingly: the two noblemen announced the Cossacks to gather, luring them with the prospective of the plunder they could commit during the expedition (which did happen – in the letters they wrote, the Jesuits complained the fate of all Podolia and of the College which had been plundered by the flood of Cossacks in their way towards Moldavia).

The expedition was a success: the army of Tomşa was scattered, the ruler was chased on the other side of the Danube river, Alexander Mohyla was enthroned, but only for a short time. According to the Jesuits, the people

⁶² ARSI, *Pol.* 66, f. 61v.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, f. 62r.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

did not want to recognize him as their ruler without the confirmation and the flag sent by the Sultan; while the boyars were negotiating in Constantinople the acceptance of the new voivode, Michael Wisnowiecki died – it seems that he was poisoned by his enemies – and his death changed the whole story. Shortly after, a break between the soldiers and Korecki led the soldiers to make a different camp. The Turks and the Tartars took advantage from these discords amongst the Poles, invading and dispersing the troupes. Eventually, in August 1616 they captured Elisabeth Mohyla, Prince Alexander Mohyla and Samuel Korecki somewhere between Hârlău and Botoșani, bringing them in captivity to Constantinople⁶⁵ with many other Polish soldiers. Thus, Alexander Mohyla's short reign (November 1615-August 1616) came to an end. Alexander Mohyla would die in Constantinople after being forced to embrace Islam while his mother died in the Sultan's harem.

The coming years were not favourable for sending new missions because of the endless troubles at the borders of Moldavia. For the year 1620, the Jesuit accounts record a raid of the Tartars in a camp of soldiers situated at the Moldavian border (“castra in loco Cicora in Valachia ad fluvium Pruth Poloni militis turbata et post a Tartaris discerpta”⁶⁶); the raid and *hac perfidia Valachorum* caused the death of a couple of Jesuits and of several benefactor of the Kamianets College: the magnificent Stanislaus Zolkiewsky, promoter of the College, and the magnificent Valentinus Alexander Kalinowsky, the captain of Kamianets and general of Podolia. Two Jesuits died, being killed by the Tartars and Moldavians: Ioannes Turowsky and Bartholomeus Wolborius, buried *in parte Valachiae quae Bessarabia dicitur*;⁶⁷ also, in Besserabia died the Jesuit missionary Martin Miruszowich whom we mentioned earlier.

The end of the Mohylas meant the end of this first attempt of the Jesuits from the Kamianets College to organize a permanent mission in Moldavia. Toward the middle of the 17th century, after a short period when the mission was organized and conducted by Hungarian Jesuits from Cluj-Mănăștur, the Polish Jesuits from Kamianets would come again in Moldavia beginning with 1650. A new period was to begin in the history of the Jesuit mission in Moldavia.

⁶⁵ Ibid., f. 62v; *Pol.* 51(1), f. 289rv.

⁶⁶ ARSI, *F. G.*, *Collegia 1452, busta no. 83, no. 10, Collegia. Kaminiac Podolski*, year 1620.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

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.¹ 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.² 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.³

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

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

² 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.

³ 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 Arhiepiscopale, 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 Sătmar 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.⁴ 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.⁵ Yet, the government in Vienna decided to fend off any Russian claims and continued to deny concessions to the Transylvanian Orthodox.⁶ 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.⁷ 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

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.

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

⁷ “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.⁸

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.⁹ 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.

⁸ Bunea, *Episcopii Aron și Novacovici*, 213–214.

⁹ 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.¹⁰ Despite its relevance, this type of document has long evaded historians, who even raised questions about its authenticity.¹¹ It was by mere chance that I came across dozens of such declarations while pursuing research in the Hungarian National Archives in Budapest.¹² 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.¹³ 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.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ Dragomir, *Istoria desrobirei religioase*, vol. 2, 2–3, 5.

¹² 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.

¹³ 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,¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ They correspond on the whole to the most extensive form found in some of the pledges,¹⁶ 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

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

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 1: Appendix, 104–105.

¹⁶ 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.¹⁷

The following **Table** indicates the origin of those making the pledge, in alphabetical order,¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ “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 kept²⁰.

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.

²⁰ 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.

Location — Date(s)
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

Location — Date(s)
Tămășasa (Tamáspatak) — 1748/8/18; 1748/8/23
Tărtăria (Alsótárlaka; Tartaria) — 1747/8/26
Topârcea (Toporcza; 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.²¹

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.²² Four months later, in August, fifteen other parishioners took upon themselves and their families to refrain from further

²¹ 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.

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

dissent and to return to attending the Greek Catholic church.²³ 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.²⁴ 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.²⁵

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.²⁶ 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.²⁷ 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.²⁸ 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.²⁹

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.³⁰ The only evidence preserved among

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³⁰ 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.³¹

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.³² Owing to his experience in the office of chief prosecutor³³ 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 1744.³⁴

³¹ 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.

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

³³ 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.

³⁴ 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.³⁵ 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.³⁶ 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.³⁷ Incidentally, the Orthodox in Transylvania launched their struggle in a context that was already markedly

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

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

³⁷ 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.³⁸ At this level, Petru Dobra's legal expertise proved paramount, as he meticulously prosecuted individuals and communities that challenged union with Rome.³⁹

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 1748.⁴⁰ After remaining incarcerated through the winter, he was released in April 1749 following the posting of a community bond.⁴¹ 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.⁴²

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

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

³⁹ 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.

⁴⁰ 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.

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

⁴² 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.⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵ Rășinari was second from the top, with 412 Hfl. collected in mulcts and another 600 Hfl. for the maintenance of the priests.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸

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

⁴³ 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.

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

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

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

⁴⁷ OeStA FHKA, AHK, HFU, 7bgn., Karton 113, fols. 26r., 27r.

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

and again.⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰ In June 1749, the entire district petitioned the Transylvanian governor for the removal of the quartered troops, emphasizing their return to church union.⁵¹ 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.⁵² 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

⁴⁹ Dragomir, *Istoria desrobirei religioase*, vol. 1: Appendix, 86–88.

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

⁵¹ 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.

⁵² 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.⁵³ 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.⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵

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.⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹ 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

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

⁵⁴ MNL OL, F 53, 27A csomó, fol. 323r–v.

⁵⁵ Ghitta, "Bishop Manuel Olsavszky," 183–194.

⁵⁶ Bunea, *Episcopul Klein*, 255.

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

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

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

Catholicism,⁶⁰ 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 1746.⁶¹ 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.⁶² 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.⁶³

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

⁶⁰ 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.

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

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

⁶³ 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.⁶⁴ Thus, Kostandin and the anonymous chaplain of 1749 are very likely one and the same⁶⁵. His testimony is a most transparent reference to the legitimizing discourse popularised by the Greek Catholic elite around 1750⁶⁶ 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,⁶⁷ 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.⁶⁸

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

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

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

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

⁶⁷ 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.

⁶⁸ 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.⁶⁹ 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.⁷⁰ 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.⁷¹ The allusion hints to the first catechism published by the printshop in Blaj earlier that year,⁷² 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.⁷³

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

⁶⁹ Bunea, *Episcopul Klein*, 255.

⁷⁰ "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.

⁷¹ "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.

⁷² *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.

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

parishes in some of the Szekler seats⁷⁴. 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.⁷⁵ 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.⁷⁶ 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.⁷⁷ 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.⁷⁸ 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

⁷⁴ MNL OL, F 53, 29 csomó, fol. 98r.

⁷⁵ MNL OL, F 53, 29 csomó, fol. 112r.

⁷⁶ "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.

⁷⁷ "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.

⁷⁸ MNL OL, F 53, 29 csomó, fols. 113r, 98r.

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

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

⁷⁹ 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.

⁸⁰ 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.

Liberty through Uniformity (The emergence of the nation-state in the French Revolution)

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Abstract: The fundamental hypothesis of the study is that the specific form of European statehood, which we still refer to today as the nation-state, emerged during the French Revolution. One of the earliest and most accurate descriptions of this form of statehood comes from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's younger compatriot, Benjamin Constant, a relentless critic of Jacobin terror: "the same code of law, the same measures, the same rules, and, if possible, gradually the same language: behold, this is called a perfectly organised society". Constant was probably right in saying that the essence of this form of statehood was uniformity, but his position needs to be supplemented insofar as it originally meant more than the legal, administrative, or even linguistic homogenization of contemporary French society: it also presupposed the introduction of a unified civil (or civic) religion. The study aims to investigate the ideological considerations behind these homogenization efforts, with particular emphasis on the ideological reasons behind the introduction of a civil religion. The basic assumption here is that the revolutionary effort to introduce a civil religion, and in connection with this, the organization of the feast of the Supreme Being during the revolution, reveals something not only about the nation-state, but also about the sentiment and way of thinking that legitimizes it, namely nationalism.

Keywords: French Revolution, nation-state, uniformity, Rousseau, Abbé Sieyès, Robespierre, cult of the Supreme Being

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Rezumat: Ipoteza fundamentală a studiului este că forma specifică a statalității europene, pe care o numim și astăzi stat național, a apărut în timpul Revoluției Franceze. Una dintre cele mai timpurii și mai precise descrieri ale acestei forme a statalității provine de la compatriotul mai tânăr al lui Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Benjamin Constant, un critic implacabil al terorii iacobine: "aceleași legi, aceleași măsuri, aceleași reguli și, dacă este posibil, treptat, aceeași limbă: aceasta este ceea ce se numește o societate perfect organizată". Constant avea probabil dreptate când spunea că esența acestei forme de statalitate era uniformitatea, dar poziția sa trebuie completată în măsura în care aceasta însemna deja la început mai mult decât omogenizarea juridică, administrativă sau chiar lingvistică a societății franceze contemporane: ea presupunea, de asemenea, introducerea unei religii civile (sau civice) uniforme. Studiul își propune să investigheze considerentele ideologice care au stat la baza acestor eforturi de omogenizare, cu un accent special pe motivele ideologice care conduceau la introducerea unei religii civile. Presupunerea de bază aici este că efortul revoluționar de a introduce o religie civilă și, în legătură cu aceasta, organizarea festivalului Ființei Supreme în timpul revoluției, dezvăluie ceva nu numai despre statul național, ci și despre sentimentul și mentalitatea care îl legitimează, adică naționalismul.

Cuvinte-cheie: Revoluția Franceză, stat național, uniformitate, Rousseau, Abbé Sieyès, Robespierre, cultul Ființei Supreme

The ideal of uniformity in the French Revolution

Benjamin Constant was undoubtedly right when he wrote in 1806 in his work on the spirit of conquest (a text that would not appear until after the fall of Napoleon in 1814) that "it is somewhat remarkable that uniformity should never have encountered greater favour than in a revolution made in the name of the rights and the liberty of men". He was also the author of one of the first and most precise descriptions of the specific conception of the *state* that took shape during the French Revolution: "the same code of law", he wrote, "the same measures, the same rules, and, if possible, gradually the same language: behold, this is called a perfectly organised society".¹ If every

¹ Benjamin Constant, "The Spirit of Conquest and Usurpation and their Relation to European Civilization", in Benjamin Constant, *Political Writings*. Edited and translated by Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 44-167, citation on page 73.

individual has equal rights, this automatically implies that every individual has the *same* rights, and that these are guaranteed by the *same* laws in every corner of the republic, that is, in every administrative subdivision of it. So, what Constant called ‘uniformity’ undoubtedly characterized the French society that born with the Revolution, moreover, in many more ways than Constant’s diagnosis initially suggests. Because it meant the political, linguistic and religious homogenization of society at the same time – or at least the *demand* for all these together.

The *political* homogenisation of French society was a direct consequence of democratisation, and the extent to which this demand was popular in contemporary French society is already illustrated by the overwhelming success of Abbé Sieyès’ pamphlet in Paris, published in January 1789. One of its most important ideas, namely, that the Third Estate is the French nation *itself*, and that all the privileges are illegitimate, was put into effect by the National Constituent Assembly on 4 August 1789, when all the privileges (landlord’s rights, municipal, provincial, and corporative privileges, the tithe, in short, the whole old regime) were abolished in France. In this long, late-night session, aristocrats made patriotic statements amid tears and applause. Sieyès, who was himself a cleric, although he was elected to the Estates General as a deputy of the Third Estate, did not even in his pamphlet insult the Church, arguing that the priesthood was not an order but a “profession”.² Despite this (and Sieyès’ express opposition), the French Revolution soon abolished all the clerical privileges. This was the purpose (among other things) of the expropriation of the Church property (2 November 1789), the adoption of a Civil Constitution of the Clergy (12 July 1790), and the swearing-in of the clergy to the civil constitution (27 November 1790). With the establishment of the constitutional church, the priests, who took the obligatory loyalty oath, became paid state employees, and the clergy ceased to be a political force with its own material basis. Being a priest did become indeed a ‘profession’ in France, just not in the way Sieyès had originally thought.

² Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, “What is the Third Estate?”, in Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, *Political Writings*. Edited and translated by Michael Sonenscher. (Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2003), 92-162, citation on page 96.

At the same time, on 4 August 1789, the Constituent Assembly also abolished the traditional administrative division of France, inherited from the 'old regime', which it considered 'tangled'. Sieyès' geometric plan (or rather that of the Constitutional Committee, of which he was a member) in September of that year to split up the territory of France in eighty *départements*, composed of regular squares, followed apparently only *electoral* reasons.³ Thus, François Furet is certainly right to say that "as each representative of the people held his mandate not from his personal electorate but from the entire nation, the best equivalent of this wholeness of the nation was to have each part of it exactly equal to all the others".⁴ But, as Edmund Burke already noticed in his book on the Revolution in France, first published on 1st November 1790, the Constituent Assembly did not follow only electoral reasons with its plan: the aim of Sieyès' proposal was the abolition of the old provincial privileges, customs barriers, linguistic diversity, etc. Whatever the case was, the plan did not meet with unanimous support: some, like Barnave, argued against it on the grounds of the importance of local 'usages', others, such as Mirabeau, advocated the creation of territories on the base of 'demographic equality'. The final division was an amalgam of rationalism and empiricism. "The new France was divided into *départements* of comparable size, mapped out by deputies in accordance with reason and history, and baptized by their natural elements, such as rivers and mountains; each of them was subdivided into districts, cantons and communes."⁵

However, the transformation of Sieyès' doctrines into political realities had begun earlier, in June 1789, with the transformation of the Estates General into a National Assembly. The facts are well known. The deputies of the Third Estate called the representatives of the clergy and the nobility to join them, but only a few representatives of the lower clergy did this (the number of which would gradually increase). On 17 June, on a motion by Sieyès, after lengthy debates, a resolution was adopted by 491 votes to 90, denying the division of society into orders and changing the name of the Estates General to the National Assembly. "The name of National Assembly is the only name appropriate to the Assembly in the current state of affairs, because the members

³ *Gazette Nationale, ou Le Moniteur Universel*, N° 65, du 29 Septembre 1789, 265-266.

⁴ François Furet, *The French Revolution. 1770-1814*. Translated by Antonia Nevill. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 87.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 88.

who constitute it are the only legitimately verified and publicly known representatives; because they have been directly dispatched by the near totality of the nation (*la presque totalité de la Nation*); and finally, because as representation is one and indivisible, no deputy, regardless of the order or community that has chosen him, has the right to exercise his functions separately from the present Assembly.”⁶

The deputies knew very well, of course, that such a decision would permanently deprive them of any possibility of a future compromise with the privileged orders. Jean-Joseph Mounier, who later defended the bicameral legislature against Sieyès, proposed that the assembly be defined as “a legitimate assembly of the representatives of the major part of the nation in the absence of the minor part”. Mirabeau, on the other hand, proposed that the Estates General should be renamed as the “representatives of the French people”.⁷ But the word ‘people’ still carried a rather partial and inferior meaning at that time – that of the Roman *plebs*, as opposed to the more noble *populus*. The fear was that the people would be identified with the *canaille*. The decision was therefore taken to use the more appropriate term ‘Nation’, and although the king did not order the unification of the estates until ten days later, the lower priesthood, which was united by then with the third estate, made it known to its contemporaries as early as 17 June that a new, egalitarian society had been born.

But even if the Constituent Assembly succeeded in abolishing the orders in France and the old provincial privileges, in breaking down local usages and traditions, eliminating customs barriers, and introducing a uniform administration everywhere, the Revolution did not achieve the great goal of *linguistic* unification of the population of France. The intention was there, but the tools weren’t added. This intention is already very clearly shown by the research carried out in 1792 by Abbé Grégoire (i.e. Henri Jean-Baptiste Grégoire), the results of which he later (on 4 June 1794) presented to the National Convention on behalf of the Committee of Public Instruction, and

⁶ *The French Revolution. A Document Collection*. Edited by Laura Mason and Tracey Rizzo. (Boston – New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 59-60. See also: *Gazette Nationale, ou Le Moniteur Universel*, N° 9, du 16 au 20 Juin, 1789, 42.

⁷ Etienne Dumont, *Souvenirs sur Mirabeau et sur les deux premières assemblées législatives* (Paris: Librairie de Charles Gosselin, 1832), 76. See also: *Gazette Nationale, ou Le Moniteur Universel*, N° 9, du 16 au 20 Juin, 1789, 41.

the title of which was already worthy of a minor declaration of war: *Report on the Necessity and Means to Annihilate the Dialects [les patois] and to Universalize the Use of the French Language*.⁸ Although the threat to annihilate the dialects was not carried out during the Revolution, the report still provides an excellent insight into the specific revolutionary logic behind the planned language policy.

For example, it is quite obvious that for Grégoire, the linguistic diversity of France (barely half of the population spoke French at the time) posed a serious threat to the internal unity of the nascent republic. The major obstacle to the “political unification” (*l’amalgame politique*) required by the republic’s “expansion” (or, if you like, its understanding: *l’étendue*), he writes, is the many jargons (*jargons*), which is spoken in France, and which “makes thirty of one people” (according to his own research, the vast majority of people in France spoke one of 30 dialects).⁹ For him, moreover, as will become clear later in the text, a single French language is not only a means of political communication required by democratic participation, but also the expression of the national *unity*. He also concludes that the linguistic homogenisation of French society is necessary because it is as much a condition for the existence of the unified nation as it is for the proper functioning of the “political machinery”. “All that we have said”, he writes, “leads to the conclusion that the crushing of all prejudices, the expression of all truth, all talent, and all virtues; the melting [*fondre*] of all citizens into the body of the nation, the simplification and facilitation of the political machinery, require the unity of language.”¹⁰ The unity of language, he says, is therefore an “integral” (*intégrante*) part of the Revolution.¹¹

Less militant in title, but perhaps even more harsh in wording, is the report of Bertrand de Barère, a lawyer from Toulouse, presented on 8 Pluviôse

⁸ Abbé Henri Baptiste Grégoire, “Rapport sur la nécessité et les moyens d’anéantir les patois et d’universaliser l’usage de la langue française”, in Michel de Certeau, Dominique Julia and Jacques Revel, *Une politique de la langue. La République française et les patois: L’enquête de l’Abbé Grégoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 300-317. See also: *Gazette Nationale, ou Le Moniteur Universel*, N° 258, Octidi, 18 Prairial, l’an 2 de la République Française, une et indivisible (6 Juin 1794, vieux st.), 1050-1052.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 304.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 308.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 309.

of the Year II (27 January 1794) on behalf of the Committee of Public Safety: *Report of the Committee of Public Safety on Languages*.¹² Barère was convinced from the outset that French was “the most beautiful language in Europe” (*la plus belle langue de l’Europe*), whose task was to “transmit to the world the most sublime ideas of freedom” (*transmettre au Monde les plus sublimes pensées de la liberté*). In his view, Occitan, the language of the troubadours, was gradually decomposed into a variety of local remnants that were mutually unintelligible and therefore should be abandoned in favor of the language of Paris. Accordingly, in his report, he first spoke about the “indestructible federalism”, “the basis of which is the lack of communication of ideas”. (It should be noted that under ‘federalism’ the revolutionary rhetoric meant those movements that opposed the centralization efforts of the Jacobin government.) “We have revolutionized the government”, he said, “the laws, the customs, the manners, the dress, the commerce, and the thought itself. It is time to revolutionize even the language, which is their daily means.”

In more concrete terms, his problem is that although the National Convention has ordered the laws to be sent to “all the communes of the Republic”, this “good deed” is immediately wasted in the departments where the population does not speak French. The “light” which the revolutionary government is trying at great expense to send “to the edges of the country” is thus extinguished as soon as it reaches them, “because there they do not even understand the laws”. It is precisely for this reason, he adds, that these departments, which cannot be won over to the cause of the Republic in this way, are also fertile soil of counter-revolutionary ideas. “Federalism and superstition speak in Lower Breton, emigration, and the desecration of the Republic in German; counter-revolution speaks in Italian, fanaticism in Basque.” “Let us destroy”, he adds “these instruments of error and destruction.” (*Caffons ces instruments de dommage et d’erreur*.)¹³ – Although Barère distorts it somewhat here, because the Minister of Justice had already set up an office in December

¹² Bertrand de Barère, “Rapport du Comité de Salut Public sur les idioms”, in Michel de Certeau, Dominique Julia and Jacques Revel, *Une politique de la langue. La République française et les patois*, 291-299. See also: *Gazette Nationale, ou Le Moniteur Universel*, N° 129, Nonidi, 9 Pluviôse, l’an 2 de la République Française, une et indivisible (28 Janvier 1794, vieux style), 519-520.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 292-93.

1792 to translate laws and decrees into German, Italian, Catalan, Basque and Lower Breton, his report is nevertheless an accurate vision of the unifying efforts of the Jacobin government and the ideological considerations behind them.

It is quite obvious that for Barère the justification for linguistic assimilation is the propagation of the idea of *freedom*, that is, the idea of the republic. Uniformity is justified by universalism, assimilation by the demand for freedom. If it is true, therefore, that the republic is the only form of government that is consistent with the ideals of liberty and equality, and that equality is a condition of liberty, then man, as Rousseau said, can be “forced to be free” for his own sake, even by the elimination of his linguistic identity. The goal of linguistic homogenization is not cultural, but political, and is related to the need for political deliberation (and to make central administration more efficient). Thus, unlike the nationalists of our day, for Barère, a language or dialect different from that of the majority of the population is visibly not in itself irritating or destructive, nor should it be destroyed for that simple reason, but because language and communication have a *political* significance in the republic. The eradication of languages is therefore not done in the name of despotism, but on the contrary, in the name of freedom, which is why Barère can think that there is something deeply anti-despotic in monolingualism.

If Rousseau thought that in the republic the walls of the houses should be made of glass and that the citizens should learn what it means “to live under the eyes of their fellow citizens”,¹⁴ then Barère assigns the same function to the common language. Monolingualism is antidespotic because it allows citizens to keep an eye on each other and at the same time to control the government. Despotism, writes Barère, preserves the diversity of languages, while in democracy, on the contrary, the “control” (*surveillance*) of the government is left to each citizen. In order to do this, everyone must know the government and, above all, must know its language.¹⁵ The requirement of linguistic homogenization is thus simultaneously connected to the ideas of political equality and freedom, and therefore freedom and uniformity are

¹⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Considerations on the Government of Poland and on Its Planned Reformation”, in *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, vol. 11. Edited by Christopher Kelly, translated by Judith R. Bush and Christopher Kelly (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2005), 167-240, citation on page 181.

¹⁵ Bertrand de Barère, “Rapport du Comité de Salut Publique sur les idioms”, 296.

not mutually exclusive, but on the contrary: they appear to be mutually presupposing states.¹⁶ Throughout in the text, Barère treats it as evidence that linguistic homogeneity of society serves the cause of freedom, because it enables the individual to fully experience citizenship.

However, it is not enough to declare the requirement of linguistic homogeneity, it must also be achieved, and the revolutionaries were not given the means to do so. For, as Burke has already observed, the best service to the linguistic unity of the nation during the Revolution was provided by the Parisian newspapers distributed everywhere in the country, which were the disseminators of both revolutionary ideas and the language of the Revolution, Parisian French. However, this instrument proved ultimately inadequate, and the time available to the revolutionaries too short to achieve their goal, and the linguistic unity of France was only achieved by the educational policy of the Third Republic almost a hundred years later, using extremely harsh methods. But even if the Revolution did not eliminate the linguistic diversity of France, it undoubtedly eliminated the French's *indifference* to the linguistic diversity of their country. All of this is ultimately proof that, historically speaking, the attempt to assimilate linguistic minorities is also a question of popular sovereignty and democracy, so it is understandable if it was raised with particular weight and significance in the gradually democratising European (and then Eastern European) countries. The linguistic diversity of France was not a problem until the rural masses and urban plebeians felt the urge to participate in democratic power. It became a problem with the introduction of republican government and the public recognition of the principle of popular sovereignty.

The religion of the nation and the cult of the Supreme Being

Today we know that creating a nation, if we mean by nation a community of monolingual people, is a long and difficult process (it took nearly a hundred years in France as well), and rarely leads to complete success. The contemporaries of the French Revolution, who, unlike us, knew nothing about the so-called 'national education', could not even imagine that this novel idea of the nation would ever be the subject of a serious *emotional*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 297.

attachment. That is why Burke has already written that probably “no man ever was attached by a sense of pride, partiality, or real affection, to a description of square measurement”. “He never will glory in belonging to the Chequer No. 71, or to any other badge-ticket.” He had noticed, of course, that the revolutionaries were pursuing a kind of “geometrical policy”, and that, in the face of this *zèle révolutionnaire*, “all local ideas should be sunk”: “the people”, he wrote, “should no longer be Gascons, Picards, Bretons, Normans; but Frenchmen, with one country, one heart, and one Assembly”. But since he only knew the *patriotic* form of political loyalty rooted in locality, the feeling that is primarily attached to one’s family and homeland, he estimated that, as a direct result of geometrical policy, the inhabitants of France, instead of becoming all French, rather would totally lose their country. Since “we begin our public affections in our family”, he said, the inhabitants of the reorganized administrative areas “will shortly have no country”.¹⁷

Similar sceptic tone was adopted by Constant in his work on the spirit of conquest, even if in 1806 he had in principle a much better historical perspective than Burke in 1790. He criticises Napoleon in the first place, who tried to spread this revolutionary idea of uniformity throughout Europe, but he does not spare “demagogy” either, that is, the republican system, which originally developed this idea. The “spirit of system”, he writes, “was first entranced by symmetry”, and although patriotism exists only by “a vivid attachment to the interests, the ways of life, the customs of some locality”, the “so-called patriots” have declared war on all of these. They almost marked the cities and provinces with “numbers” and began to build by first “grinding and reducing to dust” the materials they could use. They “dried up”, as it were, this “natural source of patriotism”, and sought to replace it with some “abstract being”, some passion for a “general idea”, “stripped of all that can engage the imagination and speak to the memory”.¹⁸ Constant thus remains sceptical, although, unlike Burke, he sees and describes convincingly the process by which the Revolution attempted to turn patriotism into *nationalism*.

Today, with more than two hundred years of historical experience behind us, and in the possession of the dubious wisdom of posterity, it is safe

¹⁷ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 167.

¹⁸ Benjamin Constant, “The Spirit of Conquest and Usurpation”, 73-74.

to say that the scepticism of both proved unfounded, and that this was one of the few occasions when his proverbial clairvoyance failed even Burke. As it turned out later, the English practice he cited as a counterexample is not at all conclusive. It may be true that in England public affections really develop in the family circle, but history suggests that a “cold relation” can also be a “zealous citizen” – sometimes even perhaps too zealous.¹⁹ Patriotism is by no means the only possible form of collective political loyalty, for the modern times discovered, in the wake of the French Revolution, an equally effective, if not more effective, force of community cohesion: unconditional loyalty to the abstract idea of the nation. It may be that the idea of the nation, precisely because it is only an *idea*, or, as Constant called it: an “abstract being”, is not realistic, but the emotions radiating to it, according to the testimony of later ages, can be very *real*.

In any case, it is certain that with the idea of the nation, an alliance of political power and society was born, which was not known in the previous centuries. Parallel to the dismantling of the *ancien régime* and the emancipation of the bourgeoisie, a new idea of the ‘nation’ was born, and this new concept of community immediately became the sole basis of the legitimacy of political power, the “keystone of a political system”, as Lord Acton once wrote in his beautiful and clever essay on nationality.²⁰ But from a historical point of view, the nation’s self-identity, and its loyalty to itself, despite all political declarations, was born painfully slowly and in controversial circumstances. Since the revolutionaries saw the ultimate depository of sovereignty in the united and indivisible nation, and only the political body of the citizens had credibility in public life, it was imperative that it should appear as unitary and to not present social, regional, or linguistic differences. The problem was that the syntagm of the ‘French nation’ during the Revolution, despite the undoubted success of Sieyès’ pamphlet in Paris, was still nothing more than a senseless fiction for the rural peasantry, who made up much of the population of France. The French nation, beyond all the pompous declarations, had therefore to be properly *created*, and its loyalty to itself had to be brought to life.

¹⁹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 167.

²⁰ Lord Acton, “Nationality”, in Lord Acton, *The History of Freedom and Other Essays* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1907), 270-300, citation on page 286.

All of this seemed so unusual and challenging even at first sight that it is not surprising that contemporaries, who looked at the revolution from the outside, like Burke, had serious doubts about the success of the whole enterprise. Even more so because the problem revolutionaries were grappling with was not only real but also extremely pressing. Lord Acton was therefore certainly right when he wrote that as soon as the French people “abolished the authorities under which it lived, and became its own master, France was in danger of dissolution”. The dismantling of the whole edifice of the old regime, he said, had broken society down into its “natural elements” and threatened to “break up the country into as many republics as there were communes”.²¹ The revolutionaries had only one response to the situation, albeit a very effective one, as it turned out later: the *festivals*.²² Even at first glance, it is striking that during the French Revolution, the various celebrations became more and more frequent: the Feast of the Federation on 14 July 1790; the Feast of Liberty on 15 April 1792; the Festival of the Unity and Indivisibility of the Republic on 15 April 1793; the Festival of Reunion or Unity on 23 Thermidor of the Year I (i.e. 10 August 1793), the Feast of the Reason on 20 Brumaire of the Year II (i.e. 10 November 1793); the Feast of the Supreme Being on 20 Prairial of the Year II (i.e. 8 June 1794); and finally, the Feast of Jean-Jacques Rousseau on the 20 Vendémiaire of the Year III (i.e. 11 October 1794), when Rousseau’s remains were transported to the Panthéon.

Although these celebrations are obviously not of equal historical importance, and although we might be inclined today to attribute the greatest importance to the first, since it is the historical antecedent of the present French national holiday, yet if we are to look at the origin of national *feeling*, the feeling which emergence was so unlikely according to Burke, we must undoubtedly look more closely at the celebration of the Supreme Being. Far from being the cause of the French national feeling, as no holiday can obviously be the cause of it, this celebration is undoubtedly one of the first, most evident and most surprising manifestations of this feeling, and a brief recollection of it may help us to understand not only the nature of the national feeling, but also, curiously enough, its *origin*.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 276-277.

²² The place and meaning of festivals in the history of the French Revolution is also discussed in detail by Mona Ozouf in her excellent, albeit controversial book: *Festivals and the French Revolution*. Translated by Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 1988).

The fact that Robespierre created this celebration specifically to counterbalance the Feast of the Reason, moreover, confirms one of Tocqueville's passing observations that even in the genesis of events of great historical importance there is something *contingent*. Its immediate cause was that in November 1793 the Commune attempted to introduce in Paris the "Cult of Reason". It closed the churches throughout the city, and after an anti-Christian meeting was held in the National Convention on November 7, during which the constitutional bishop of Paris, Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Gobel, solemnly renounced his faith and resigned his episcopal functions, it organized the Feast of the Reason at Notre-Dame on the 10th. The leaders of the movement included both Convention members and representatives of the Commune. Its first man was Jacques René Hébert, the deputy prosecutor of the Commune, and its organiser and promoter was the Paris Commune itself. Already on October 23, the General Council of the Commune decided "that all religious images in the various places of Paris should be removed" and called on the popular societies (*sociétés populaires*) to search for these "monuments of barbarism" (*les monumens de la barbarie*) and gave permission to the revolutionary committees (*Comités révolutionnaires*) to "totally destroy" them (*leur totale destruction*).²³

The astonishing events that followed the Council's decision are recounted by a contemporary witness (although it would be more accurate to say an ear-witness, as he happens to be in prison at the time, incarcerated by Robespierre), Louis Sébastien Mercier, in his colourful but not entirely reliable book, *Le Nouveau Paris*. Soon, he writes, "fanciful celebrations were organized", in which Paris took the lead. The participants drank brandy sipped from the altar chalices, and "picked medlar from the wafer trays". Riding on donkeys dressed in vestments, with the sacrament in their hands, they "stood in front of the doors of the taverns", and the innkeeper "filled the ciborium for them three times". The procession was closed by mules laden with "crucifixes, holy water vessels and incense burners". Thus, in their "masquerade" of priestly vestments, they marched to the Convention, where they made welcome speeches and received a round of applause. In the courtyards of the houses, wooden statues of saints and crucifixes were burnt. The flames of the bonfires reached as high as the second floor, and from

²³ *Gazette Nationale, ou Le Moniteur Universel*, N° 34, Le 4 du 2^e Mois, L'An II^e de la République Française, 134.

the windows they threw into the fire “the books condemned by Jacobinism”. “At the sight of these new orgies”, says Mercier, “the people came running in crowds, proud to have shaken off the yoke of their religion.” They laughed loudly, shouted obscenities and carried confessionals to the stake. “The whore showed her boyfriend the half-roasted image of the innocent Susanna; and the picture of the Lord’s Supper served as an eaves above a mending-shop”.²⁴ The “irreligious follies” (*folies irréligieuses*), as Mercier calls them, reached their peak on November 20, when an endless line of people, disguised in “dalmatics and vestments”, marched in front of the Convention, and developed into double lines; the wheelbarrows were filled with “chalices, ciboriums, and candlesticks”. The crowds, Mercier tells us, demanded to be rewarded for their offering by “dancing the carmagnole”. The Convention agreed, and some of its members, Mercier adds, “got down from their curule chairs”, grabbed girls in clerical garb around their waists and danced with the crowd.²⁵

Robespierre, who hated atheism, after these events entered into a temporary alliance with Danton, and on 21-22 November both spoke out against anti-Christian actions. Robespierre, in a speech delivered on 21 November 1793 at the Jacobin Club, with the not so hidden aim of denouncing the atheist, Hébertist movement, confessed that, although he had been “a fairly bad Catholic” even in his schooldays (in his youth, Robespierre secured a scholarship at the prestigious Collège Louis-le-Grand, by the recommendation of bishop Louis-Hilaire Conzié), he had never been indifferent to the “fate of humanity”. He has always believed in the idea of the Supreme Being because it is a “humane idea”, and therefore the Convention cannot tolerate that the Prussian Baron Anacharsis Cloots, who preached the idea of a cosmopolitan republic, and the Hébertists who followed his doctrines, “under the pretext to destroy superstition, want to make a sort of religion out of atheism himself”. The National Convention, according to Robespierre, “rejects such a thing with abhorrence”. The Convention does not produce “books or metaphysical systems”, but it is also not only a political body whose sole function is to uphold the law. The Convention must also respect “the character of the French people” (*le caractère du peuple français*), Robespierre claims, and

²⁴ Louis Sébastien Mercier, *Le Nouveau Paris* (Paris: Louis Michaud éditeur, 168, Boulevard Saint-Germain, 1824 (?), 103.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

it was not in vain that it had already declared the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* in the presence of the Supreme Being.²⁶ – Already Robespierre’s speech makes it clear, therefore, that although the enactment of the mandatory cult of the Supreme Being (7 May 1794) and the organisation of its first celebration (8 June 1794) took place in a specific historical context, it is equally true that the idea of the Supreme Being accompanied the whole history of the Revolution.

It is probable that when he was protesting the atheist fervour, the image of the Vendée was also in Robespierre’s mind: he feared, rightly, that the pious rural population would again revolt against the Revolution. He also wanted to sideline his rival, Anacharsis Cloots, and the Hébertists. At the same time, however, we must also see in his speech a sincere conviction. Robespierre’s belief was, and he states this publicly on several occasions, that the Supreme Being was in some way an expression of the character of the French people. Many things met in this conviction. He thought the same of the Republic. For Robespierre, the Republic embodied the character of the people, that is, the essentially *virtuous* character of the people, and it was for this reason that he was almost completely unconcerned with the institutional *structure* of the Republic: for him, the Republic’s sole mission was simply to assert the character of the people, and since the people were good by nature, there was no need to fear its excesses of power. In this sense, the idea of the Supreme Being was a natural corollary of the idea of the Republic, a cultic manifestation of the virtue of the people. Atheism is aristocratic, says Robespierre, while “the idea of a Great Being” (*l’idée d’un grand être*) is entirely popular (*est toute populaire*):²⁷ “if God did not exist, he would have to be invented”, he quotes Voltaire (*si Dieu n’existoit pas, il faudroit l’inventer*).²⁸

While it is true that the idea of the Supreme Being was a *locus communis* of the Enlightenment deism of the eighteenth century, and thus the idea of natural religion was not alien to Rousseau (see the Savoyard Vicar’s creed in *Émile*), Robespierre seems to borrow the idea of the Supreme Being more from Voltaire, as his speech testifies. (Rousseau’s natural religion was later revived in a coherent form by a cult called Theophilanthropy, founded by a Masonic bookseller, Chemin Despontès, in 1796.) But if not regarding natural religion,

²⁶ Maximilien Robespierre, *Oeuvres complètes*, tome X, *Discours* (5^e Partie) (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), 196.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 197.

Robespierre evidently follows Rousseau in his considerations regarding *civic religion*, who himself was a proponent of a kind of “civil religion”, as he put it in the last chapter of the *Social Contract* (Book Four, Chapter VIII). There he concludes, following Hobbes, that it was necessary to unite the “two heads of the Eagle”, so to speak, because only in this way could the “political unity” be restored.²⁹ But Rousseau’s civil religion differed from that of Hobbes in that he was hostile to Christianity in all its forms. In his opinion, even Hobbes “ought to have seen” that “the dominating spirit of Christianity was incompatible with his system” and that “the interest of the Priest would always be stronger than that of the state”.³⁰ So, there must be, he says, a “purely civil profession”,³¹ and its dogmas “ought to be simple, few in number, stated with precision, without explanations or commentaries”.³² These articles must be established by the “Sovereign”, “not exactly as Religious dogmas, but as sentiments of sociability without which it is impossible to be a good Citizen or a faithful subject”.³³ While the sovereign cannot oblige anyone to believe in these dogmas, it can “banish from the State anyone who does not believe them”, “not for being impious, but for being unsociable”.³⁴

It would be worthwhile, moreover, if they have not already done so, to take an account of all the religiously motivated decrees and resolutions of the French Revolution, and of the sectarian wars and skirmishes, some of national and others of local importance, which have accompanied it throughout its history. Undoubtedly, the Revolution was not originally a civil war or an anti-religious movement (or even an anti-clerical uprising), but it has evolved into one or the other, and the events have been followed by the declarations and decrees of the National Convention. Although the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizens* generously promised religious tolerance and freedom of conscience, stating in its Article 10 that “no one shall be disquieted on account of his opinions, including his religious views,

²⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “On the Social Contract”, in *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, vol. 4. Ed. Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly, translated by Judith R. Bush, Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1994), 129-225, citation on page 218.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 222.

³² *Ibid.*, 223.

³³ *Ibid.*, 222.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 223.

provided their manifestation does not disturb the public order established by law”, freedom of religion had to be confirmed from time to time by decrees and resolutions – for example on 8 December 1793 or 18 September 1794. Although the revolutionaries recognized freedom of conscience, and Robespierre himself confessed his belief in it in his speech, they did not consider religion a matter of conscience, but of *superstition*, being themselves children of the Enlightenment and the century of the ‘philosophers’.

But if there were disagreements between Rousseau and Robespierre on natural religion, there seemed to be complete agreement on the *liturgy* of civil religion. Rousseau’s preoccupation with the celebration of civil religion, even after the writing of the *Social Contract*, is evidenced by the fact that in his *Considerations on the Government of Poland* he proposes that Poles should embrace “religious ceremonies” typical of ancient republics, which looked “for bonds which attached the Citizens to the fatherland and each to each other”, and “which were always exclusive and national by their nature”.³⁵ The idea, as it becomes clear on the next page of the book, goes back not only to the last chapter of the *Social Contract*, but also to his letter to D’Alembert four years earlier, in which Rousseau broke up with the Encyclopedists. In this letter, Rousseau was already proposing a ‘liturgy’ for such a religion, or more precisely, he was saying that liturgy was superfluous. “With liberty, wherever abundance reigns, well-being also reigns. Plant a stake crowned with flowers in the middle of the square; gather the people together there, and you will have a festival. Do better yet; let the Spectators become an Entertainment to themselves; make them actors themselves; do it so that each sees and loves himself in the others so that all will be better united.”³⁶ When, on 7 May 1794, Robespierre made his speech on the national holidays, asking the National Convention to legislate for the mandatory veneration of the Supreme Being, he even took the justification almost verbatim from Rousseau: “gather the people together”, he said, “you will make them better” (*rassemblez les hommes, vous les rendrez meilleurs*); “because men gathered together will seek to please each other”, and “because men do not see each other without pleasure”.³⁷

³⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Considerations on the Government of Poland”, 173.

³⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Letter to D’Alembert”, in *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, vol. 10. Edited and translated Allan Bloom, Charles Butterworth, and Christopher Kelly. (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2004), 251-352, citation on page 344.

³⁷ Maximilien Robespierre, *Oeuvres complètes*, tome X, *Discours* (5^e Partie), 458.

These are, then, the Rousseauian ideas which in some way inspired the celebration of the Supreme Being, but the reason for its inclusion in a decree was undoubtedly Robespierre's intention to do away with the Cult of Reason and its adherents, the 'Exaggerators' (*Exagérés*). Robespierre's (and Danton's) opposition to the Hébertists in November 1793 was not without consequences: the founder of the Cult of Reason, Hébert, and his atheist followers, together with Anacharsis Cloots, were executed on 24 March 1794. A month and a half later, on 7 May, the Convention, at Robespierre's request, recognised the existence of the Supreme Being, and a month later Paris (and other cities or even remote villages, but in a much less spectacular way) organized his festival. According to the decree of the National Convention, "the French people recognises the existence of the Supreme Being and the immortality of the soul" and also "recognizes that worthy worship of the Supreme Being is the practice of man's duties".³⁸ (According to Mercier, these inscriptions proclaiming the existence of the Supreme Being and the immortality of the soul were still hanging in the public squares of Paris long after Robespierre's torture, "and this seems", he says, "just as inconceivable as to having seen it raised by so many docile hands".³⁹) Besides this, the Convention also decided that "festivals will be established to remind man of the thought of the Divinity, and to the dignity of his being", and that "the French Republic will celebrate de feasts of 14 July 1789, 10 August 1792, 21 January 1793 and 31 May 1793 every year".⁴⁰

The celebration of the Supreme Being in Paris, on the date fixed in advance by the decree, 8 June 1794, was rather grand and confusing, although it largely followed Rousseau's idea of the tree of liberty and the people gathered around it. In its second location, the *Champ de Mars* (or *Champ de la Réunion*), a 'mountain' awaited the crowd, dotted with 'accidents of nature' (grottoes, boulders, brambles), and crowned with the 'tree of liberty'. "On arrival at the Champ de la Réunion", says Jonathan Smyth, who dedicated an entire chapter to the Parisian feast in his book about the Festival of Supreme Being, "the men proceeded to the rear of the Mountain, on the river side, the young persons encircled the Mountain, while the chosen group of fathers and grandfathers with their sons and grandsons, together with the nursing

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 462.

³⁹ Louis Sébastien Mercier, *Le Nouveau Paris*, 122.

⁴⁰ Maximilien Robespierre, *Oeuvres complètes*, tome X, *Discours* (5^e Partie), 463.

mothers with their babies, took up their positions on the Mountain itself, along with members of the Convention and the Opéra orchestra and chorus.”⁴¹ One after the other, the different groups sang a verse of Marie-Joseph Chénier’s hymn in honour of the Supreme Being (*Dieu puissant, d’un peuple intrépide*). The last verse, sung in unison, marked the climax of the event, says Furet, who himself recounts it with visible irony and pleasure: “the adolescents brandished their sabres, the old blessed them and the young girls threw their flowers to the Supreme Being”.⁴² (For the occasion, the guillotine was dismantled and covered with flags and banks of flowers.⁴³ And although it was moved from *Place de la Révolution*, three days later, and the day after the Convention passed the famous law of 22 Prairial (or the law of the Great Terror), it was back at the western end of the *Rue du Faubourg Saint-Antoine*, near the ruins of the Bastille.)

Obviously, the celebration may seem quite grotesque in the light of the above, but there is something about it that makes it “enigmatic”, Furet says, something deeply thought-provoking, the result of which is that it is in fact still an unsolved mystery for historians. The surprising thing is that a huge crowd took part, as if the whole of Paris had just swarmed out into the open. The ladies who attended it were dressed in their pre-revolutionary finery, the boats on the Seine were covered in flags, and all this was done not by decree but without any constraint from the authorities, which is difficult to understand because the celebration took place during the worst period of terror and the guillotine was only stopped for a few days. Moreover, as Furet also adds, there was nothing unusual in the festival’s offerings to raise any expectations: those who knew a little about the deism of the century could predict what the scenario would be. Be that as it may, he says, the fact is that a huge crowd attended it, without any compulsion or political imperative, and with apparent joy, because at this point all the “accounts agree”.⁴⁴ Furet’s concise observation is fully confirmed by Jonathan Smyth: “even those contemporary commentators”, he writes in his book, “who had no love for Robespierre, and who saw the Festival purely as part of his drive to

⁴¹ Jonathan Smyth, *Robespierre and the Festival of Supreme Being. The search for a republican morality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 69.

⁴² François Furet, *The French Revolution. 1770-1814*, 148.

⁴³ Charles Nodier, *Souvenirs de la Révolution et de l’Émpire*, tome premier (Paris: Charpentier, 1860), 288.

⁴⁴ François Furet, *The French Revolution. 1770-1814*, 148.

become dictator of France”, agree that the joy was “the overriding feeling in the celebrations both in Paris and in the provinces”. And “this seems also to be true”, he adds, “both for those members of the public chosen to take an active part in the celebrations and for the great mass of the population as well”.⁴⁵

Perhaps one of the greatest accounts of the day is that of historian Charles Nodier, who attended the Parisian feast at an age of fourteen and recalled it in 1831. This is why he considers it important to emphasize that he was young enough to enjoy it “without that the terrible impressions of that time being mixed up with his memories”.⁴⁶ He describes the Parisians attending the celebrations as a huge, intoxicated, self-indulgent crowd. “We get closer”, he writes, “without knowing each other, we kiss without each other appoint; public banquets served in the streets gathered the rich to the poor, the aristocrat to the Jacobin, and in this enormous crowd [*cohue*] there was no fuss, no argument, and no accident.”⁴⁷ While it is still possible that the crowds were attracted just by the lovely June weather, as many historians claim, and it is also possible that many were hoping for a general amnesty, it is much more likely that Furet is right when he says that the best explanation is still the one offered by Nodier: “In order to appreciate it”, he wrote, “one must take the trouble to travel in time. *Nothing was left*. This is therefore the cornerstone of a nascent society.”⁴⁸ Or, in other words: this was the day when Paris (and with it all of France) celebrated not just the Supreme Being, but also the new ‘Nation’ that was just being born. The feast found its audience because, as Rousseau suggested, it was the crowd itself that became the spectacle and its own audience.

⁴⁵ Jonathan Smyth, *Robespierre and the Festival of Supreme Being*, 129.

⁴⁶ Charles Nodier, *Souvenirs de la Révolution et de l'Émpire*, tome premier, 288.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 289.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 285.

The Portraits of Michael the Brave Discovered by Nicolae Bălcescu in Paris

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Abstract: Paris, 2 August 1847. Nicolae Bălcescu and Alexandru Golescu were working in the reading rooms of the National Library of France. They discovered a set of images that would significantly shape how later generations viewed the ruler Michael the Brave. Within a collection of prints, they identified six engraved portraits depicting the Wallachian Prince. Not all of these images entered the Romanian cultural circulation. The portraits were subjected to a process of selection and visual legitimation that would later be canonised in the 19th-century national imaginary. The present study builds on the discovery made in the summer of 1847 and traces the paths through which the identified engravings were integrated into Romanian culture. The analysis addressed both the mechanisms of dissemination and reception of these images and the ways in which they influenced the iconographic repertoire of Romanian painting in the second half of the 19th century. Moreover, the study of the engravings provides an opportunity to clarify the data concerning when and where they first appeared, as well as to interpret the inscriptions and the physiognomic features of the depicted figure.

Keywords: Michael the Brave, engraving, iconography, Nicolae Bălcescu, 19th century, historical painting, visual canon, Aegidius Sadeler, Dominicus Custos.

Rezumat: Paris, 2 august 1847. Nicolae Bălcescu și Alexandru Golescu se află în sălile Bibliotecii Naționale din Franța. Cei doi descoperă un set de imagini care vor influența semnificativ viziunea posterității asupra domnitorului Mihai Viteazul. Într-o colecție de stampe au identificat șase portrete de tip gravură care îl înfățișau pe domnitorul muntean. Nu toate s-au propagat în circuitul cultural românesc.

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Portretele au fost supuse unui proces de selecție și consacrare vizuală care avea să fie ulterior canonizată în imaginarul național din secolul al XIX-lea. Cercetarea își are punctul de plecare în descoperirea din vara anului 1847 și urmărește traseul prin care gravurile identificate au fost integrate în cultura română. Analiza vizează atât mecanismele de difuzare și receptare ale acestor imagini, cât și modul în care ele au influențat repertoriul iconografic al picturii românești din a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea. În același timp, studiul gravurilor oferă prilejul de a preciza date legate de momentul și locul apariției lor, precum și de a interpreta inscripțiile și caracteristicile fizionomice ale personajului reprezentat.

Cuvinte-cheie: Mihai Viteazul; gravură; iconografie; Nicolae Bălcescu; secolul al XIX-lea; pictură istorică; canon visual, Aegidius Sadeler, Dominicus Custos.

On 2 August 1847, while working at the National Library in Paris, Nicolae Bălcescu (1819–1852) and Alexandru G. Golescu (1819–1881) discovered, among other prints, an engraving executed in 1601 by the Flemish artist Aegidius Sadeler, depicting Michael the Brave. Having identified the portrayed figure, they decided “to promptly empty our modest purses in order to produce a beautiful and faithful engraving after it, and to thus offer the Romanians a true portrait of their hero as a keepsake.”¹ In fact, they identified six engraved portraits depicting the Wallachian ruler. These were extracted from a print collection entitled *Condica colecțiunii pentru Transilvania*² [Register of the collection for Transylvania]. Bălcescu, however, was most interested in the “true portrait.” In a letter to Vasile Alecsandri dated 1 October 1847, he confessed how he had found “among other things here, at the Royal Library, I have uncovered the true portrait of Michael the Brave, after which I shall make a beautiful engraving at once. The mere idea of the work I intend to undertake now sustains me and gives me renewed strength.”³

¹ Nicolae Bălcescu, *Opere I. Scrieri istorice, politice și economice 1844–1852*, critical ed. Gh. Zane, revision and name index by Dorina N. Rusu, foreword by Dan Berindei, introduction by Eugen Simion (București: Academia Română, Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă; Muzeul Național al Literaturii Române, 2017), XCVI. Original text: “îndată a ne deșerta ușoarele noastre pungi spre a stampa după dânsa o gravură frumoasă și credincioasă și a da în amintirea românilor adevăratul portret al eroului lor”.

² Constantin V. Obedeanu, *Portretele lui Mihai-Viteazul*, lecture delivered at the Romanian Atheneum on 27 February 1906 (Bucharest: Göbl, 1906), 13.

³ Valentin Hănulescu, “Întâlnire cu Nicolae Bălcescu, pe Valea Topologului”, in *Lumea lui Bălcescu*, eds. Astrid Cambose, Cătălina Mihalache, and Antonie Dumitru Chelcea (Cluj-Napoca:

The copying of Sadeler's engraving was entrusted to the painter Barbu Iscovescu (1816–1854), who brought copies of the portrait back to the country.⁴ “Soon this engraving will be finished and we will be on our way back home with it,” Bălcescu noted in *Buletinul despre portretele principilor Țării Românești și ai Moldovei* [Bulletin on the Portraits of the Princes of Wallachia and Moldavia], written in Bellevue, near Paris.⁵ The text recounts his journey to the French capital and the identification of the portraits depicting Michael the Brave, among which Sadeler's was considered “the most beautiful.”⁶ Motivated by this discovery, the historian began, in the summer of 1847, work on the book that would later solidify his reputation: *Românii supt Mihai Voievod Viteazul* [Romanian under the rule of Michael the Brave].⁷

His enthusiasm is also evident in the same letter sent to Vasile Alecsandri while he was still in Paris. Bălcescu informed the poet of the preparations he envisioned for a work dedicated to Michael the Brave and shared an overview on the scholarly itinerary he intended to follow in order to expand his documentary corpus. In his words:

I shall therefore set to work in earnest. For the moment, I am gathering here [in Paris], from libraries, the historical documents I can find. I wish to produce an extensive work, a historical poem on Michael the Brave. When I have finished gathering all that I need from here, I shall go to Vienna and through Hungary and Transylvania in order to complete my collection, and then return home to set to work.⁸

Mega/Argonaut, 2021), 20. “între altele, aci, la Biblioteca regală, și adevăratul portret al lui Mihai V.V., de pe care o să fac îndată o frumoasă gravură. Ideea lucrării ce voi să fac mă hrănește acum și îmi dă viață”.

⁴ Anca Maria Zamfir, “Mihai Viteazul în pictura românească”, *Cumidava* 26 (2003): 265.

⁵ Nicolae Bălcescu, “Buletin despre portretele principilor Țării Românești și ai Moldaviei, ce se află în cabinetul de stampe de la Biblioteca Regală din Paris”, in *Magazin istoric pentru Dacia*, vol. 4 (1847), 264. “Preste puțin această gravură va fi gata și o vom porni în țară”.

⁶ Bălcescu, *Opere*, I, 244.

⁷ *Ibid.*, XCVII.

⁸ Bălcescu, *Opere*, II, *Românii sub Mihai Voievod Viteazul. Corespondență. Scrisori. Memorii. Adrese. Documente*, eds. Daniela Poenaru and Gh. Zane, revised ed. and name index by Dorina N. Rusu (București: Academia Română, Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă; Muzeul Național al Literaturii Române, 2017), 632–633. “mă voi apuca dar de lucru cu temei. Deocamdată adun aci [Paris], din biblioteci, documentele istorice ce găsesc. Voi să lucrez o scriere întinsă, o poemă istorică asupra lui Mihai V.V. Viteazul. Când voi sfârși aci adunarea ce fac, mă voi duce la Viena și prin Ungaria și Transilvania, ca să completez colecția mea, și apoi mă întorc în țară ca să mă pui pe lucru”.

Bălcescu's own testimony shows that he had found the six portraits of Michael the Brave in Paris. Among them, the engraving by Aegidius Sadeler was selected and circulated from the second half of the 19th century onward, thus becoming a source of inspiration for historical paintings by artists such as Constantin Lecca, Carol Wallenstein, and Theodor Aman, who belonged to the first generation of artists, as well as Nicolae Grigorescu, Sava Henția, and George Demetrescu-Mirea, representative of the younger generation. In his five-page study, Bălcescu briefly describes, in just a few sentences, all six portraits, mentioning only the names of their authors together with the inscriptions on the engravings. The order in which they were presented in *Buletinul* is as follows: the engraving included in the book by Hieronymus Ortellius (1603); the engraving published in the book by Johannes Bisselius (1675); the engraving by Dominicus Custos (1601); the engraving by Giovanni Orlandi (1599); the engraving by Giacomo Franco (1608); and the engraving by Aegidius Sadeler (1601).

Before Nicolae Bălcescu turned his attention to the image of the Wallachian ruler, the subject had already been approached by a Transylvanian intellectual. Anton Kurz was the first 19th-century author to undertake a search for portraits of Michael the Brave. One year prior to Nicolae Bălcescu's discovery, Anton Kurz published the article *Portretul lui Mihai Viteazul*⁹ [The portrait of Michael the Brave] in *Magazin istoric pentru Dacia*. The text describes three engraved portraits of the ruler: the one reproduced by Johann Siebmacher in the book by Hieronymus Ortellius, the engraving included by Johann Alexander Böner in the work of Johannes Bisselius, and the engraving executed by Dominicus Custos.¹⁰

The present study focuses on Bălcescu's discovery in Paris and primarily seeks to trace the ways in which these engravings entered Romanian cultural circulation. It examines the process through which they were disseminated and the use of iconographic patterns in Romanian painting during the second half of the 19th century. Moreover, the analysis of the engravings allows for the clarification of issues relating to the year of their production and the place of publication, as well as the meaning of the inscriptions and the physiognomic features depicted.

⁹ Anton Kurz, "Portretul lui Mihai Viteazul, Principe al Țării Românești și al Moldovei, locțiitoriu al Transilvaniei", *Magazin istoric pentru Dacia* II (1846): 371–374.

¹⁰ Obedeanu, *Portretele lui Mihai-Viteazul*, 11.

The first portrait

“The portrait from the book by Hieronymus Ortelius, after which an oil copy was made and donated by Mr. Meyer to the National Museum.”¹¹ (Fig. 4)

Serving as a court historiographer to Rudolf II,¹² Hieronymus Ortelius (1524–1614) offered posterity an extensive chronicle written in Gothic German, in which he described the major military confrontations that had taken place in Upper and Lower Hungary between 1349–1603. Comprising 618 pages,¹³ the first edition was published in Nuremberg in 1603, titled *Beschreibung aller Kriegsemporungen und Belägerungen der Stätt und Vestungen auch scharmutzeln* [The chronicle, or the historical description of all military campaigns].¹⁴ The work comprises 30 panoramic descriptions of geographic areas in Hungary and Transylvania, alongside a series of 26 portraits of contemporary political figures,¹⁵ with Michael the Brave as the 17th.¹⁶ It had several subsequent editions and additions, even decades later (see, for instance, the Dutch edition of 1619, or those of 1620 and 1665).¹⁷

The portrait depicting Michael the Brave was made by Johann Siebmacher and was included in Ortelius' chronicle of 1603.¹⁸ The ruler is

¹¹ Bălcescu, “Buletin despre portretele principilor Țării Românești și ai Moldaviei,” 259. “Portretul din cartea lui Hieronymus Ortelius, după care s-a făcut copia în oliu, dată de d. Meyer la Muzeul Național”.

¹² Barbu Slătineanu, *Contribuțiuni la studiul portretelor lui Mihai Viteazul, însoțite de un nou portret* (București: Imprimeria Națională, 1933), 209.

¹³ Vasile Oltean, *O cronică necunoscută din vremea lui Mihai Viteazul. Nurenberg - 1603 de Hieronimum Ortelium Augustanum* (Sibiu: Editura Andreiană, 2019).

¹⁴ *Chronologia oder Historische Beschreibung aller Kriegsemporungen und Belägerungen der Stätt und Vestungen auch scharmutzeln, und Schlachten so in ober-und unter-ungern, auch Sibenbürgen mit den Türcken von Ao 1395. Biss auff gegenwertige Zeitt gedenck, würdig geschehen*, cited in *Mihai Viteazul în conștiința europeană*, Vol. 2, *Cronicari și istorici străini. Secolele XVI–XVIII. Texte alese*, ed. Ion Ardeleanu (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1983), 44, 57.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁶ Livia Ciupercă, “O cronică necunoscută din vremea lui Mihai Viteazul”, *Revista Limba Română*, no. 3–4 (2020): 353.

¹⁷ Kurz, “Portretul lui Mihai Viteazul,” 373.

¹⁸ The engraving was noted by Victor Petrescu and Serghie Paraschiva in the study “Mihai Viteazul în conștiința poporului român – Bibliografie selectivă”, *Valachica - Studii și cercetări de istorie și istoria culturii* 7 (1975): 75. The portrait is located in Hieronymus Ortelius,

shown within an oval frame, in three-quarter profile facing right, clad in a fur-trimmed cloak with embroidery and wearing an elongated, fur-lined tall fur cap (Rom. *guşiumană*) on his head. His facial features appear slightly aged, with round, dark-rimmed eyes and a long beard. The inscription encircling the portrait reads *Michael Weywodt aus der Walachey*, while beneath the bust the date of the ruler's death is recorded: OCCVBVIT XVIII AVG A. MDCI ("died/fell in battle on 18 August 1601"¹⁹).

The engraving reappeared in the 1665 edition entitled *Ortelius Redivivus et continuatus*, published in Nuremberg under the patronage of Paul Fürst. The only difference from the 1603 engraving is the placement of the title beneath the bust rather than around the medallion, likely intended to make it easier to read, thus abandoning the Renaissance convention of integrating the legend within the oval frame.²⁰ The engraving was identified in 1844 by the Bucharest-based physician Johann Meyer in the course of examining the *Universal history* authored by the Flemish geographer Abraham Ortelius (1527–1598).²¹ It was subsequently described in the article published by Anton Kurz in 1846.²² One year later, following his research in Paris, Nicolae Bălcescu reported a copy of the engraving. The image was revisited in the lecture delivered on 27 February 1906 by Constantin V. Obedeianu at the Romanian Athenaeum in Bucharest.²³ References to the engraving also appear in the study published by Barbu Slătineanu in 1933.²⁴

Kurz regarded the engraving published by Hieronymus Ortelius as the earliest known representation of the ruler.²⁵ Citing the lack of evidence,

Chronologia oder Historische Beschreibungen (Nuremberg, 1603), 452–453, digitized edition, Internet Archive, https://archive.org/stream/bub_gb_cRhaAAAAYAAJ/bub_gb_cRhaAAAAYAAJ_djvu.txt (accessed on 22 August 2025).

¹⁹ Occumbō, -ere, cūbuī, cūbitum = "to fall in death, die." See Charlton T. Lewis, *An Elementary Latin Dictionary* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Franklin Square, 1891), 559, s.v. *occumbō*.

²⁰ Hieronymus Ortelius, *Ortelius Redivivus et Continuatus, oder der ungarischen Kriegs-Empörungen historische Beschreibung*, edited and continued by Paul Fürst (Nuremberg, 1665). Digitized edition. Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Düsseldorf: <https://digital.ulb.hhu.de/ihd/content/pageview/3579727> (accessed on 25 August 2025).

²¹ Andrei Pippidi, *Mihai Viteazul în arta epocii sale* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1987), 13.

²² Kurz, "Portretul lui Mihai Viteazul," 474.

²³ Obedeianu, *Portretele lui Mihai-Viteazul*, V.

²⁴ Slătineanu, *Contribuţiuni la studiul portretelor lui Mihai Viteazul*, 209.

²⁵ Kurz, "Portretul lui Mihai Viteazu," 477.

Obedeanu rejected Kurz's hypothesis on the grounds that the engraving may have been inspired by either the work of artists active at the time in Wallachia, such as Nicolae Cretanul (Nicholas the Cretan) or Petru Armeanul (Peter the Armenian), or by an oil portrait said to have been in the possession of Cardinal Malaspina.²⁶ Moreover, he characterised the image as unrealistic, arguing that the facial features appear excessively aged for a man who died at the age of 43.²⁷ An oil copy was donated to the "St. Sava" National Museum by Johann Meyer.²⁸ Andrei Pippidi likewise described the image as "strange" and advanced the hypothesis that it may derive from the adaptation of an older plate originally intended to depict the Transylvanian folk costume.²⁹

The second portrait

"The portrait from Johannes Bisselius' book."³⁰ (Fig. 6)

Born one day after the assassination of Michael the Brave, the professor of rhetoric, ethics and theology Johannes Bisselius (1601–1677), originally from Babenhausen (Swabia) authored the work entitled *Aetatis nostrae gestorum eminentium* [The historical contents of the most eminent deeds of our time]. The chronicle was published in Amberg (eastern Germany) in 1675, under the patronage of Johannes Burger. It presents a series of events that unfolded within the Holy Roman Empire between 1601 and 1621.³¹ As a promoter of Christianity, in general, and of the Counter-Reformation in particular, Bisselius wrote from the viewpoint of a cleric defending his defining values. A member of the Jesuit order, he composed his chronicle driven by a deep anti-pagan sentiment. His desire to free his country from Ottoman rule was so intense that any political leader who shared this ideal earned his immediate respect. Michael the Brave was one such figure: his anti-Ottoman struggles and Balkan campaigns resonated with the author's ideals, thus leading Bisselius

²⁶ Obedeanu, *Portretele lui Mihai-Viteazul*, 11.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Pippidi, *Mihai Viteazul în arta epocii sale*, 13.

²⁹ Ibid., 38.

³⁰ Bălcescu, "Buletin despre portretele principilor Țării Românești și ai Moldaviei," 259. "Portretul din cartea lui Joannes Bisselius".

³¹ *Mihai Viteazul în conștiința europeană*, Vol. II, 288.

to devote no fewer than 113 pages to the ruler, in a chapter entitled “Michael, Wallahiae Waywoda.”³²

Bălcescu’s notes indicate that within Johannes Bisselius’s work, there is an engraving depicting Michael the Brave, after a certain J. A. Böner.³³ Johann Alexander Böner (1647–1720) was a German engraver born in Nuremberg, specialised in copper engraving and in the lead-casting technique. He produced an extensive gallery of portraits and tableaux, his preferred subjects being urban scenes and folk costumes.³⁴ The engraving of Michael the Brave noted by Bălcescu and identified by him in Bisselius’s book is, in fact, a copy after Dominicus Custos, drawn by Jonas Umbach (1624–1693) and subsequently engraved by Johann Alexander Böner. The ruler is depicted wearing clothing similar to those of Custos’s print: the cap secured with a clasp, the fur-trimmed cloak, decorated with floral motifs and fastened at the neck, are indeed comparable. Although the facial features rendered by Böner are more tense and angular, they display the same defining traits: a coarse, wrinkled face, arched eyebrows, and a piercing gaze.

Beneath the portrait, there is an inscription identifying the markers of the image: *Umbach fecit* (on the left) and *J.A/ Boner Sc* (on the right). The ruler’s title appears below: *MICHAEL Wallachiae WAYWODA*. The absence of the laudatory stanza present in Custos’s 1601 portrait gallery indicates the fact that the engraving was intended for circulation among the broader public, rather than for its use merely in scholarly works. Thus, the emphasis falls on the dissemination of the image itself, rather than on the encomiastic message conveyed through the titulature. Ioan C. Băcilă attested to the existence of copies of this engraving after Johann Alexander Böner, held both in the National Library of Paris and in the Imperial Collection in Vienna.³⁵

³² Johannes Bisselius, *Aetatis nostrae gestorum eminentium medulla historic, per aliquot septennia digesta. Septennium I. Ab anno MDCI usque ad annum MDCVII, inclusive* (Amberg, 1675), 53–166.

³³ The engraving is on page 54.

³⁴ Ulrich Thieme, Felix Becker, *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Leipzig: Verlag von Wilhelm Engelmann, 1910), 311. In 1702, Böner published a first edition of the work titled *Des Heil. Röm. Reichs Stadt Nürnberg Zierdte*, in which, alongside numerous representations of folk costumes worn by children and craftsmen of Nuremberg, he included a series of 180 portraits. These were largely based on paintings and drawings by other artists active in the German sphere, such as Hieronymus Holzschuher (1469–1529), Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), Michael Herr (1591–1661) and Georg Strauch (1613–1675).

³⁵ Ioan C. Băcilă, *Portretele lui Mihai Viteazul* (Sibiu: Editura Asociațiunii, 1926), 28.

Kurz also analysed Böner's engraving in the same article dedicated to the representations of Michael the Brave. He concluded that it could not depict the ruler's true likeness, since the figure is rendered as too old, whereas at the time of his death, the voivode was only 43 years old. Moreover, the clothing accessories are far too Oriental for a commander who fought against the Turks.³⁶ A copy of the engraving was donated by Alexandru Papiu-Ilarian to the National Library in Bucharest.³⁷

The third portrait

“The third portrait resembles the one above, from Bisselius's book, both in physiognomy and in dress.”³⁸ (Fig. 3)

This is the portrait on which Bălcescu placed the least emphasis in his *Buletin*, where it is mentioned only in passing. The historian was unaware of the fact that the engraving before him was, in fact, the one produced by Dominicus Custos. The image entered the Romanian cultural circuit only in 1860, when Alexandru Papiu-Ilarian donated it to the National Library in Bucharest.³⁹ During the same period in which Aegidius Sadeler depicted Michael the Brave in his print, Dominicus Custos (1560–1612) was part of the court of Rudolf II. A Flemish engraver and printer born in Antwerp, Custos descended from a family with a long-standing tradition in this field. He initially settled in Augsburg, where he opened a workshop that rapidly gained prominence. His debut was marked by an engraving dedicated to Ferdinand II of Tyrol, an image included in the *Armamentarium Heroicum*.⁴⁰ In his workshop in Augsburg, he collaborated both with his stepsons (Wolfgang and Lukas Kilian) and with the humanist Marcus Henning. Together, they produced a

³⁶ Nicolae Bălcescu pointed out the same issues. See “Buletin despre portretele principilor Țării Românești și ai Moldaviei,” 260.

³⁷ Obedeanu, *Portretele lui Mihai-Viteazul*, 12.

³⁸ Bălcescu, “Buletin despre portretele principilor Țării Românești și ai Moldaviei,” 260. “Al treilea portret se aseamănă cu acest din sus, din cartea lui Bisselius, atât la fizionomie, cât și la îmbrăcăminte”.

³⁹ Pippidi, *Mihai Viteazul în arta epocii sale*, 15.

⁴⁰ Jörg Diefenbacher, Eckhard Leuschner, “Dominicus Custos,” *Hollstein*, <https://www.hollstein.com/running-research-projects/dominicus-custos.html> (accessed on 22 August 2025).

portrait gallery comprising representations of 28 princes, from Albert IV to Rudolf II.⁴¹

Between 1600–1602, Dominicus Custos published a volume of portraits entitled *Atrium heroicum* (“The heroic gallery”).⁴² It also incorporated the engraver’s earlier works, taken from previous volumes published in 1593 and 1599.⁴³ The album is comprised of four parts⁴⁴ and brings together a total of 171 portraits depicting political leaders, military commanders, and nobles of that time.⁴⁵ Custos was responsible for the engravings, while Marcus Henning authored the laudatory texts that accompanied the visual representations. The image of Michael the Brave appears in the third part of the gallery, printed at the press of Michael Manger in Augsburg, between March and August 1601. Under the title *Atrii heroici pars III. Eiconum XXXX. Ex caelatura et officina Dominicus Custos eiconographi; Augustae Vindel*, the volume presents a new set of 40 images, accompanied by inscriptions by M[arcus] H[enning].⁴⁶

The volume contains a subchapter entitled “To the most illustrious and the most noble count, Lord Gottfried, Count of Oettingen, his lord, honouring him with the greatest distinction.”⁴⁷ The text speaks of a number of illustrious men whom Henning and Custos included, in order to commemorate their memory:

⁴¹ “*Tirolensium principium comitum eicones*,” by Dominicus Custos (1560–1612), Google Arts & Culture, <https://artsandculture.google.com/entity/dominicus-custos/m05f9tpt?hl=en> (accessed on 22 August 2025).

⁴² Dominicus Custos, *Atrium heroicum Caesarum, Regum, aliarumque summatum ac procerum, qui intra proximum seculum vixere, aut hodie supersunt* (Augsburg, 1601).

⁴³ *Fuggerorum et Fuggerarum imagines* (1593) and *Tirolensium principum comitum eicones* (1599), in Dominicus Custos, *Atrium heroicum Caesarum, regum...*, <http://mateo.uni-mannheim.de/desbillons/eico.html> (accessed on 7 March 2025).

⁴⁴ The first part appeared in 1600; the second, in the spring of 1601; the third, between March–August 1601 (this is where the representation of Michael the Brave appears); the fourth, in 1602. See Slătineanu, *Contribuțiuni la studiul portretelor lui Mihai Viteazul*, 206.

⁴⁵ “Engravings by Dominicus Custos,” The Public Domain Review, <https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/engravings-by-dominicus-custos> (accessed on 22 August 2025).

⁴⁶ Marcus Henning, Dominicus Custos, *Atrii heroici pars. III. Eiconum XXXX. Ex caelatura et officina Dominicus Custos eiconographi, Augustae Vindel* (Augsburg), in Michael Manger’s print, 1601, <https://www.e-rara.ch/sbs/content/zoom/22431637> (accessed on 22 August 2025).

⁴⁷ “*Perillustri et generosissimi comiti, domino Gottfrido comiti Oetingensi, domino suo maxima observantia colendo*,” see *ibid.*, 235–241. The Latin-Romanian translations used for the English translations in the present article were made by TRANS.SCRIPT – The Centre for Diplomatic and Medieval Documentary Palaeography, <https://ts.centre.ubbcluj.ro/>. See also note 87.

[...] nor will they perish from the praiseworthy memory of posterity: neither the Palatine of Wallachia or of Transalpine Dacia, Michael, who sought both to manfully free his Wallachians from Turkish servitude and to hold and steadfastly preserve Transylvania within the Christian realms.⁴⁸

The mention of Transalpine Dacia shows Marcus Henning's familiarity with the ancient world and his awareness of the continuity of this toponym into the period of Michael the Brave's rule. Ultimately, the voivode's anti-Ottoman deeds provided sufficient grounds for his inclusion in the portrait gallery.

This third part also contains a list of the names of 35 political leaders and military commanders, alongside their respective titles. In the second column, Michael the Brave's name is the 28th entry (*Michael Palatinus Valachiae Transalpiniae etc.*). He is listed among a number of other rulers, such as commander Lamoral von Egmond (1522–1568), Prince Charles de Bourbon (1566–1612), or Protestant Count Gottfried Graf von Öttingen (1554–1622).⁴⁹ The geographical scope selected by Henning and Custos for their representations was not limited to the territories of the Holy Roman Empire – it included figures from the Oriental sphere as well, such as the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed III, the Persian Shah Abbas I, as well as officials of lower rank, such as the Turkish viziers Sinan Pasha and Ferhat Pasha.⁵⁰

The engraving depicting Michael the Brave is on page 301.⁵¹ It bears an inscription set within an oval – *MICHAEL PALATINUS VALACHIAE*. Below it, there are two lines which, according to Bălcescu's translation, state the following: "This is Michael, who can, once he so desires, deliver all the people of Dacia from the Turkish yoke."⁵² In the lower part, separate from the engraving itself, a six-line Latin stanza was added by the hand of another scribe, praising the voivode's military virtues:

⁴⁸ "[...] nec Palatinum Valachiae seu Daciae Transalpiniae Michaelem, et Valachos suos e Turcica servitute viriliter eximere et Transsilvaniam christianis partibus strenue conservare atque adferere conatum," *ibid.*, 240.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 242.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 149, 151, 155, 159.

⁵¹ Another version of the print is accessible today on The British Museum website: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1873-0510-2856 (accessed on 22 August 2025).

⁵² "*Si DEUS.O. vellet. Dacorum hic colla MICHAEL/ Eximeret Turca. Libera tota iugo,*" in Bălcescu, "Buletin despre portretele principilor Țării Românești și ai Moldaviei," 261. Romanian-language quote from the aforementioned publication: "Acesta e Mihai, care poate, îndată ce va voi, să mântuiască pre toți locuitorii Daciei de jugul turcului" (my translation).

Long ago, the Turk from Asia, dreaded king of the Argolic land,⁵³ cast the Dacian down from his ancient crest. Yet, seeking to mend the wrongs of the past, MICHAEL, recalling his ancient forebearers, strove to drive the Thracian from the Dacian hearth. Thus it would have come to pass, had fortune favoured him. May it yet be so.⁵⁴

On the right side of the page illustrating the engraving, the capitalised notation “GOTT.” appears, which is likely an abbreviation of the name of the Protestant count Gottfried, to whom the chapter of the work is dedicated.

Both Barbu Slătineanu, in his 1933 study, and Andrei Pippidi, in 1987 work that approached the portraits of Michael the Brave, place the creation of Dominicus Custos’s print prior to 1601. Pippidi argues that certain phrases used in the inscription, such as *Contendit factum modo sorte favente fuisset Fiat adhuc Daco pellere Thraca lare*, attest that the engraving was made when the voivode was still alive.⁵⁵ Slătineanu dates the engraving even earlier than the one made by Aegidius Sadeler, given that, in order for it to be published between March-August 1601, the gathering of materials would have required time and prior preparation.⁵⁶

In his analysis of the engraving, Andrei Pippidi emphasises the terminology and the meaning of certain words: thus, the term *palatinus* (appearing within the oval) is used, in his opinion, in order to avoid infringing upon the prestige of Prince Sigismund Báthory (who is usually represented bearing the title *princeps*⁵⁷). In the phrase from the final line, “*Daco pellere Thraca lare*,” translated as “strove to drive the Thracian from the Dacian hearth,” Pippidi points out a terminological error: the term “Thracians” is erroneously

⁵³ With regard to Greece. The Ottoman sultan controlled ancient Constantinople, which lay along an old Greek commercial artery. “*Argolicus*” = adj., Argolic, Greek, in Philip Sandford, *The Aeneid of Virgil*, Book III (London: Blackie & Son, 1900), 112.

⁵⁴ “Deiecit ueteri pridem de uertice Dacum
Turca Asiae, Argolici rexq; timendus agri.
Damna tamen tentans reparare priora MICHAEL,
Et ueteres referens indole mentis auos;
Contendit (factum modò sorte fauente fuisset,
Fiat adhuc) Daco pellere Thraca lare.”

⁵⁵ Pippidi, *Mihai Viteazul în arta epocii sale*, 32.

⁵⁶ Slătineanu, *Contribuțiuni la studiul portretelor lui Mihai Viteazul*, 207.

⁵⁷ The title of Sigismund Báthory as given in the medallion is reproduced at <http://mateo.uni-mannheim.de/desbillons/eico/seite103.html> (accessed on 22 August 2025).

used to designate the Turks.⁵⁸ However, rather than a mistake per se, this should be understood as a usage characteristic of the period in question, employed to either designate the Turks, based on phonetic similarity, or to indicate the geographical area in which they waged war, namely Thrace.

For a long time, Custos's engraving was believed to be a copy of that of Sadeler. Barbu Slătineanu challenges this view, arguing that, in Custos's case, "the voivode's physiognomy is more aged," his facial expression seemingly emanating cruelty, whereas in Sadeler's print, the voivode is depicted as younger, with a piercing gaze and a well-defined expression.⁵⁹ Moreover, both portraits present the head turned to the right – thus, according to Slătineanu's hypothesis, if Custos had copied Sadeler, the orientation of the former's engraving would necessarily have been reversed.⁶⁰

A copy of Dominicus Custos's engraving was purchased in Berlin by Alexandru Papiu-Ilarian in February 1860 and donated to the National Library. However, this version has not been preserved.⁶¹ The original engraving was acquired in 1873 by Wilhem Eduard Drugulin, a print dealer from Leipzig.⁶²

The fourth portrait

"The fourth portrait differs from the one above, both in physiognomy and in dress."⁶³ (**Fig. 1**)

The image to which Bălcescu refers in the quote above is an engraving made by Giovanni Orlandi, in Rome, according to the inscription beneath the portrait. The engraving depicts a man turned to the left in a semi-profile. The physiognomy is harsh: he has a bald head, large, round eyes, a prominent nose, and an elongated, wrinkled face, framed by a black beard and a long, twisted moustache. The attire evokes that of a battle-ready knight, consisting of a fur-trimmed cloak fastened at the neck, a suit of knightly armour and

⁵⁸ Pippidi, *Mihai Viteazul în arta epocii sale*, 32.

⁵⁹ Slătineanu, *Contribuțiuni la studiul portretelor lui Mihai Viteazul*, 207.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 207–208.

⁶¹ Băcilă, *Portretele lui Mihai Viteazul*, 28.

⁶² F. W. H. Hollstein, *German engravings, etchings, and woodcuts, ca. 1400–1700* (Amsterdam: M. Hertzberger, 1954).

⁶³ Bălcescu, "Buletin despre portretele principilor Țării Românești și ai Moldaviei," 261. "Al patrulea portret se deosebește de acesta de sus atât în fizionomie, cât și în îmbrăcăminte".

a sword with a wolf's-head-shaped hilt. His right hand is holding a commander's baton, while the other rests at his waist, with the fingers covering the sword's hilt. In the background, mounted figures can be discerned, and in the upper left corner, a heraldic emblem is displayed.⁶⁴ The symbols of the coat of arms suggest, according to Andrei Pippidi, "the capture of a fortress on the banks of the Danube."⁶⁵

Beneath the bust, there is a Latin inscription reading: "Michael, Voivode of Wallachia, who captured the city of Nikopol in Bulgaria in the year 1598."⁶⁶ In the lower right corner, the author's name and place were added by hand: "*Ioan Orlandi forma in Roma.*" The inscription refers to Michael the Brave's anti-Ottoman military campaign south of the Danube in the autumn of 1598. After the Wallachian ruler's army supported the troops of Sigismund Báthory, by coming to the aid of Oradea Mare, which was under Turk siege, Michael the Brave advanced into the Balkans in September and managed to capture Nikopol, Vidin and Kladovo.⁶⁷

Andrei Pippidi proposed a hypothesis regarding the dating of the image. He discusses the chronicle by Balthasar Walther, *Brevis rerum a Michaele Moldaviae Transalpinae sive Valachiae palatino gestarum descriptio* [A brief and true account of the deeds accomplished by Io Mihai, Voivode of Wallachia], printed in Görlitz in 1599.⁶⁸ In 1597, the Silesian chronicler produced a description of the ruler, later published in his 1599 book.⁶⁹ The text appears

⁶⁴ The Semitic shield bears a crenellated fortress with an open gate, flanked by two key-shaped openings and surmounted by three towers.

⁶⁵ Andrei Pippidi, *Mihai Viteazul în arta epocii sale*, 23. "ocuparea unei fortărețe de pe malul Dunării".

⁶⁶ "Michel Vaivoda della Vallachia, il quale prese la città di Nicopoli nella Bvlgaria l'anno 1598."

⁶⁷ Petre P. Panaitescu, *Mihai Viteazul* (Bucharest: Editura Fundația Regele Carol I, 1936), 149.

⁶⁸ Gheorghe Oprică, "'Momentul Mihai Viteazul' - Consecințe în istoriografia și mentalitatea istorică a vremii", *Buletinul Societății de Științe Muzeale din România*, no. VI (2008): 110–111.

⁶⁹ According to Balhasar Walther: "This is the likeness of the prince, animated by the proud and manly spirit within his breast, which endows his right hand with formidable strength. Not even the skilful hand of Apelles could portray him, and scarcely could wise Apollo sing him in fitting verse. He is the leader of the Getic crowds, the bulwark of Christendom and its avenger. Few in number are his soldiers, yet great is he in arm and in heart: he overcomes countless enemies, delivering them to death and flight. O Christ, in Your name we beseech You: from force, deceit, blows, or treachery, protect the prince. In You lies all salvation, and as You grant all things heartily, according to Your will, Lord, a cause pleasing to You often finds favour" – English translation based on the Romanian translation in Pippidi, *Mihai Viteazul în arta epocii sale*, 22.

to be based on an image available to the author at the time (now lost) in which Michael the Brave is presented as a skilled warrior, aided by divine support in confronting his enemies. A comparison between Walther's 1597 description and Orlandi's 1598 engraving reveals certain similarities that point to a possible visual influence. Thus, Pippidi deems that Walter may have drawn inspiration from Orlandi's engraving and proposes an earlier dating, around 1596, when the engraver also produced the portrait of Sigismund Báthory.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the year referenced in the engraving corresponds to the anti-Ottoman military event, rather than to the publication of the portrait. Given the fact that, while in Rome, by 1599, Orlandi had finished editing the work featuring portraits of contemporary political leaders, a safe assumption would be that the engraving of Michael the Brave was published together with this series.⁷¹

The engraving in question sparked a lively controversy within the Romanian historiography over time. From its very first identification by A. Kurz, the print was poorly received, as Michael the Brave's appearance did not match the image that his contemporaries had come to project onto him. Bălcescu stated that "in this portrait, rather poorly printed from a woodblock onto a small quarto sheet, the prince's bust is shown in full. The figure is elongated, harsh and slender [...] the head is bare, the forehead broad and slightly shaven, the hair short."⁷² D. A. Sturdza referred to the representation as "the prince's bust with a Spanish beard," and considered it to be a merely imagined portrait.⁷³ Nicolae Iorga deemed it to be "of inferior value to the one we are familiar with"⁷⁴ (referring to the print by Aegidius Sadeler).

Barbu Slătineanu and Andrei Pippidi advanced the hypothesis that Orlandi's engraving does not, in fact, even depict Michael the Brave at all. Both scholars drew attention to the existence of another engraving titled

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷¹ Gemma Cornetti, "Portrait Prints of Rulers and Military Commanders in Sixteenth-Century Italy" (PhD diss., The Warburg Institute University of London, 2022), 181.

⁷² Bălcescu, "Buletin despre portretele principilor Țării Românești și ai Moldaviei," 261. "în acest portret, stampat cam rău de pe lemn, pe o foaie în 4^o, bustul principelui e întreg, figura e lungureață, tare și slabă [...] capul e gol, fruntea lată și rasă puțin, părul scurt".

⁷³ Slătineanu, *Contribuțiuni la studiul portretelor lui Mihai Viteazul*, 201. "bustul principelui cu barbă spaniolă".

⁷⁴ Nicolae Iorga, *Portrete și lucrări domnești nou-descoperite. Ședința de la 19 octombrie 1928*, 219. "de o valoare inferioară față de acela pe care-l cunoaștem".

Giorgio Basta. The figure is rendered in the same clothing and with the same facial features that are usually attributed to Michael the Brave. Moreover, since heraldic symbols were at the time generally reserved for Western princes, the presence of a coat of arms above the head is rather atypical. Therefore, the historians argue that the titles of the two political leaders had been reversed due to an error made by the Italian engraver.⁷⁵

The fifth portrait

“The fifth resembles the sixth in all respects, of which we shall now speak, although it is rather poorly engraved.”⁷⁶ (Fig. 5)

The reference is to an engraving made by the Venetian artist Giacomo Franco (1550–1620), produced in 1608 and included in the album *Effigie Naturali Dei Maggiori Principi e piu Valorosi Capitani di questi et con l’arme loro* [Natural likenesses of the greatest princes and the most valiant commanders of their time, together with their coats of arms].⁷⁷ The portrait gallery comprises 53 representations of kings and princes of that time, with Michael the Brave’s portrait appearing on page 34.⁷⁸

Nicolae Bălcescu noted that this portrait resembled the sixth one (i.e., the print by Aegidius Sadeler), given that the inscription encircling the medallion is identical. The clothing accessories were faithfully copied by Giacomo Franco. The only differences that stand out are the inscription beneath the bust, which reads *Franco forma* (“made by Franco”), and the facial features, which the Venetian engraver rendered rather awkwardly and somewhat schematically. Even the elements of dress are far more hashed, with the kaftan and the tall fur cap appearing blurred. The fact that the Italian artist’s engraving does not include, as we shall see in the following, the stanza that Sadeler placed beneath the bust suggests that the engraving was reproduced for wide circulation and commercial distribution within the

⁷⁵ See Slătineanu, *Contribuțiuni la studiul portretelor lui Mihai Viteazul*, 213–215 and Pippidi, *Mihai Viteazul în arta epocii sale*, 27.

⁷⁶ Bălcescu, “Buletin despre portretele principilor Țării Românești și ai Moldaviei,” 262. “Al cincilea seamănă în toate cu al șaselea, de care vom vorbi acum, deși e mai rău săpat”.

⁷⁷ Slătineanu, *Contribuțiuni la studiul portretelor lui Mihai Viteazul*, 208.

⁷⁸ Băcilă, *Portretele lui Mihai Viteazul*, 19–20.

Latin public sphere. Moreover, its production seven years after the voivode's death points to the sustained interest within the Latin sphere in the Christian commanders who fought against the Turks.

The sixth portrait

“Upon coming across the sixth, we burst out at once: This is it! The inscription on the portrait then fully convinced us.”⁷⁹ (**Fig. 2**)

The portrait that so deeply impressed Bălcescu and Golescu is the print made by the Flemish engraver Aegidius Sadeler (1570–1629). A large proportion of the artists active at the court of Rudolf II came from the Antwerp region, an important economic centre of that time,⁸⁰ renowned for its major commercial fairs, where merchants and craftsmen conducted their activities on both local and international markets.⁸¹ Under Emperor Rudolf II's patronage, the Prague court attracted numerous artists from Flanders, who came to exercise their craft not only in their regions of origin but also on an international stage. These painters and engravers produced remarkable works, and their subjects included many contemporary historical figures, including that of Michael the Brave.

The portrait was made in Prague in 1601 and it is an emblematic engraving. Such representations typically depicted the subject frontally and were reserved almost exclusively for political and social elites (rulers, nobles, or officials attached to the imperial court). Sadeler frequently employed a standardised compositional formula: the portrait was framed within a decorative oval medallion, surrounded by two circular registers intended for inscriptions, which usually indicated the rank or public office of the depicted

⁷⁹ Bălcescu, “Buletin despre portretele principilor Țării Românești și ai Moldaviei,” 262. “Când văzurăm pe cel de-al șaselea strigarăm deodată: Acesta este! Citirea cuvintelor scrise pe portret ne încredință desăvârșit”.

⁸⁰ Michael Limberger, *Sixteenth-century Antwerp and its Rural Surroundings Social and Economic Changes in the Hinterland of a Commercial Metropolis (ca. 1450 – ca. 1570)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 1.

⁸¹ Donald J. Harreld, “Trading Places: The Public and Private Spaces of Merchants in Sixteenth Century Antwerp,” *Journal of Urban History* 29, Issue 6 (2003): 662, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009614420325346>.

figure.⁸² The image is part of an emblematic register; according to the 1989 edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term “emblem” designates a visual sign intended to represent an institution or a person, most often a public figure or a political leader.

In order to clarify the context in which the image was produced, namely its function and possible commission, a presentation of its author is necessary. Aegidius Sadeler came from a family of printers in Antwerp and he surpassed in renown the works of his uncles, Jan and Raphael Sadeler. Because of the economic, political and religious pressures exerted by the Spanish administration in Flanders, he left his hometown in 1586 and subsequently worked in workshops in Mainz and Frankfurt. In 1588, he settled in Munich alongside Jan Sadeler, where he came into contact with artists such as Friedrich Sustis and Pieter Candid and produced his first major works.⁸³ After several periods of working in Italian art centres such as Venice, Rome, and Florence, Sadeler was appointed imperial engraver at the Prague court, in the autumn of 1597, where he quickly integrated into the circle of the court’s most prestigious artists.⁸⁴

The authenticity of the engraving dedicated to Michael the Brave is confirmed by the artist’s signature (*sculptor AEG. Sadeler*), by the indication of the place of execution (*Prage*) and by the date inscribed on the work (*MDCI*). The identity of the subject is indicated by the inscription incorporated into the emblematic composition. Executed as a bust portrait, the image depicts the voivode in a slight right-facing profile, wearing an oval cap adorned with ostrich feathers, i.e. an attribute of high rank. The physiognomic features are strongly emphasised: a direct gaze, arched nose, full moustache, and a thick beard; the attire consists of a light-coloured cloak with a fur collar, worn over a dark garment. The figure is placed within a mandorla, framed by two concentric circles containing the inscription of the voivode’s title: “Michael, Voivode of Transalpine Wallachia: equally illustrious in favourable and adverse fortune, and in both displaying the same unbending valour.”⁸⁵

⁸² Dorothy Limouze, “Aegidius Sadeler, Imperial Printmaker,” *Bulletin of the Philadelphia Museum of Art* 85, no. 362 (Spring 1989): 15.

⁸³ Limouze, “Aegidius Sadeler,” 3–4.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 6–8.

⁸⁵ “MICHAEL WAIVODA WALACHIAE TRANSALPINAЕ, VTRAQVE FORTVNA INSIGNIS: ET IN VTRAQ, EADEM VIRTUTE.” in Pippidi, *Mihai Viteazul în arta epocii sale*, 34.

The inscribed text also indicates the voivode's age at the time the portrait was produced: 43 years old (*ÆT. XLIII*). Beneath the bust image, within the same medallion, the printing privilege granted to the engraver under imperial authority is noted (*cvm priul. S. Cae. M^{lis}*),⁸⁶ translated as "printed with the privilege (authorisation) of His Imperial Majesty." Below the frame, several lines are inscribed in Latin, in order to state: "So greatly does he cherish the name of Christ, His Majesty, the Christian commonwealth, and the peace of its Church under the Pope, with a generous heart, devoted to the common good, even when all is dire and adversaries oppose him. He who crushes what is feigned by deeds."⁸⁷ As mentioned earlier, the lower part of the composition bears the engraver's signature, together with the date and place of execution of the print: *S. Cæs. M.tis Sculptor Æg. Sadeler ad vivum/delineavit, et D.D. Prage. MDCL.*, thus reinforcing the authenticity of the portrait.

Shortly after Michael the Brave's death, copies of this print began to circulate, most of which faithfully reproduced the original. This is reflected in the copied made by Isaac Major (1588–1642),⁸⁸ Giacomo Franco (1550–1620)⁸⁹ and Johann Ludwig Gottfried (1584–1633).⁹⁰

Epilogue

After 1848, interest in the image of Michael the Brave shifted from the initiatives of independent scholars towards the systematic organisation of art collections and their integration into a more coherent scholarly framework.

⁸⁶ "Terms in Print Addresses: Abbreviations and Phrases on Printed Images 1500–1900," an updated version of "Appendix 3," in Arthur M. Hind, *Engraving and Etching 1400–2000: A History of the Development of Manual Intaglio Printmaking Processes* (London & Houten: Archetype Publications, 2012), 10. PDF available at <https://www.delineavit.nl/wp-content/uploads/Terms-in-print-addresses.pdf> (accessed on 22 August 2025).

⁸⁷ "Tanti facit nomen Christi: Maiestatem Cæsaris: Remp[ublicam]: Christianam, et Ecclesiæ, Sub Pont[ifice]. Max[imo]. Concordiam: Sue prodigus, publicæ devotus Saluti: etiamsi dira omnia, et diri adversarentur: Ficta obruens factis."

⁸⁸ Băcilă, *Portretele lui Mihai Viteazul*, 19–20.

⁸⁹ Slătineanu, *Contribuțiuni la studiul portretelor lui Mihai Viteazul*, 208.

⁹⁰ Pippidi, *Mihai Viteazul în arta epocii sale*, 36–37.

The collections assembled by Iordachi Beldiman, Dimitrie Papazoglu and Cezar Bolliac represented the first efforts to bring together the portraits of the rulers.⁹¹

Of the six engravings described by Nicolae Bălcescu, only two effectively entered the Romanian cultural circuit at the time, and they were incorporated into the artistic practices of the two Principalities, namely those produced by Aegidius Sadeler and Dominicus Custos.

Sadeler's print was copied in Paris immediately after its discovery by Barbu Iscovescu and brought back to the country.⁹² By 1850, a lithograph after Sadeler's engraving, produced by the Wallachian painter Mihail Lapaty (1816–1860) in Paris, is documented.⁹³ The portrait made in France served as the basic model that the artist used three years later in producing a historical painting sent to the country.⁹⁴ In 1852, another Romanian painter, Theodor Aman, likewise studying in Paris, painted the dramatic composition *Cea din urmă noapte a lui Mihai Viteazul* [The final night of Michael the Brave]. In this depiction, the semi-profile pose of the subject's head, the long and imposing beard, the black fur cap, and the clasped feathers all echo Sadeler's engraving.

Custos's engraving did not circulate as widely as that of his contemporary. A first possible use of it as a model, albeit still debated in historiography, has been identified in Constantin Lecca's painting *Intrarea triumfală a lui Mihai Viteazul în Alba Iulia* [The triumphant entry of Michael the Brave in Alba Iulia] (1855–1856). The depiction of the ruler in semi-profile, with an intense gaze, a full beard, and resolute bearing, led some art historians (Remus Niculescu) to hypothesise that the physiognomic type derived from Custos's engraving.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁹² Zamfir, "Mihai Viteazul în pictura românească," 262.

⁹³ Virgil Căndea, *Mărturia românești peste hotare II. Cercetări românești și izvoare despre români în colecții din străinătate. Seria Nouă, Finlanda-Grecia* (București: Editura Biblioteca Bucureștilor, 2011), 170. Moreover, see a reproduction of Mihail Lapaty's lithograph after Aegidius Sadeler on *Artmark* – the lithograph in question is part of the collection of literary historian Șerban Cioculescu (1902–1988): <https://www.artmark.ro/ro/licitatie/licitatie-de-hartii-importante-inclusiv-o-selectie-din-colectia-criticului-literar-serban-cioculescu-5082023/lot/litografie-mihai-viteazul-de-mihail-lapaty-paris-cca-1850-ro-80927?srsId=AfmBOopo3urmDPzL41p2mCV2dDCHEFsB0osagWsGRuQIEZs-1AWR4Kea> (accessed on 28 December 2025).

⁹⁴ Adrian-Silvan Ionescu, "De la galeria de tablouri la pinacoteca națională" [From the painting gallery to the national pinacotheca], *Revista Istorică*, New series, vol. 13 (2002): 157.

The fact that the other engravings found by Nicolae Bălcescu in Paris in 1847 were not used indicates that the painters who shaped the ruler's image from the second half of the 19th century made a selection, conserving only those features considered relevant for their compositions. The remaining representations were recovered primarily on an erudite level, through studies published in the second half of the century. Michael the Brave's image thus became the object of scholarly interest for researchers such as A. Papiu-Illarian (1862), D. A. Sturdza (1875), Constantin V. Obedeanu (1906), George Oprescu (1910, 1922), Alexandru Busuioceanu (1925), Ioan C. Băcilă (1926), Nicolae Iorga (1927), Barbu Slătineanu (1933), Emil Țirțosu (1936), Radu Victor Bossy (1937) and Andrei Pippidi (1987).

Artist and inscription	Date and place	Status	Motivation	Engraving
Giovanni Orlandi "Michel Vaivoda della Vallachia" (Fig. 1)	1599, Rome	ORIGINAL	The first autonomous Western portrait; a "news-sheet" print (Nikopol, 1598). Does not generate a canonical type.	
Aegidius Sadeler, "Michael Waivoda Walachiae Transalpinae" (Fig. 2)	1601, Prague	ORIGINAL canonical type, <i>ad vivum</i>	Produced at the court of Rudolf II, under <i>cum privilegio</i> ; becomes the preferred model for subsequent dissemination.	

Johann Alexander Böner , in J. Bisselius's <i>Aetatis nostrae gestorum</i> , "Michael Walachiae Waywoda" (Fig. 6)	1675, Amberg	SECONDARY (after Custos)	Book re-engraving produced 70 years after the original; simplified title; late editorial dissemination.
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Hermann Oberth at the University of Cluj. A Necessary Clarification

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Abstract: The present article identifies and analyses the information concerning Hermann Oberth as a student, preserved in the archives of the former Faculty of Sciences of the University of Cluj. It brings to light a series of previously unknown details regarding his enrolment in October 1922 and the formal completion of his academic record in April 1923. These documents show that the goal pursued by the future scientist was to obtain a graduation certificate and to take the capacity examination required to obtain a teaching diploma in secondary education. Thus, he followed the course of study prescribed by the Hungarian Law of Education of 1883, which was still accepted by the newly established Romanian university authorities in Cluj, in order to settle the status of the students enrolled before the war or immediately after its end. Taking this procedural detail into account ultimately leads to abandoning a notion that has circulated for several decades, namely that, in Cluj, Oberth completed a degree examination comparable to today's system, based on the defence of a thesis.

Keywords: Hermann Oberth, University of Cluj, academic year 1922-1923, certificate of completion, capacity examination.

Rezumat: Articolul semnalează și analizează informațiile despre studentul Hermann Oberth păstrate în arhiva fostei Facultăți de Științe a Universității din Cluj. Sunt detalii inedite, referitoare la înmatricularea lui Oberth, în octombrie 1922, și, respectiv, la încheierea situației sale școlare, în aprilie 1923. Din ele reiese că obiectivul avut în vedere de viitorul om de știință a fost obținerea certificatului de absolvent și prezentarea la examenul de capacitate (de obținere a diplomei de

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profesor în învățământul secundar). El a urmat astfel traseul prescris de legea învățământului din Ungaria, din 1883, acceptată încă de noile autorități universitare de la Cluj, românești, pentru rezolvarea situației studenților înscriși înainte de război sau imediat după încheierea acestuia. Luarea în considerare a acestui amănunt procedural impune renunțarea la ideea aflată în circulație de câteva decenii, că Oberth ar fi dat la Cluj, ca în zilele noastre, un examen de licență bazat pe susținerea unei teze.

Cuvinte-cheie: Hermann Oberth, Universitatea din Cluj, anul universitar 1922-1923, certificat de absolvire, examen de capacitate.

In the spring of 2023, the rector of the Babeș-Bolyai University, Daniel David, invited me to present a paper at the symposium marking one hundred years since the completion of Hermann Oberth's university studies in Cluj. I accepted the invitation, although I was not very familiar with the life story of this important pioneer of global astronautics, a Transylvanian Saxon born in Sibiu. The idea of exploring at least one facet of his biography was nevertheless appealing. I chose to first and foremost conduct the necessary archival research. The aim was to find information on the aforementioned figure in the documentary holdings of the faculty he had chosen in 1922, namely the Faculty of Sciences. Thus, I could align my contribution with the anniversary moment and, moreover, to offer the audience certain previously unexamined material. Any detail thus brought to light from these archives had the potential to constitute an intriguing discovery. None of the scholars who had previously written about Oberth's life and work had made use of this particular body of documents. Consequently, very little was known about how he completed his university education. Moreover, Oberth himself did not provide much detail. He only provided a single academic document to his devoted biographer, Hans Barth: his teaching diploma in physics and mathematics issued in Cluj on 18 May 1923.¹ Nothing else. The scientist never disclosed a bachelor's degree in the standardised format then used by the University of Cluj. Nor did he ever explain why. This left room for misinterpretations of the significance of that sole document he provided and of the examination on the basis of which it had been issued.

¹ Hans Barth, *Hermann Oberth. Titanul navigației spațiale*, 2nd expanded edition (București: Kriterion, 1979), illustrations appendix no. 19.

The archival investigation I carried out yielded quite little. What I did uncover, however, was enough to clarify what had happened a century ago. In the records of the former Faculty of Sciences, among the documents preserved for the academic year 1922-1923, I found Hermann Oberth's name mentioned in four places. Two references appear in the register recording incoming and outgoing documents, and two more in the minute book of the Faculty Council. The first of these entries shows that on 27 October 1922, shortly before the beginning of the academic year, Oberth requested the recognition of the studies he had completed in Germany² (however, the request itself, bearing his signature, appears not to have been archived). The Faculty Council's resolution is dated the following day. The minutes of the meeting held on 28 October record that six semesters completed abroad were recognised for the petitioner. He was required to attend "a further two semesters at our Faculty before taking the specialisation examination."³ Thus, Oberth mentioned and asked that the three academic years he had spent in Germany be taken into account. Evidently, he did not include the brief period during which he had also been enrolled at the University of Cluj, beginning in February 1919.⁴ The episode in question was rather brief and did not conclude with him taking any examination. The activity of the Hungarian university in the city, at which Oberth had enrolled after returning home at the end of the war, came to an abrupt end in May of that respective year. The institution was taken over by the Romanian authorities (who had been in control of Transylvania for several months), following the refusal of the academic staff to swear an oath of allegiance to the King of Romania.⁵ In

² The National Archives of Romania, Cluj County Branch (hereafter ANR-SJC), Fonds *University of Cluj*, Faculty of Sciences, Register of incoming and outgoing documents for the academic year 1922-23, fol. 12v.

³ ANR-SJC, Fonds *University of Cluj*, Faculty of Sciences, no. 62, Minutes of the Faculty of Sciences Council of Cluj for the years 1921-22 and 1922-23, fols. 57v-58r.

⁴ Heinz Gartmann, *The Men Behind the Space Rockets*, trans. by Eustace Wareing and Michael Glenny (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1956), 51; Barth, *Hermann Oberth*, 67; Simion Simon, "Întâlnirea a doi titani ai științei: Hermann Oberth și Augustin Maior", *Lucrările simpozionului internațional Hermann Oberth și bazele științifice ale zborului cosmic, 16-17 mai 2003*, ed. Simion Simon (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2003), 104; Ana-Maria Pălimariu, "Hermann Oberth (1894-1989)," *Limbă și cultură germană în România (1918-1933). Realități postimperiale, discurs politic și câmpuri culturale*, ed. Andrei Corbea-Hoișie, Rudolf Gräf (Iași: Ed. Polirom, 2023), 599.

⁵ See more recently Vasile Pușcaș, *Universitate, Societate, Modernizare. Idealul universității moderne la Cluj (1919-1945)* (Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Școala Ardeleană, 2019), 66-81.

autumn, when the university reopened, this time as a Romanian institution, Oberth chose to leave for Munich. From there, he moved to Göttingen, and then to Heidelberg, in search for the appropriate academic environment and mentor.⁶ He had thus come very close to completing the final stage of his university studies.

After failing to achieve what he had hoped for in Heidelberg, he chose to take that final step in Cluj, in his native province, closer to his family. At that time, there were other young Transylvanians just like him, who had completed semesters before or immediately after the war, at various Central European universities, and who decided to become students of the Romanian institution of higher education in Transylvania. They wished to settle their academic affairs and to obtain the diploma required to embark on a professional career. All of these young students, upon enrolment, requested that University of Cluj take into account the semesters they had attended and the examinations they had passed elsewhere, and place them in the appropriate year of study. They were met with understanding, regardless of the language in which they had studied or the country where they had pursued the education in question. The response to these requests was usually favourable.

The reference to Hermann Oberth in the minute book of the Faculty of Sciences Council, however, raised a question: given the absence of the letter in which the figure under scrutiny here had presented his academic record and intentions, it became necessary to clarify the actual meaning of the phrase “specialization exam,” referring to the final test to be taken. The assumption that this was the bachelor’s degree examination could not be the only one to be taken into consideration. Another possibility came into play. The evidence appears in the document in question a few lines below.

During the same council meeting, Miss Ana Hoffbauer was granted, at her request, recognition of the eight semesters she had completed at the universities of Budapest and Graz. According to the “old Regulation” (as stated in the resolution), this entitled her to appear before the “committee for the examination of candidates for professorships.”⁷ That is to say, it may be inferred that she was thus allowed to proceed directly to the so-called “capacity” examination – the state-regulated qualifying examination, at the

⁶ Gartmann, *The Men Behind the Space Rockets*, 52; Barth, *Hermann Oberth*, 66-71.

⁷ ANR-SJC, Fonds *University of Cluj*, Faculty of Sciences, no. 62, Minutes of the Faculty of Sciences Council of Cluj for the years 1921-22 and 1922-23, fol. 58r.

time mandatory for becoming a secondary-school teacher –, without first having to take the bachelor's degree examination. The minutes provide no further details in this respect either – it does not specify which “old regulation” is referenced. In Romania, the law governing the secondary and higher education had not changed in the meantime. The 1912 law remained the legal standard – there was no newer one. It is, in fact, out of discussion, given that Article 24 explicitly stipulated that those wishing to become teachers must hold, among other certifications, a bachelor's degree diploma.⁸ This was one of the conditions for admission to the capacity examination. By contrast, no such requirement appeared in the Education Act issued in Hungary in 1883. Under its provisions, in order to present oneself for the examination for the title of secondary-school teacher, one had to provide evidence for having attended four years of university study in the subjects corresponding to the intended specialization.⁹ The required document was a certificate of completion issued by the Faculty of Letters or the Faculty of Sciences attended, thus attesting that the candidate had fulfilled the obligations established by the regulations. A comparison between the two legal frameworks shows that the latter offered the solution to Hoffbauer's case. In this context, the normative act could indeed be justifiably described as “old.”

It should not come as a surprise that this legal framework continued to be upheld in Cluj, even after Transylvania's incorporation into Romania. Since a law unifying the education system of the greatly enlarged kingdom could not be adopted swiftly after the end of the war, the regulations previously in force in the annexed provinces continued to be used for some time. The territories in question were integrated together with their particularities, including those relating to institutional rules and practices. Moreover, in the case of Transylvania, until 1920, a form of autonomous regional government existed, exercised by the Ruling Council (installed in December 1918 in Sibiu and later moved to Cluj). That provisional government, through its Office of Religious Affairs and Public Instruction (*Resortul Cultelor și Instrucțiunii*), strived

⁸ *Antologia legilor învățământului din România* (București: Institutul de Științe ale Educației, 2004), 161-162.

⁹ *Az 1883-dik évi törvények gyűjteménye* (Budapest: Pesti könyvnyomda-részvénytársaság, 1883), 382-384.

to ensure the functioning of the local school network.¹⁰ Additionally, it began adapting it to the new political reality and to the shift in state framework. The major issue was the very limited availability of the human resource. The teaching staff that could be relied upon was insufficient in number, relative to the demands placed upon it (in fact, the overall number of teachers had been significantly reduced during the war). An acute personnel shortage was recorded particularly in connection with the project that the Romanian authorities regarded as “the nationalization of education on all levels, for the benefit of all the sons of our nation in Transylvania, the Banat, and the Romanian-inhabited parts of Hungary.”¹¹ More precisely, the pressing imperative at the time was the transition to instruction in the Romanian language in the majority of the existing state schools, beginning with the 1919-1920 school year. A remarkable number of high schools and civic schools that were now being transformed into Romanian educational institutions required teaching staff capable of assuming the task.

Thus, the expedited relocation to Transylvania of a certain number of teachers and preceptors from the Old Kingdom was encouraged, as well as the reactivation of local retired educators.¹² Moreover, the authorities counted on certain active segments of the Romanian scholarly community in Transylvania, as well as on those still in training. Their recruitment into the education system was to follow a different course from the usual one, given the exceptional circumstances. There was no longer time to wait for the actual completion of a full cycle of university education, initiated at that point, to produce results. The first call to those wishing to obtain a teacher status in an expedited manner is particularly revealing. Issued by the Ruling Council on 23 May 1919, it encouraged enrolment in a free training course for the following categories: students who had managed to complete four semesters (that is, only two years of study); high school graduates who had five years of teaching experience; theology graduates who held some form of pedagogical qualification; priests who had served for ten years as schoolteachers.¹³ Therefore, the eligibility

¹⁰ I. Bratu, “Învățământul secundar din Ardeal”, *Transilvania, Banatul, Crișana, Maramureșul 1918-1928*, vol. II (Bucharest: Editura Cultura Națională, 1929), 1002-1010; Gh. Smarandache, “Activitatea Consiliului Dirigent Român al Transilvaniei în domeniul învățământului secundar”, *Studii și articole de istorie*, LXIV (new series) (1999): 118-123.

¹¹ *Gazeta Oficială*, nos. 7-12 (1-22 February, 1919): 2.

¹² *Limbă și cultură germană în România (1918-1933)* (subchapter 4.1.1., authored by Ionuț Nistor), 194.

¹³ *Gazeta Oficială*, no. 20 (16-29 March 1919): 2.

standard was set way below the levels established by both of the aforementioned laws. The first intensive course and the examination scheduled at its end took place in Cluj in the summer of 1919, inside the building of the recently taken-over university.

An actual capacity examination was also scheduled there in August, which was the very first to be held after the war. However, we do not know whether or not it actually took place. An explicit opportunity was offered to the candidates who had been students of the Hungarian universities in Cluj and Budapest and who, for various reasons, had not managed to take the exam at the time.¹⁴ In those circumstances, they were the ones for whom the decision was made to rely on the provisions of the “old regulation” (namely, the 1883 law),¹⁵ which did not make registration for the capacity examination conditional upon possession of a bachelor’s degree. Thus, this procedure was followed in the case of Ana Hoffbauer as well, in 1922. Her name and those of other former students who requested to be treated in this manner are telling. They show that those who were able to take advantage of this opportunity in the early 1920s, at the Faculty of Sciences, were predominantly from among Transylvania’s national minorities. Understandably, they were mostly aiming for positions within state or confessional schools in the region where the languages of instruction continued to be German and Hungarian.

The examination of the two categories of candidates for the teaching diploma (namely, the “course attendees” and those falling under the umbrella of the “old regulation”) was entrusted to an “interim committee.” It included university professors and was chaired by philologist Nicolae Drăganu.¹⁶ Circumstances compelled it to act with considerable flexibility. It relied on a blend of convenient rules suited to the context, in order to fill the gaps in Transylvania’s school system as quickly as possible. However, in 1922, when the Secretariat-General in Cluj (which had coordinated the education system in the province after the dissolution of the Ruling Council) ceased its activity, the Ministry of Public Instruction in Bucharest announced the nationwide imposition of a single procedure for the capacity examination: the one prescribed by the Romanian education law. Nevertheless, one year’s grace

¹⁴ *Gazeta Oficială*, no. 45-46 (30 July – 6 August 1919): 1.

¹⁵ Bratu, “Învățământul secundar,” 1013.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* The clarification regarding the period during which N. Drăganu held that position appears in *Anuarul Universității din Cluj pe anul școlar 1923-24* (Cluj: Institutul de Arte Grafice Ardealul, 1925), 124.

period was allowed before the unifying decision took effect. In Transylvania, the moratorium was firmly and explicitly addressed to the two aforementioned categories. Until 30 July 1923, they could still take the teaching diploma examinations, in accordance with the rule applied in the previous years.¹⁷ If they failed to take advantage of the opportunity, they were compelled to take a more complicated route to obtaining the teaching qualification. Additionally, the regional authority that had previously evaluated the candidates was also being dissolved. The ministry's statement reads as follows: "As of 1 July 1923, the interim capacity examination committee operating alongside the University of Cluj shall be dissolved."¹⁸ Therefore, the "old-style" form of examination went into liquidation. Hermann Oberth ultimately made use of this final opportunity as well.

The fact that the goal he pursued in Cluj was to obtain the teaching diploma emerges from the other two mentions of his name. On 11 April 1923, according to the register of incoming and outgoing documents, Oberth requested the "recognition of the eight semesters and the issuance of the certificate of completion."¹⁹ The Faculty Council's response was given at the meeting held on 28 April 1923. The minutes summarise the request somewhat differently, by omitting the number of semesters credited to the student. Instead, they noted his additional demands: "Mr. Hermann Oberth requests the certificate of completion and the permission to take the examination in accordance with the old regulations."²⁰ The decision was recorded tersely: "Approved."²¹ Thus, Oberth was to receive the document confirming that he was a graduate. From the faculty leadership's viewpoint, his academic record was now deemed complete. However, the actual date of the resolution stands out. It suggests that he had somehow managed to settle the matter more quickly. The second semester could not possibly have been finished by early April. Yet, at his enrolment in October 1922, Oberth had been explicitly asked to attend two more semesters in Cluj.

¹⁷ "Recrutarea profesorilor secundari pentru Transilvania, Bucovina și Basarabia", *Adevărul* XXXV, no. 11750 (22 July 1922): 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ ANR-SJC, Fonds *University of Cluj*, Faculty of Sciences, Register of incoming and outgoing documents for the academic year 1922-23, fol. 52v.

²⁰ ANR-SJC, Fonds *University of Cluj*, Faculty of Sciences, no. 62, Minutes of the Faculty of Sciences Council of Cluj for the years 1921-22 and 1922-23, fol. 81v.

²¹ *Ibid.*

Nonetheless, that academic year was far from ordinary. The first semester, which began on 1 November, proceeded uninterrupted for a mere few weeks. It was then progressively disrupted by the antisemitic agitation that erupted at Cluj University's Faculty of Medicine. The unrest quickly spread to the other university centres across the country, giving rise to street altercations, obstructions in lecture halls, and pressure placed on the academic authorities and the ministry.²² The end of the first semester and the opening of the second were effectively compromised by the escalating tensions. Under such circumstances, on 1 February 1923, the rectorate of the University of Cluj decided to suspend "until further notice, all lectures and practical sessions for all faculties," beginning with the following day.²³

What Hermann Oberth was engaged in over the first three months of the academic year in Cluj, before the suspension of the teaching activities, remains unknown. We do not know which lectures and seminars he chose to attend. His student record book would clarify the matter, if it still existed. In this type of document, it was customary at the beginning of each semester to list the subjects one intended to study (professors were then required to mark the date of the student's first attendance in their course and, at the end of the semester, to confirm that the course had indeed been duly attended). Oberth undoubtedly followed this general practice as well upon enrolment in October 1922. The subjects he selected must also have appeared on the list he submitted at that time to the university registry, in full accordance with the internal procedure. However, that document, too, has since been lost. In the absence of such sources, we do not know how Oberth concluded his first semester either. Did he manage to take at least one examination? The regulation did not compel him, but neither did it prevent him from taking any at the end of that initial period. The strategy for the entire year was left up to the student. For the stamp marking the end of the autumn-winter term, one had to merely provide proof of attendance to the selected lectures and of participation in the seminars. Additionally, there is also no record of Oberth's place of residence. His name does not appear in the records listing the Faculty of Science students who benefited from accommodation in the university

²² Maria Ghitta, *Clujul universitar și geneza noului naționalism (1919-1925)* (PhD diss., Cluj-Napoca, 2020), 58-65.

²³ ANR-SJC, Fonds *University of Cluj*, Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, box 4, 1922-23, file no. 790/1922-23 (1 February 1923).

dormitory.²⁴ This fact suggests that he paid tuition and lodged privately. He probably remained in his rented place of accommodation after the suspension of courses as well, during the two and half months of waiting for the resumption of teaching. During that time, he was also able to leave the city for several days, in order to travel to Sighișoara, where his wife and two young children resided.²⁵

The delay in the start of the second semester, however, seriously threatened Hermann Oberth's plans. At a certain point, it became clear that, even if teaching were to eventually resume, he would no longer be able to complete his academic record in time to take the capacity examination. That stalled semester, therefore, had to be taken out of the equation. When he decided to take action, Oberth had only about a month left before the desired examination, and the university remained closed. The inference is that he resorted to an argument he had not previously advanced (or that the council had not taken into account). In order to bring his total number of semesters to eight, as he requested to have recognised on 11 April 1923, he must also have included the incomplete semester he had attended in Cluj in 1919. No other hypothesis seems likely. With no alternative, he presumably proceeded in the same manner as student Elisabeta Szabó had done in September 1921. He requested "that the second semester of the 1918-1919 academic year be considered completed, despite lacking the certificate of completion required by the Romanian interim office."²⁶ In her case, by way of exception, the Faculty of Science Council decided to validate the semester, "in view of the diligence shown by the student, as well as her desire to pursue her studies further."²⁷ The particular circumstances of the spring of 1923 tipped the scales toward a similar resolution for Herman Oberth's request. When the council ruled in his favour on 28 April, the second semester had only just begun, less than two weeks earlier.²⁸ The academic calendar had become severely delayed, and peace had not truly been restored in the universities. The student movement had not entirely subsided and, thus, the spectre of another suspension of the

²⁴ ANR-SJC, Fonds *University of Cluj*, Faculty of Sciences, no. 68, fols. 143, 154-155.

²⁵ *Hermann Oberth (documente inedite)*, eds. Mircea Țiplea and Marin Gheorghe Trifa (Mediaș: Crisserv, 2012), 19.

²⁶ ANR-SJC, Fonds *University of Cluj*, Faculty of Sciences, no. 62, Minutes of the Faculty of Sciences Council of Cluj for the years 1921-22 and 1922-23, fol. 3r.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ ANR-SJC, Fonds *University of Cluj*, Faculty of Sciences, box 14, file no. 64, fol. 31r.

academic year continued to hover over Romania's higher education system. In such circumstances, there was little sense in obstructing the plans of a student like Oberth. It was, in all fairness, hardly his fault that he had been unable to meet the requirement formulated by the council in October 1922. One semester recovered, one way or another, retroactively, as a substitute for one that could not realistically be completed on time, offered a convenient solution for both parties.

Ultimately obtained under such circumstances, the certificate of completion enabled Hermann Oberth to take the capacity examination. It is even likely that he took all of the tests in one day, since this appears to have been the rule established by the Ministry of Public Instruction in Bucharest.²⁹ This would mean that the date inscribed on the diploma coincides with that of the examination itself: 18 May 1923. Oberth underwent three categories of tests (written and oral), as required by the old law.³⁰ Details are provided both in the document he received at the end and in his discussion with Hans Barth.³¹ During the fundamental examination, his basic knowledge of Romanian language and literature, German language and literature, mathematics, and physics was assessed. The grades he received were "satisfactory" in the first subject and "good" in the others. This was followed by the specialised examination, consisting of more applied topics in mathematics and physics, namely the subjects he was to teach in school and for which he was again graded "good." The session concluded with an examination in philosophy and pedagogy, in which he was likewise graded "good."

The procedure did not provide for the submission of a thesis. Consequently, the claim suggesting otherwise must be rejected, having, in time, become a deeply entrenched myth. It entered circulation some time after 1970, endorsed by Hermann Oberth himself, by then in his old age and at a moment when he was being publicly reclaimed by Romania. Since then, the circulated claim was that the volume rejected as a dissertation in Heidelberg was accepted in that same capacity in Cluj.³² Yet, this could not have been

²⁹ See the schedule sent by the ministry to the deans on 4 November 1922: ANR-SJC, Fonds *University of Cluj*, Faculty of Sciences, box 14, file no. 64, fol. 107.

³⁰ *Az 1883-dik évi törvények gyűjteménye*, 385-388.

³¹ Barth, *Hermann Oberth*, 71 and the illustrations appendix, no. 19.

³² *Ibid.*; *Hermann Oberth (documente inedite)*, 19; S. Simon, "Întâlnirea a doi titani ai științei", 104; S. Simon, "Prefață," Hermann Oberth, *Racheta spre spațiile planetare/ Die Rakete zu der Planetenräumen* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2003), 7; *Transilvăneanul Hermann Oberth. Pământeianul*

the case within that examination framework. However, something else may reasonably be acknowledged to have taken place. There are no grounds to dispute that the ideas contained in the manuscript were indeed discussed with the candidate and evaluated by professor Augustin Maior. However, this took place not in the context of a bachelor thesis defence, but rather as part of the special examination that Oberth had taken.³³ This is an important distinction that must not be overlooked. The obvious anachronism must therefore be removed from the discussion.

The teaching diploma received by Hermann Oberth stated that he was “qualified to teach physics and mathematics in secondary schools with Romanian and German as languages of instruction.”³⁴ Although the document had been obtained as a result of an examination that had taken place on the premises of the University of Cluj, in the presence of professors from the same institution, it did not bear the university’s endorsement, but that of the already dissolved Secretariat-General of Public Instruction in Cluj. It was this regional office that had granted the authorization and in whose name the proceedings had been carried out. The seal affixed to the document was that of the interim committee. The clarification must be made in the same context of dismantling entrenched clichés. In fact, the only final academic document issued by the University of Cluj to Hermann Oberth was the certificate of completion. It is the sole official act that truly connects the great Saxon inventor to this alma mater. When, in 1972, Oberth became its Doctor Honoris Causa, the procedural and terminological particularities of the distant 1922-1923 academic year were already regarded, it would seem, as irrelevant, if not outright inconvenient details. The past was simplified and translated into contemporary terms so that the former mature student’s connection with the University of Cluj could be recast as the first scientific validation of his genius.

care a identificat căile navigației spațiale, eds. Mircia Țiplea and Marin Gheorghe Trifa (Mediaș: Crisserv, 2011), 7. Oberth’s book was published in 1923, at his own expense: *Die Rakete zu der Planetenräumen* (München: Verlag R. Oldenbourg, 1923). Significantly, in the “Introduction,” the author does not suggest that there was any connection between his work and the University of Cluj. Nor does this detail appear in Gartmann, *The Men*, 52.

³³ See Barth, *Hermann Oberth*, 71, the footnote, as well as several nuances made by Hans Barth in “Cuvânt de salut”, in *Lucrările simpozionului internațional Hermann Oberth*, 23-24.

³⁴ Barth, *Hermann Oberth*, illustrations appendix, no. 19.

Outstanding Figures in the Life and History of the University Library of Cluj: József Sebestyén K. (1878-1964)¹

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Abstract: József Sebestyén K. was a prominent scholar, specialised in heraldry. Additionally, he was a leading heraldic painter, a Hungarian genealogist and a distinguished connoisseur of Transylvanian monuments. Beyond evoking his major achievements – which included the painting of the first coat of arms of Greater Romania, as well as numerous other coats of arms for public institutions and private families – this study aims to present several original findings concerning the events surrounding the University Library of Cluj between 1945-1959. The research conducted in the “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca revealed new information regarding the years during which József Sebestyén K. was employed by the library. The official documents from the aforementioned archive can be more readily understood when read in conjunction with his correspondence with Lajos Kelemen (an eminent archivist who was both his friend and colleague at the University Library of Cluj), as well as with entries from the journal kept by his colleague, writer György Jakab (Bözödi), as well as the correspondence with his wife, Ilona Gyenge. The interpretation of the *ex libris* designed by K. Sebestyén József (still found today in thousands of volumes belonging to the collections of the “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library) will undoubtedly represent a novelty.

Keywords: The University Library of Cluj, The Transylvanian Museum Society, Ex libris, Transylvania, Heraldry, Journals.

¹ The paper entitled “K. Sebestyén József és a Kolozsvári Egyetemi Könyvtár” [József Sebestyén K. and the University Library of Cluj] was presented at the 11th edition of the Doctoral Students’ Conference of the Hungarian-language Department of History in Cluj-Napoca, on 1 March 2025.

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Rezumat: József Sebestyén K. a fost un eminent specialist în heraldică, pictor heraldist de prim rang, genealog maghiar și un bun cunoscător al monumentelor transilvănene. Pe lângă evocarea marilor realizări - a pictat prima stemă a României Mari, dar și multe alte steme ale unor instituții publice sau de familie, voi prezenta în acest studiu descoperirile mele legate de evoluția Bibliotecii Universității din Cluj, în perioada 1945-1959. Cercetările din arhiva Bibliotecii Centrale Universitare „Lucian-Bloga” din Cluj-Napoca au scos la iveală noi informații despre anii în care József Sebestyén K. a fost angajatul Bibliotecii. Documentele oficiale din arhiva bibliotecii pot fi mai ușor înțelese prin prisma corespondenței dintre acesta și Lajos Kelemen (marele arhivist, care i-a fost prieten, dar și coleg în cadrul Bibliotecii Universității din Cluj); de asemenea, din jurnalul scriitorului și colegului, György Jakab (Bözödi), respectiv din corespondența cu soția lui, Ilona Gyenge. Interpretarea ex-librisului desenat de József Sebestyén K., care se găsește și în zilele noastre în miile de volume din colecția Bibliotecii Centrale Universitare „Lucian-Bloga” din Cluj-Napoca, va fi cu siguranță o noutate pentru mulți.

Cuvinte-cheie: Biblioteca Universității din Cluj, Societatea Muzeului Ardelean, Ex-libris, Transilvania, Heraldică, Jurnale.

The present study pays tribute to one of the outstanding figures of the 20th century, József Sebestyén K. In addition to recalling the achievements through which he has become known over time, my research into the history and development of the University Library of Cluj between 1945 and 1959 highlights several new findings and previously undocumented aspects of his activity.

His pseudonym, József Sebestyén Keöpeczi, is familiar to many. He is known as a heraldist, a coat of arms painter, a genealogist and an illustrator, yet few are aware that, between 1940 and 1947, he was also an employee of the University Library of Cluj. Proceeding chronologically in the identification of the documents relevant to the present research, thus beginning with the year 1945, we uncovered, in the archives of the “Lucian Bloga” Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, a table² listing the library employees who had remained in Cluj. After the end of World War I, part of Cluj’s Hungarian population (civil servants, teachers, intellectuals) fled to Hungary out of fear of reprisals.

² Cluj-Napoca, the Archive of The “Lucian Bloga” Central University Library (hereinafter ALBCUL): file no. 45 / 12 March 1945, 7 folios.

Because of the general state of uncertainty, in the summer of 1944, 21 librarians, led by director Árpád Herepey, left for Hungary, while those who remained guarded the institution day and night.³ Among the 52 employees, the renowned heraldist appears in the capacity of *library officer* (Hungarian term: *könyvtári tisztt*). It is highly likely that this table, drawn up by the library director, István Monoki,⁴ was compiled at the request of the authorities, given the fact that, in the final column, each employee is listed as “nélkülözhetetlen munkaerő,” meaning “indispensable workforce” (see Table 1).

Before reviewing several biographical details, we must clarify the version of the name used henceforth. In the official documents of the University Library of Cluj, his name appears as *K. Sebestyén József* (following the Hungarian convention in which the family name precedes the given name). However, the standardised English form will be used throughout the present study: *József Sebestyén K.* He signed his works using the artistic name “K.” or “Keöpeczi/Köpeczi Sebestyén József” (see Fig. 4. The origin of the name Keöpeczi or Köpeczi will be addressed in a later section), which is also the form that appears on his business card (see Fig. 2). In the two volumes⁵ dedicated to his life and work, the literary historian Péter Sas used the form “Köpeczi Sebestyén József,” while Attila István Szekeres (heraldist, heraldic graphic artist, president of the Transylvanian Association of Heraldry and Vexillology, and member of the International Academy of Heraldry) has opted, in his conference papers⁶ and published works, for the variant József Sebestyén Keöpeczi.

The abbreviation/initial “K.” and the noble predicate Köpeczi/Chepeț derive primarily from the noble origins of the Sebestyén family from Trei Scaune/Háromszék, more precisely from Micloșoara/Miklósvárszék, as Köpecz was one of the settlements from Miklósvárszék (see Fig. 3: the coat of arms

³ See Gyórfi Dénes, *Bibliotheca Universitatis Claudiopolitanae: evoluția instituțională și practici ale lecturii în Clujul universitar: 1872-1945* (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2019), 255.

⁴ István Monoki (1887-1963): Hungarian bibliographer, director of the University Library of Cluj between 1944-1947.

⁵ Péter Sas, *A heraldikus. Köpeczi Sebestyén József élete és munkássága*, Vol. I-II (Miercurea Ciuc: Pallas-Akadémia Könyvkiadó, 2011).

⁶ Attila István Szekeres presented his paper titled “Artistul heraldist József Sebestyén Keöpeczi (1878-1964)” at the 17th National Congress of Genealogy and Heraldry, 12-14 May 2016, Iași; on 9 February 2016, he launched the biographical volume titled *Keöpeczi Sebestyén József, a címerművész* at the “Kájoni János” County Library in Miercurea Ciuc.

of the Sebestyén family of Keöpecz – the use of the letter “e” appears in the diploma of ennoblement granted in 1608 by Gabriel Báthory, Prince of Transylvania⁷). Another reason for the adoption of the place name Köpeczi (from Köpecz/Chepeț) as an artistic name is related to the fact that József Sebestyén K. enlisted in the Székely Division in 1918.⁸ The division was dissolved in 1919, after which he was taken as a prisoner of war and sent to the POW camp in Brașov. Following his release, he was placed under house arrest. In 1936, he told journalists Endre Hegyi and Ilona Jagamas: “I was interned in Chepeț (Köpecz/Căpeni), because my artistic name was Köpeczi.”⁹ After his forced exile to Köpecz, he lived there with his family between 1919 and 1940.

In the following, we shall briefly outline several important biographical data pertaining to the life of József Sebestyén K., with particular emphasis on the years spent in the University Library of Cluj.

He was born on November 12, 1878, in Sic, Solnoc-Dăbâca County.¹⁰ His father, József Sebestyén (1855-1933),¹¹ was a schoolteacher. Thus, young Sebestyén attended school wherever his father was appointed: after Sic, in Nimegea de Jos, then in Șieu, completing his secondary education in Bistrița, where, within a Saxon milieu, he also refined his knowledge of the German language. Aspiring to become a painter, József Sebestyén K. attended the courses of the Royal Hungarian School of Artistic Drawing in Budapest during the first semester of the 1898/1899 academic year.¹²

Upon arriving in Cluj in 1903, Sebestyén began researching the noble origins of his family, for which purpose he requested, together with the

⁷ Attila István Szekeres, *Patrimoniul heraldic al județului Covasna* (Arcuș: Tinta, 2015), 51.

⁸ Ádám Kónya, “Országok heraldikusa Keöpeczi Sebestyén József,” *Erdővidéki lapok*, I/2 (2000): 4-6; Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 34-50.

⁹ Endre Hegyi, “Látogatás Köpeczi Sebestyén Józsefnél, a román és a magyar királyi címerek tervezőjénél,” *Keleti Újság*, 116 (22 May 1936): 5. Original text: “Szabadulásom után Chepețire internáltak, miután előnevem Köpeczi volt.” Unless otherwise indicated, all translations were made by the author of the present article.

¹⁰ ALBCUL, ad 45/12 March 1945, f. 3.

¹¹ Lajos Kelemen, *Napló II (1921-1938)* (Cluj-Napoca: Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület, 2018), 358; Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 563.

¹² Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 19-20; Attila István Szekeres, *Keöpeczi Sebestyén József, a címerművész* (Baraolt: Tortoma, 2014), 107.

University Library director, Farkas Gyalui,¹³ different diplomas from the Hungarian National Archives. These constitute the first two archival documents attesting to his presence as a researcher on the premises of the University Library of Cluj.¹⁴ This correspondence is preserved by the Hungarian National Archives and was published in 2011 by the literary and art historian Péter Sas.

In the months that followed, Sebestyén became the co-editor and illustrator of the newly founded scholarly periodical titled *Genealógiai füzetek* [Genealogical Journal], edited by Sándor Imre until 1914, when the journal ceased its publication because of the outbreak of the war.¹⁵ As soon as 1905, this journal gave rise to a professional collaboration with historian Lajos Kelemen,¹⁶ who, over the years, would come to play a major role in Sebestyén's life. The relationship between the two was documented by the correspondence collected and published by Hungarian historian Péter Sas in the two volumes of Lajos Kelemen's journal.¹⁷ From the very beginning, Lajos Kelemen was impressed by the artistic skills that created the badges bearing the Mikó coat of arms for the team of organisers of the Mikó Commemorative Ceremony, held on 12 November 1905, among whom Kelemen himself was included.¹⁸

In September 1906, Count László Teleki's entire archive¹⁹ was transported to the Wesselényi House (the one-story building next to the University Library), in two large carts, together with the chests and two archival cabinets. There, Lajos Kelemen unpacked and sanitized the enormous number of documents.

¹³ Farkas Gyalui (1866-1952): writer, literary historian, acting director (1899/1900) and subsequently deputy (technical) director of the University Library of Cluj (1911, 1920-1926). See also Dénes Gyórfi, "Farkas Gyalui, Former Deputy Director of Cluj University Library," *Philobiblon* XIII (2008): 507-514.

¹⁴ Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 119. The letter sent by Farkas Gyalui to the Hungarian National Archives (dated Cluj, 23 April 1903) reads: "I must mention the fact that, in accordance with our agreement, the requested diplomas will be consulted solely within the premises of the University Library." Original text: "Megjegyzem, hogy kölcsönös megállapodásunk szerint iratokat csak az egyetemi könyvtárban fogják használni."

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21-23; Szekeres, *Patrimoniul heraldic*, 30.

¹⁶ Lajos Kelemen (1877-1963): Hungarian historian and archivist, employed by the University Library of Cluj between 1903-1949. See Lajos Kelemen, *Napló I (1890-1920)*, *Napló II (1921-1938)* (Cluj-Napoca: Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület, 2017-2018).

¹⁷ *Ibid.* I, *Ibid.*, II; Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 23.

¹⁸ Kelemen, *Napló I*, 272; Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 23.

¹⁹ Count László Teleki (1864-1949), following his divorce, sold all his property in Transylvania and relocated to Gyömrő (Hungary). See Kelemen, *Napló I*, 320.

The library director, Pál Erdélyi,²⁰ approved Kelemen's request to hire intelligent people to organise the archive. According to Kelemen's journal, those were the circumstances in which Sebestyén came to work alongside him in the Wesselényi House.²¹ Lajos Kelemen had been the one who initiated him into the intricacies of archival work. A document dated 22 July 1947²² attests the fact that József Sebestyén K. had indeed been an employee of the University Library in 1907 – an employee certificate, signed by the library's retired director, Antal Valentiny.²³ According to the certificate from 22 July 1947, librarian József Sebestyén had been employed by the University Library, from the beginning of March to the end of August 1907, as a day labourer and was paid at a rate of two crowns per day. His assigned duty was the organisation of the archive – which, due to a lack of space, had been moved to the Wesselényi House, located near the new building (under construction at that time).

In 1907, he further refined his studies in heraldry and painting abroad. Lajos Kelemen carefully preserved the postcards he had sent him from different European cities:

Today (30 April 1907, in the evening), I received two letters from Sebestyén, from Strasbourg and Ulm, letting me know that he would write to me again from Paris. He was planning on returning home by mid-May. Things are rather easy for him – he does not need to think much of tomorrow.²⁴

Upon his return to Cluj, due to Lajos Kelemen's friendship and influence, he became a member of the Philology and History Section of the Transylvanian Museum Society. He moved to Budapest in 1914 and, one

²⁰ Pál Erdélyi (1864-1936): librarian, literary critic, director of the University Library between 1900-1919.

²¹ Kelemen, *Napló* I, 320-321.

²² The document is preserved in the József Sebestyén Köpeczi personal fonds at the Archive of the Transylvanian Museum Society, Personal Documents file; see also Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 540.

²³ Antal Valentiny (1883-1948): Hungarian linguist, bibliographer, director of the University Library of Cluj between 1940-1942.

²⁴ Kelemen, *Napló* I, 339. Original text: "Április 30., este. 1907. Sebestyéntől ma Strassburgból és Ulmból két levelezőt kaptam, s jelzi, hogy Párizsból ír újra. Úgy tervezte, hogy május közepére itthon lesz. Könnyű neki – ő a holnappal nem gondol."

year later, he received permission from the Minister of Internal Affairs to use the title “heraldic painter of the Royal Hungarian National Archives.”²⁵ In this capacity, he designed the coat of arms of the Kingdom of Hungary, as well as the royal seal.

In 1917, he published a substantial volume titled *Erdély címere*, discussing the coat of arms of Transylvania, in the scholarly journal on heraldry and genealogy, *Turul. A Magyar Heraldikai és Genealogiai Társaság Közlönye* [The *Turul*. The Bulletin of the Hungarian Heraldic and Genealogical Society]. The text is abundantly illustrated with the author’s own heraldic drawings. This is the very first truly scholarly work that addressed the issue of the Transylvanian coat of arms.²⁶

The period between 1919 and 1940, during which he lived in Căpeni, was the most fruitful phase of his heraldic activity, as well as of his work in cultural heritage conservation and monument protection. One of his greatest accomplishments was the design of the coat of arms of Romania, after the unification of the country following the Treaty of Trianon. For this task, he had been recommended by university professor Alexandru Tzigara-Samurçaș, acting as a representative of the Royal Court.²⁷ The coat of arms designed by József Sebestyén K. was adopted on 23 July 1921 and published in the *Monitorul Oficial* [The *Official Gazette*] no. 92 of 24 July 1921.²⁸ Consequently, he was awarded the Order of the Crown of Romania, Officer rank.²⁹ His design for the Romanian coat of arms was used between 1921 and 1941.³⁰

²⁵ Attila István Szekeres, “József Sebestyén Keöpeczi autorul stemei României din 1921”, in Mircea Ciubotariu, Lucian Valeriu Lefter, eds., *Mihai Dim. Sturdza la 80 de ani. Omagiu* (Iași: Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza,” 2014), 919-933; Szekeres, *Patrimoniul heraldic*, 54; Attila István Szekeres, Tudor Radu Tiron, “Stemele din biserica reformată de la Căpeni – un ansamblu unic de heraldică publică și privată”, *Monumentul X*, Vol. II, Part 1 (Iași, 2009): 329-358; Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 30-33.

²⁶ Szekeres, *Patrimoniul heraldic*, 27.

²⁷ Alexandru Tzigara-Samurçaș (1872-1952): Romanian art historian, museologist and professor at the Art History department of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the Bucharest University, as well as director of the Carol I Foundation between 1899-1946. See *Alexandru Tzigara-Samurçaș (1872-1952): biobibliografie adnotată*, Podgoreanu Anca, ed. (Constanța: Ex Ponto, 2004), LXVI; Hegyi, “Látogatás,” 5; Ádám Kónya, “Stema României și heraldistul József Sebestyén Keöpeczi”, *Acta Siculica* (1995): 343-350; Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 71.

²⁸ Szekeres, *Patrimoniul heraldic*, 55, 139.

²⁹ Szekeres, Tiron, “Stemele din biserica reformată de la Căpeni”: 330; Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 45-48.

³⁰ Kónya, “Stema României”: 343.

Sebestyén intended to prove that the so-called Transylvanian culture was, in fact, an integral part of European culture. The phrase “the easternmost frontier of Western culture” became a poetic manifesto and he did everything in his power to substantiate it.³¹ Inside the Reformed Church of Căpeni, he created a veritable gallery of coats of arms.³² He was commissioned to paint numerous family crests, he designed *ex libris* bookplates and produced the illustrations for Imre Lukinich’s work titled *A bethleni gróf Bethlen család története*³³ [The Count Bethlen family of Bethlen]. He collaborated with the Székely National Museum of Sfântu Gheorghe³⁴ and, additionally, he perfected his linguistic and professional skills by taking part in the restoration works on the Black Church of Braşov.³⁵ He published a series of studies in heraldry and art history, primarily in Hungarian journals, but also in scholarly Saxon and Romanian journals: *Genealogiai Füzetek*; *Erdélyi Irodalmi Szemle*; *Erdélyi Múzeum*; *Művészeti Szemle*; *Siebenbürgischen Vierteljahrschrift*; *Mitteilungen des Burzenländer Sächsischen Muzeums*; *Ilustrația*; *Flacăra*.³⁶ Among those who commissioned various works from him were Attila T. Szabó³⁷ and János Herepei.³⁸

Beside his professional achievements, we must also highlight the events from his private life in the village of Căpeni, as they had a major impact on him. There, he married Ilona Gyenge³⁹ and, shortly after that, they had two

³¹ Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 71.

³² Szekeres, Tiron, “Stemele”: 329-357; Szekeres, *Patrimoniul heraldic*, 158, 161, 170.

³³ Imre Lukinich, *A bethleni gróf Bethlen család története* (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1927). See Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 49-52.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 53-64.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

³⁶ József Sebestyén Keőpeczi’s studies published in the *Erdélyi Tudományos Füzetek* series: “A Brassai Fekete Templom Mátyás-kori címerai” (no. 8, 1927); “A Becse-Gergely nemzetség, az Apafi és a bethleni gróf Bethlen család címere” (no.13, 1928); “A középkori nyugati műveltség legkeletibb határai” (no. 19, 1929); “A Cenk-hegyi Brasovia-vár temploma” (no. 121, 1940); “Régi székely népi eredetű műemlékeink” (no. 126, 1941). József Sebestyén Keőpeczi’s studies published in *Erdélyi Irodalmi Szemle*: “A brassai fekete templom Mátyás-kori címerai,” 1 (1927): 13-32; “A Becse-Gergely nemzetség, az Apafi és a Bethleni gróf Bethlen család címere,” 1-4 (1928): 69-83. József Sebestyén Keőpeczi’s studies published in *Pásztortűz*: “Egy Báthori-címeres asztal Segesváron,” 5 (1927): 101-102; “Erdélyi renaissance-émlékek,” 13 (1927): 293-297.

³⁷ Attila T. Szabó (1906-1987): linguist, historian, literary historian, ethnographer, director of the Transylvanian Scientific Institute. See Kelemen, *Napló II*, 856.

³⁸ János Herepei (1891-1970): Hungarian museographer.

³⁹ Ilona Miklósvári Gyenge (1895-1945).

sons: András⁴⁰ and Albert.⁴¹ His devotion to his wife and his paternal inclination are reflected in the family correspondence preserved in the József Sebestyén Collection held at the Romanian National Archives, Cluj County Branch. The letters contained in this archival collection were published in the first volume of Péter Sas's monograph.⁴²

On 18 December 1923, Kelemen highlighted Sebestyén's importance and uniqueness within an auxiliary science of history, namely heraldry: "Today, he is the only Hungarian heraldic scholar in Transylvania."⁴³ Their mutual respect and admiration for each other's contributions to Transylvanian history are reflected in a letter sent on 17 May 1938 by József Sebestyén K. to Lajos Kelemen, in which he conveyed his best wishes: "Due to your work, the entire scholarly sphere of Transylvania has been elevated to a truly higher level, since all of our own work stems from yours. You are the initiator, the awakener of souls, the motivator of work."⁴⁴

Financial hardship burdened Sebestyén throughout his life. His good friend, Lajos Kelemen, recounts this aspect of Sebestyén's private life in his journal: "Sebestyén is terrible at managing money and his wife lacks this ability as well. Therefore, they struggle to meet expenses. Sebestyén earns so little that they are drowning in debt."⁴⁵

Following the Second Vienna Award, on 30 August 1940, Northern Transylvania was ceded to Hungary. As a consequence of this event, a political and administrative change took place in Cluj: beginning in September 1940, the Hungarian administration was installed, while the Romanian authorities withdrew. The "King Ferdinand I" University of Cluj and the "King Ferdinand I" University Library took refuge in Sibiu and Timișoara, while the library building in Cluj was handed over to the Hungarian authorities in order to ensure the proper functioning of the "Ferenc József" Royal Hungarian University Library; thus, the library staff was subsequently expanded.⁴⁶ The

⁴⁰ András Sebestyén (1920–1946): József Sebestyén's eldest son.

⁴¹ Albert Sebestyén (1921-?): József Sebestyén's youngest son.

⁴² Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 119-565.

⁴³ Kelemen, *Napló II*, 216. Original text: "Ma ő az egyedüli heraldikus magyar író már Erdélyben."

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 20. Original text: "Veled tulajdonképpen egész Erdély tudományos világát felemelték, hiszen mindnyájunk munkássága Tőled ered, Te vagy a kezdeményező, a lelkek ébrentartója, munkára serkentője."

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 570. Original text: "Sebestyén a pénzzel nem tud bánni, s az asszony se ért hozzá. Így aztán tengődnek."

⁴⁶ See Győrfi, *Bibliotheca Universitatis Claudiopolitanae*, 234, 248.

Hungarian elite sought to set the Transylvanian scholarly life on a new path. Shortly after the political changes, Sebestyén moved to Cluj. One month after having settled in Cluj, on 16 November 1940, he informed his wife that he was spending the entire day, every day, working in the University Library.⁴⁷ Beginning with November 1940, the entire correspondence bore, as the recipient's heading, "To Mr. heraldist József Sebestyén, University Library of Cluj," and, as the sender, "József Sebestyén Keöpeczi, University Library." At the end of each letter, he indicated the locality, the institution in parentheses (University Library), the date, and his name.⁴⁸

Many assumed that he had moved to Cluj in 1940 due to the influence of Lajos Kelemen who was believed to have recommended him to the University Library.⁴⁹ However, Sebestyén's correspondence shows that he was, in fact, recommended to Minister Bálint Hóman⁵⁰ for a position at the library by Károly Kratochvil,⁵¹ commander of the Székely Division.

He wrote to his wife frequently about the long wait for his appointment: "My appointment seems certain – after that is when we will finally be rid of all our problems" (23 February 1941);⁵² "The appointment has still not arrived, but I already know my duties" (1 April 1941);⁵³ on 12 December 1941, he joyfully informed her that he had received an invitation from Minister Hóman, hoping that he would be appointed to a good position at the Transylvanian

⁴⁷ Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 439: "It has been a month since I left home... I did not write to you because everything is still uncertain. My situation is being settled at the ministry... I usually spend my whole day working in the University Library."

⁴⁸ The National Archives of Romania, Cluj County Branch (hereafter NARCCB), Fund 608, File 16, 333 fols.

⁴⁹ Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 565. Letter of the art historian János Herepei, addressed to the priest Dezső László, marked Szeged, dated 15 March 1965, reads: "In 1940, he became an employee of the University Library of Cluj, where he was hired on the recommendation made by Uncle Lajos."

⁵⁰ Bálint Hóman (1885-1951): Minister of Education and Culture in Hungary between 1932-1938 and 1939-1942.

⁵¹ Károly Kratochvil (1896-1946): an officer in the Austro-Hungarian army, commander of the Székely Division. The letter sent by Károly Kratochvil to József Sebestyén on 7 November 1941 from Budapest reads: "I sent Homán a very lively recommendation on your behalf." Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 75-76, 461.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 444. Original text: "A kinevezésem most már biztosnak látszik, s akkor minden bajtól megszabadulunk."

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 448. Original text: "Még mindig nincs meg a kinevezésem, de már megvan a munkaköröm."

Museum in Cluj;⁵⁴ “I have begun work. I do hope the appointment will arrive next week. Please send the parcels to Bolyai Street no. 6, so I wouldn’t have to rent a cart to transport them from the library anymore” (4 January 1942).⁵⁵

In Cluj, he lived away from his family and under rather difficult conditions. On 2 February 1942, already at his wit’s end because of homesickness and the continued delay of his appointment, he wrote:

Send me a little corn flower and eggs; there is no firewood, only poverty. If the appointment does not come this month, I won’t stay any longer. I’ll return home and I’ll put it out of my mind for good. I am also being called up to the army, but the salary is small and the work is hard.⁵⁶

According to the research conducted by historian Dénes Gyórfi,⁵⁷ on 16 February 1942, the University Library of Cluj employed 25 librarians, 17 assistant librarians, and 23 attendants. The staff included several prominent intellectuals, such as heraldist József Sebestyén K., archivist Lajos Kelemen, historian Zsigmond Jakó,⁵⁸ art historian Géza Entz,⁵⁹ writers György Bözödi and Zoltán Jékely,⁶⁰ and others (see Fig. 6).

⁵⁴ József Sebestyén’s letter from 12 December 1941, sent to his wife, reads: “My darling! Minister [Bálint] Hóman has summoned me to Pest. He is going to appoint me to the Transylvanian Museum of Cluj, and what a wonderful position that will be.” NARCCB, Fund 608, File 13. See *Ibid.*, 463.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 465. Original text: “Én megkezdtem a munkát. Remélem, hogy jövő héten már megjön a kinevezésem. A csomagokat címezzétek a lakásomra (Bolyai utca 6. 1 em. 1. ajtó), hogy ne kelljen a könyvtártól még kocsit fogadjak haza, a hazavitelre.”

⁵⁶ NARCCB, Fund 608, File 14; *Ibid.*, 468. Original text: “Ha teheted, küldj egy kis puliszkalisztet, s néhány tojást, itt nincs. Fa sincs, csak nyomrúság. A kinevezésemet mindennap várom. Ha e hónapban nem jön meg, hazamegyek, s többet nem is gondolok rá. A hadtest is hív, de kevés a fizetés és rengeteg a munka.”

⁵⁷ Gyórfi, *Bibliotheca Universitatis Claudiopolitanae*, 249.

⁵⁸ Zsigmond Jakó (1916-2008): university professor, Hungarian historian and archivist. Between 1941 and 1947, he served as assistant library custodian at the University Library – NARCCB, Bolyai Fund no. 1363, f. 394 – and was assigned for official duties to the Archive of the Transylvanian Museum in Cluj, later being seconded as an archivist to the Archive of the Transylvanian National Museum; ALBCUL, 195/22 August 1945.

⁵⁹ Géza Entz (1913-1993): Hungarian art historian, assistant library custodian at the University Library of Cluj between 1941 and 1945.

⁶⁰ Zoltán Jékely (1913-1982): Hungarian writer and translator; employed at the University Library of Cluj between 1941 and 1945.

His appointment would not have been possible under the laws in force at the time. At the moment of his appointment, Sebestyén was 64 years old and held neither a teaching degree nor a doctoral degree. He himself was aware of the exceptional nature of the decision, as he confessed to his wife in a letter dated 8 March 1942:

Darling! I am hereby joyfully informing you that my appointment has finally taken place, I am a university library officer. I took the official oath before the 15th. Everyone at the University is very pleased with my appointment and has high expectations for my work. I am immensely grateful for my appointment, particularly because the statutory age limit was disregarded – meaning that after the age of sixty no one may be appointed to a state position and employment normally requires a teaching diploma and a doctorate, with one beginning in any case as a trainee. The rank I hold now would normally be attainable only after eight years. In my case, this appointment has been a reward for my past scholarly work, a national gift. They have also assured me of very rapid advancement.⁶¹

Upon being appointed, he was congratulated by László Kovács, the head of the employment office in Cluj, in a letter dated 5 March 1942: “I wish that the position of library officer may be the first step toward the position of director. You obtained this position through your own work, in recognition of all of your efforts devoted to the cause of the Szeklers and the Hungarians.”⁶² On 6 March, the director of the Székely National Museum of Sfântu Gheorghe, János Herepei, also wrote him a letter saying: “I read about your appointment. I was overjoyed.”⁶³

⁶¹ Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 76, 470-471. Original text: “Egyetlenem! Örömmel tudatlak, hogy a kinevezésem megtörtént, Tudományegyetemi könyvtártiszt vagyok. 15. előtt letettem a hivatalos esküt. Nagyon nagyra becsülöm a kinevezésemet, mert két dologtól tekintettek el, éspedig a törvényben előírt kortól, mert 60 év után senki ki nem nevezhető állami állásra és az előképzettségtől, t.i. ide tanári oklevél és doktorátus kell, s akkor is csak gyakornoksággal kezdődik, s az a fok, amelyben én vagyok a legjobb esetben is nyolcv év múlva érhető el. Nálam a tudományos munkásságot, a megszállás alatti erős nemzeti munkát és magatartást jutalmazták velem. Ez egy nemzeti ajándék. Nagyon gyors, évről évre való előhaladásomat is biztosították.”

⁶² *Ibid.*, 470. Original text: “Ha valaki megérdemelte ezen soron kívüli kinevezést, úgy mindnyájan meg vagyunk győződve, hogy a Te sok évtizedes tudományos munkásságod, melyet a székelység és a magyarság érdekeiért folytatál ténylegesen és érdemlegesen minden elismerést kiérdemelt.”

⁶³ *Ibid.* Original text: “Olvastam kinevezésed. Nagyon örültem neki.”

During this period, he worked extensively alongside Lajos Kelemen, producing illustrations both for Kelemen's studies and for articles published in the journal *Erdélyi Múzeum* [The Transylvanian Museum]. Undoubtedly, Lajos Kelemen played a decisive role in the Transylvanian Museum Society's request for the creation of badges and seals for the Association and its branches. Moreover, Sebestyén readily designed the seal of the Library of the Transylvanian Museum, the institution in which he activated at that time.⁶⁴

József Sebestyén K. designed one of the *ex libris* used by the University Library of Cluj (see Fig. 5). By definition, an *ex libris* is a small label, drawing, stamp, or engraving, usually affixed to the first page of a book, indicating its owner. Its purpose is to mark ownership, while also fulfilling an aesthetic and cultural function. Most *ex libris* designs include heraldic, literary, professional, or philosophical symbols. An *ex libris* is therefore both a mark of ownership and a small, personalised work of art. The *ex libris* designed by József Sebestyén K. was, for many years, applied to the volumes from the collections of the University Library of Cluj. Readers who come across an *ex libris* rarely ask themselves who designed it and what it represents. In the course of the present research, we were able, with the help of the heraldist Attila István Szekeres⁶⁵ and Clara Fulea,⁶⁶ a specialist in the cultural history of *ex libris*, to decipher the meaning of the one designed by József Sebestyén K.. According to Clara Fulea, the *ex libris* of the University Library of Cluj (*Bibliothecae Universitatis Kolozsvár*) was created by József Sebestyén K. at the beginning of the 20th century, most likely in 1910. Unfortunately, a precise date cannot be irrefutably established. However, the stylistic features and the historical context clearly point to this period. According to the heraldist Attila István Szekeres, the *ex libris* may have been created sometime between 1904 and 1914.

The central element of the *ex libris* in question is an incense burner, or a symbolic altar with rising flames and smoke, which may be interpreted

⁶⁴ Ibid., 80; Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. II, 461, 502.

⁶⁵ Personal correspondence with heraldist Attila István Szekeres, from 30 January 2025.

⁶⁶ Personal correspondence with historian Clara Fulea, from 30 January 2025. See Clara Fulea's published research on the topic of *ex libris*: Clara Fulea, "O istorie culturală a ex-libris-ului: incursiuni în istoricul ex-libris-ului românesc" (PhD diss., Babeş-Bolyai University, 2021); "Eva Mârza, Alexandru Ştirban, Florin Bogdan, Ex-libris, colecția Mârza (recenzie)", *Caiete de antropologie istorică*, 1 (2021): 220-221; *Ex-libris. Incursiune în istoria ex-libris-ului* (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2023); "Tema morții în ex-libris-uri", *Caiete de antropologie istorică*, 1 (2022): 27-39; "Femeile și ex-libris-ul", *Caiete de antropologie istorică*, 2 (2022): 164-173.

as a symbol of the enlightenment brought about by knowledge. However, it may also allude to the sacrifices made in the name of learning and culture. The book placed beneath the altar further reinforces the fundamental idea conveyed by the *ex libris* under scrutiny, namely that of knowledge being one of the crucial pillars or intellectual development.

In the upper right corner, one can observe a coat of arms which, as a heraldic element, refers to the historical context in which the *ex libris* was created. Its structure consists of a main shield divided into four parts, with a heart-shaped inescutcheon. In the first section of the main shield, there is a raven (Hunyadi) perched on a tree branch, turned to the right, holding a ring in its beak; in the second section, there are three wolf's teeth facing forward (Báthory); in the third section, there is wolf emerging from a triple tumulus, turned to the right, with a crescent in front of it and a star behind (Szapolyai); in the fourth section, there are two swans facing each other, with their necks crossed (Bethlen of Iktár). At the bottom, there is a wall with three bastions (Cluj/Kolozsvár), while the central shield depicts a small Hungarian coat of arms. The Holy Crown of Hungary surmounts the larger shield. The entire composition is framed by a border decorated with vegetal ornamentation reminiscent of the finely crafted margins of medieval codices. These details confer a particular elegance upon the work, emphasising the prestige, status, and intellectual heritage of the University Library. Through its richly detailed, meticulously executed style and carefully chosen symbolism, this *ex libris* reflects not only the cultural identity of the University Library, but also its scholarly and educational role.

Owing to his processional success and integration into the city's elite circles, József Sebestyén K. attempted to bring his wife from Căpeni to Cluj. On 5 May 1942, he wrote "Here, I have absolutely no enemies. Everyone loves and appreciates me, so you too would be treated the same way."⁶⁷ On 29 September 1942, "I wish I were home with you, but this wonderful position, this pleasant, refined entourage cannot be compared to the coarseness of Köpec."⁶⁸ On 29 May 1943, "I feel so lonely – nothing but work and more work. Even last summer, I couldn't spend my entire leave with you because of the researchers

⁶⁷ Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 474. Original text: "Nekem senki ellenségem nincs, mindenki szeret, becsül, ebben volna Neked is részed."

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 482-483. Original text: "Úgy szeretnék otthon lenni! De hát ez a szép hivatal, ez a kedves, úri környezet össze sem hasonlítható a köpeci durvasággal."

from Pest.”⁶⁹ On 2 December 1944, “I have no news of you. Darling, please come to me. Even though the food is scarce, we’ll manage and we’ll live here in peace and quiet. I am well, in good health, in the service of the University Library. Please look after my books, letters, documents and drawings.”⁷⁰

Nonetheless, he was far less fortunate in maintaining his family than he was with matters related to his work. Anna Fadgyas,⁷¹ the museologist and secretary of the Székely National Museum of Sfântu Gheorghe, assisted him in communicating with his wife by mediating their letter exchanges. It was through her that he learned of the death of his wife. His sons then return from the front – András had been decorated for his merits on the Kyiv front. A difficult period followed in Sebestyén’s life: on 17 January 1945 his wife died, and shortly thereafter, in June 1946, he also lost his eldest son. With the death of his son, Sebestyén definitively abandoned the idea of returning to Căpeni to manage the house and land there. Albert, however, was more fortunate – after returning from the front, he arrived in Cluj on 18 May 1945. In November 1945, Lajos Kelemen helped the two of them with residence documents, but Albert did not remain long in Cluj. He first settled in Hungary and later in Austria. He never returned, as it is believed that he had been sentenced to 15 years in prison for a naïve conspiracy against the Romanian authorities. The years following World War II were truly difficult for Sebestyén – his wife and elder son had died, his younger son disappeared, and he received no further news of him. He lived with no family. Lajos Kelemen was the only one of his friends who remained by his side throughout the years⁷² (see Fig. 1).

In addition to his position as a library officer, József Sebestyén K. also held the position of commander of the air-raid defence. In order to protect the library’s priceless collections, Dr. Ernő Zikély, commander of air-raid defence of the University of Cluj, proposed the heraldist József Sebestyén K. for the

⁶⁹ NARCCB, Fund 608, File 15; *Ibid.*, 499. Original text: “Én a vakációmát július végére kértem. Remélem nem kell itt maradnom, mint tavaly. Akkor csak 12 napot vettem ki a pesti kutatók miatt. Én is olyan árva vagyok, olyan elhagyott. Csak a munka, a munka, semmi más.”

⁷⁰ NARCCB, Fund 608, File 16; *Ibid.*, 528. Original text: “Oly régen nem tudok semmit Rólad. Édesem, amint teheted, jere fel hozzám, ha szűk is az élelem, valahogy megélünk itt csendben. A könyveimre, irataimra, leveleimre, rajzaimra vigyázz Édesem.”

⁷¹ Anna Fadgyas (1906-1983): secretary of the Székely National Museum of Sfântu Gheorghe in 1924.

⁷² Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 85-86.

position of air-raid defence commander, responsible for the library and the clinics, considering him the most suitable person for the post, given that he knew the institution and its assets better than anyone and had demonstrated intelligence and prompt presence of mind.⁷³ He wrote to his wife in several letters about this responsibility and the training required for this task. On 29 September 1942, he wrote: “On Saturday, I passed the exam to become an air-raid defence instructor... At the library, I am on duty from 8PM to 7AM. We are terribly afraid of air-raids. It would be an absolute disaster if this treasure trove of knowledge were to ever be destroyed” (see Fig. 9).⁷⁴ On 6 June 1944:

I received your saddening letter and thank you for writing to me. I have little to no time for myself, because there is so much to be done here, so much agitation, so many problems. Lately, I have been sleeping in the library, as there are so many alerts, and at every alert I must be present in my capacity as air-raid defence commander of the Library and the Clinics. On Friday morning, 2 June, air raids took place in the area of the railway station and the hospitals. Houses collapsed like houses of cards, and many people lost their lives. The image of the city is sinister. At this very moment, there are still people buried beneath the ruins. I was in the shelter in the library basement (see Fig. 8) together with 200 people, which is why I felt nothing of the bombardment. If only the war ended and I could be at home with you. I do not think I will have summer leave, although I do truly long for you. I cannot leave the library beyond a five-minute distance from which I could return. Such is the gravity of the situation. I cannot focus on any private work, as there is absolutely no time for such things.⁷⁵

⁷³ NARCCB, Fund 608, File 5, f. 4.

⁷⁴ Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I., 482-483. Original text: “Szombaton letettem a légtalmai oktatói vizsgát... a könyvtárban éjjeli szolgálat van 8-tól reggel 7-ig, nagyon félünk a támadástól. Végzetes lenne, ha e hatalmas nemzeti kincs elpusztulna.”

⁷⁵ NARCCB, Fund 608, File 16; *Ibid.*, 522. Original text: “Megkaptam szomorú leveledet, köszönöm, hogy írtál, én bizony alig jövök hozzá, hogy írhassek, annyi gond, izgalom és dolog között vagyok. Mostanában a könyvtárban alszom, mert annyi riadó s veszedelem van, hogy nem merek otthon aludni, már csak azért sem, mert minden riadónál itt kell legyek, mint a Könyvtár, az Újklínika és a fogászat légtalmai parancsnoka. Pénteken, június 2-án délelőtt szörnyű repülőtémadás érte a város állomás körüli részét. Magam a mi könyvtári, föld alatti nagyon erős óvóhelyén voltam vagy kétszázad magammal. Nem éreztünk semmit a bombázásból. A könyvtártól nem mehetek messzibb, mint ahonnan 5 perc alatt visszajöhetek, annyira veszedelmes a helyzet. Dolgozni sem tudok privát munkát, mert nincs idő hozzá.”

On 16 July 1944:

If possible, I will come home for a week. For now, however, I am extremely busy. I am truly tired of being the commander of 200-300 people in the shelter. There was only one air raid on 2 June. Now, there is only cannon fire.⁷⁶

The consequences of this event are still discussed today. In 2024, historian Levente Benkő delivered a lecture on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the air raids of 2 June 1944.⁷⁷ A brief assessment of the damage is enough to convey the atmosphere of the time: 459 people were killed, 2.434 families were left homeless, and the 1.200 bombs dropped within 40 minutes destroyed factories, warehouses, and railway infrastructure. The material damage was estimated at 31-33 million Hungarian *pengő*.⁷⁸

Despite his advanced age, he was full of energy, strength, and a powerful desire to accomplish as much as possible. On 1 August 1944, he wrote to his wife: “After the war ends, I will retire, but I will be able to keep working, since I am still fit for work. I believe they will promote me to the position of chief officer.”⁷⁹ After the withdrawal of the Hungarian troops in 1944, the work of salvaging the archives continued under the leadership of Lajos Kelemen. His experience as an archivist contributed greatly to the conservation of many family archives, which were transported to Cluj. The team included József Sebestyén K., Zsigmond Jakó, Attila T. Szabó, György Jakab (Bözödi),⁸⁰ and others. They systematically visited the more important

⁷⁶ NARCCB, Fund 608, File 16; *Ibid.*, 524. Original text: “Én, ha csak lehet, hazamegyek néhány napra, talán egy hétre. Nagyon be vagyok fogva, a könyvtárban alszom. Annyi légiriadó van, hogy igazán meguntam a sok óvóhelyen való tartozkodást s 200-300 embernek való parancsolást. Légítámadásunk eddig egy volt, június 2-án délelőtt, de távol tőlünk, de az borzasztó volt.”

⁷⁷ The event was held on 28 May 2024 by the Transylvanian Museum Society and it was titled “Orașul rănit. 80 de ani de la bombardarea orașului Cluj”; see also Annamária Papp, *Megsebzett Kolozsvár: a fotófilm műhely fényképalbuma az 1944. Június 2-ai amerikai bombázásról* (Cluj-Napoca: Exit, 2019).

⁷⁸ Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 605.

⁷⁹ NARCCB, Fund 608, File 16; *Ibid.*, 526. Original text: “Engem a háború végével nyugdíjaznak, de kormányzói úton teljes fizetéssel hivatalban tartanak, míg munkaképes vagyok, azt hiszem, hogy mostanában főtisztté előléptetnek.”

⁸⁰ György Jakab (Bözödi) (1913-1989): Hungarian writer, staff member of the University Library between 1942-1946. The manuscript of his journal is held at the Archives of the Transylvanian Museum Society, Cluj-Napoca, part of the György Bözödi Personal Collection.

Transylvanian castles that had been looted and set on fire, searching for family archives and libraries. In the autumn of 1944, they reached the looted and burned down Bánffy Castle in Bonțida, where, according to József Sebestyén K., they gathered materials even at the risk of their own health.⁸¹

After World War II, in addition to his position at the library, he carried out extensive private commissions for different churches (namely the Franciscan Church in Cluj and the Reformed churches in Bicfalău, Căpușu Mare, Câțcău, Dej, and Cluj). He also created new heraldic compositions, such as the coat of arms of the Reformed College of Cluj.⁸²

The University Library of Cluj was an important part of József Sebestyén K.'s life, as it was for other eminent figures, such as Lajos Kelemen, Zsigmond Jakó, György Jakab (Bözödi), István Monoki, and others (see Fig. 7). At the University Library, József Sebestyén K. was a colleague of the writer György Bözödi. The manuscript of the writer's journal is preserved in the Archives of the Transylvanian Museum Society, as part of the György Bözödi Personal Collection and contains his memoirs from the period between 1941-1946. Both were appointed to the University Library of Cluj in 1942: the heraldist on 10 March, as a library officer at the Archive of the Transylvanian Museum, and the writer on 18 May, as an assistant librarian at the Old Hungarian Library.⁸³ György Bözödi's journal notes the important events both in the life of the Library and the University of Cluj, while also offering details about the political and cultural life of the city. Two events recounted in the journal stand out – instances in which the writer refers to his colleague, Sebestyén.

The Hungarian People's Union was established in 1944. It was a party supported by the Romanian Communist Party and by the Soviet authorities. The Hungarian People's Union's primary objective was to reconcile the representation of the interests of the Hungarian minority in Romania with its role as a party-controlled mass organization of the Romanian Communist Party. On 2 May 1945, several days before the first congress of the Hungarian People's Union, he recounts a discussion between himself and "Uncle/Ol' Jóska Sebestyén" (the form of address used in the original document was *bácsi*, which roughly translates to "uncle" or "old", indicating affectionate and friendly respect rather than age alone, but József Sebestyén K. was indeed 67

⁸¹ See Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 84.

⁸² Szekeres, *Patrimoniul heraldic*, 56.

⁸³ ALBCUL, 45 / 9 March 1945.

years old in 1945, while the writer was only 32) concerning the election of the president of the Hungarian People's Union.⁸⁴ The second recollection dates from 18 May 1945 and is related to the fear of the reopening of the Romanian University and the loss of the Hungarian University.⁸⁵

The Archive of the "Lucian Blaga" Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca is rich in official documents concerning the period during which József Sebestyén K. was an employee. Most of these documents consist of staff registers⁸⁶ listing, for each employee, in addition to their name, the date and place of birth, their religion, education, marital status, position held, position proposed, political affiliation and other such details. The positions held by József Sebestyén K. between 1942-1947 were as follows: library officer, archivist, heraldist, assistant librarian, and librarian, while the proposed positions were: archivist-librarian,⁸⁷ assistant librarian and, finally, higher-

⁸⁴ The Archive of the Transylvanian Museum Society, György Böződi Personal Collection, György Böződi's journal, part II, 2 May 1945, page 35: "That very morning I had been discussing with *ol'* Jóska Sebestyén how we should prepare for the major meeting on the 6th, so that we could elect Jordáky as president of the Hungarian People's Union, instead of Edgár." Original text: "Éppen ma reggel beszélgettünk a könyvtárban Sebestyén Jóska bácsival, hogy elő kell készülni a 6.-i nagygyűlésre avégett, hogy a Népi szövetség elnökévé Lakatost vagy Jordákyt válasszuk meg Edgár helyett."

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 18 May 1945, page 5: "This morning, there was quite a bit of commotion in the library, when doctors and clinic staff rushed in to tell us that yesterday the chief of police had issued a decree: within five days, all Hungarians who arrived after 1940 must leave Transylvania... For two days now, the city has been in turmoil because of the rumours that the Romanian university has been secretly reopened, and there is even unfounded information circulating that the Hungarian university has ceased to function. *Ol'* Józsi Sebestyén immediately ran to the university's central building, but he discovered that the exam sessions and the doctoral programmes were carrying on as normal." Original text: "Ma reggel korán nagy izgalom a könyvtárban, átszaladtak hozzánk a klinika orvosai, alkalmazottai, hogy a rendőrfőnök kiadta tegnap a rendeletet: 5 nap alatt minden 1940 után jött magyar hagyja el Erdélyt...Két nap óta tele van a város azzal, hogy a román egyetemet titokban megnyitották, sőt az az alaptalan hír is terjed, hogy a magyar egyetem megszüntette működését. Sebestyén Józsi bácsi át is szaladt a központi egyetemre, de meggyőződött, hogy a vizsgák, doktorálások rendben folynak."

⁸⁶ ALBCUL, 520 / 3 November 1944; ad. 533 / 16 November 1944; 14 / 17 January 1945; 23 February 1945; 62 / 29 March 1945; 13 June 1945; ad. 190 / 14 August 1945; 24 August 1945; 405 / 21 September 1946; ad. 433 / 5 October 1946; 6 / 1947.

⁸⁷ ALBCUL, 96 / 14 May 1945.

education librarian.⁸⁸ The official records of the library also document József Sebestyén K.'s acquisition of Hungarian citizenship following the Second Vienna Award,⁸⁹ his registered residence,⁹⁰ professional background,⁹¹ and various certificates of employment.⁹² The attendance registers bearing his signature over many consecutive years have also been preserved (see Fig. 10).

On 24 March 1947, the rector of the Bolyai University, Lajos Csőgör,⁹³ sent the director of the library an urgent request from the Cluj Police Headquarters (no. 9640), calling for a compilation of a nominal table detailing the political activities of the university personnel (professors, auxiliary teaching staff, administrative, technical and service staff). The library's response shows that Iosif Sebestyén, assistant librarian, had previously been a member of the

⁸⁸ ALBCUL, 205 / 15 April 1947: Staff Classification Table of Administrative, Technical, and Service Personnel, University Library, no. 422: Sebestyén Iosif - Higher-Education Librarian, Grade 19, Category XII, Functional Coefficient 2.10.

⁸⁹ ALBCUL, 9 November 1944.

⁹⁰ ALBCUL, the places of residence between 1944-1947: ad. 533 / 16 November 1944, ad. 542 / 28 November 1944: Király Street (today, I.C. Brătianu Street), no. 4; 22 November 1947: 6 March Street, no. 5; 450 / 11 August 1947: Türr István Street, no. 8; 679 / 16 October 1948: Petőfi Street, no. 31.

⁹¹ ALBCUL, 70 / 4 April 1945: studies in fine arts.

⁹² ALBCUL, 260 / 29 October 1945: "Certificate - József Sebestyén K. has been in the service of the University Library since 10 March 1942, in the capacity of library officer;" 283 / 25 June 1946: "Certification. The Directorate of the University Library of Cluj hereby certifies that Mr. Iosif K. Sebestyén is employed by the library in the capacity of assistant librarian, seconded to the archive of the Transylvanian Museum;" 130 / March 1947: certificate requested by József Sebestyén K. attesting that he is an employee of the library; 450 / 11 August 1947: service certificate of librarian Iosif Sebestyén: "I hereby kindly request the issuance of a service certificate stating that I am employed at the University Library." Original text: "Subsemnatul Sebestyén Iosif bibliotecar, Vă rog să binevoiți a-mi elibera un certificat de serviciu din care reiese, că fac serviciu la Bibl. Univ. De prezenta am nevoie pentru Biroul Populației la scoaterea buletinului." 679 / 16 October 1948: "I, the undersigned Iosif Sebestyén, retired librarian, kindly request the issuance of a service certificate. I require this certificate in order to arrange my pension rights; I was employed until 1 September 1947, the date of my retirement." Original text: "Subsemnatul Sebestyén Iosif, bibliotecar în pensie cu onoare vă rog să binevoiți a-mi elibera un certificat de serviciu. Am nevoie de acest certificat la aranjarea drepturilor mele la pensie. Am funcționat până la data de 1 Septembrie 1947, până la data pensionării mele."

⁹³ Lajos Csőgör (1904-2003): dentist, university professor; first rector of the Bolyai University (1945-1948) and first rector of the Institute of Medicine and Pharmacy of Târgu Mureș (1948-1949).

Transylvanian Party and was, at that time, a member of the Hungarian People's Union.⁹⁴

In 1946, a storm destroyed the roof of the church in Sic. József Sebestyén K. was invited by the vice-president of the Hungarian People's Union, Edgár Balogh,⁹⁵ to a discussion concerning the restoration of the church. In the summer of 1946, with financial support from the party, he succeeded in salvaging and conserving many of the church's mural paintings. Two documents from the Library Archive contain direct information on this issue – one document dated 17 August, is a request made by Edgár Balogh to the library director István Monoki for the approval of a one-week leave for József Sebestyén K., for the conservation of the mural paintings of the Reformed Church in Sic.⁹⁶ The second document, dated 18 August, is a request for a study leave between 19-30 August 1946, signed by József Sebestyén K. and sent to the rector of the Bolyai University.⁹⁷ This period also provided him the opportunity, together with Géza Entz, to write the study titled *A széki református templom* [The Reformed Church of Sic], which discusses the history and artistic significance of the monument – Sebestyén authored the section on the communion vessels.

In the project for the unification and organisation of the services of the University Library of Cluj, drafted on 24-25 April 1947 and implemented on 1 May 1947, Sebestyén's name appears under the Archive of the Transylvanian Museum.⁹⁸

According to Lajos Kelemen's journal, Sebestyén's life became increasingly difficult, because of his material hardships: "József Sebestyén often ate only apples and dry bread for lunch, instead of a cooked meal." A life summed up in a single sentence: "Józsi Sebestyén does every kind of work from which he might receive the means to survive."⁹⁹ "I worked in the

⁹⁴ ALBCUL, 159 / 24 March 1947: a table listing the political activities of the library employees.

⁹⁵ Edgár Balogh (1906-1996): university professor, journalist, writer, literary critic, vice-president of the Hungarian People's Union until 1946; Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 88; NARCCB, Fund 608, File 16, fol. 179.

⁹⁶ ALBCUL, 341 / 17 August 1946: document no. 6101/1946 of the Hungarian People's Union.

⁹⁷ ALBCUL, 341 / 17 August 1946: József Sebestyén K.'s personal request dated 17 August 1946.

⁹⁸ ALBCUL, 235 / 29 April 1947, fol. 2.

⁹⁹ Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 91. Original text: "Barátja már akkor sokat nélkülözött és sokszor csak almát és száraz kenyeret evett főtt étel helyett. Egy életsors egy mondatban sűrítve: Sebestyén Józsi is dolgozgat s mindent, amiből kaphat szegény feje valamit."

afternoon five days a week... We met more and more rarely, every two or three weeks; Sebestyén worked on the second floor of the University Library in Cluj, while I worked on Kogălniceanu Street.”¹⁰⁰ In a letter sent to the lawyer László Fábián, he wrote “Cluj University Library” next to the date, 23 November 1949. This is an important document, as it shows that, in 1949, he was still working at the library without remuneration, as a member of the National Commission for the Protection of Historical Monuments. He lived on a modest pension of 2.900 lei, he received C Category food ration cards and provisions allotted to university employees.¹⁰¹

At the beginning of the 1950s, József Sebestyén K. worked in the archive relocated to the Nemes House (on Kogălniceanu Street, no. 8). Here, he was a colleague of Lajos Kelemen and of the staff of the History Section of the Romanian Academy: archivists Zsigmond Jakó, János Dani, András Kiss, researchers Elek Csetri, Samu Benkő and his wife, art historian Margit Nagy. The head was István Imreh, with Attila T. Szabó serving as director of archives.¹⁰²

Kelemen was both his mentor and friend, to whom Sebestyén dedicated his study titled *A gelencei mennyezet – és karzatfestmények*, published in the commemorative volume *Emlékkönyv Kelemen Lajos születésének nyolcvanadik évfordulójára* (1957). On 26 April 1958, Lajos Kelemen wrote to Herepei János about the importance of the commemorative volume: “It is a source of pride for Bolyai University, a proof more enduring than ore itself that we do, in fact, live and work, if we are actually allowed to do so.”¹⁰³ Many sought to become part of the great archivist Lajos Kelemen’s inner circle, yet only few were admitted. Sebestyén was one of them. Despite their differing temperaments and habits, Sebestyén consistently expressed his respect and gratitude for all that he had received from his friend Kelemen.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 90. Original text: “A könyvtár bölcs igazgatója legújabb intézkedése Sebestyénnel együtt kiszorított ott régi megszokott munkahelyünkről, heti két nap kivételével minden délután. Találkozási lehetőségeink is megritkultak: Sebestyénnel 2-3 hétben egyszer találkoztunk, mert ő az Egyetemi Könyvtár II. emeletén dolgozik s én a Farkas utcában.”

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 542.

¹⁰² Ibid., 87.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 93-94. Original text: “Ez az Emlékkönyv irodalmi eseménnyé nőtt itt s büszkeségévé vált a Bolyai Egyetemen, ls a benne szereplő írókon kívül minden öntudatos magyarnak. Ércnél maradandóbb bizonyítéka annak, hogy élünk s dolgozunk itt, ha hagyják.”

On the occasion of his 80th birthday, in 1958, Bishop Áron Márton sent him a letter of gratitude for all he had done for the Church and for the preservation of national heritage, concluding with a blessing that came at a moment of particular physical and moral hardship for Sebestyén. Áron Márton's letter dated 5 November 1958 was published by Péter Sas, under the suggestive title "A püspök és a heraldikus" [The bishop and the heraldist], in *Művelődés*, 12 (1996): 42.

He died on 27 December 1964, at the age of 86, and he was buried near the grave of Lajos Kelemen. By his will, he left his entire estate to his wife, Hortenzia Sebestyén (née Balázs). The two had met in the late 1940s, and Sebestyén spent the final years of his life in her house on Mănăștur Street, no. 91.¹⁰⁴ In accordance with his vocation as a heraldist, his funerary monument is decorated with the Sebestyén family coat of arms.¹⁰⁵ József Sebestyén K. remains in the memory of those engaged in heraldic studies and of those familiar with his work and figure as one of the most important Hungarian heraldists and genealogists of the 20th century. Due to his striking physical appearance – he was, after all, almost two metres tall –, his manner of speaking, and his distinctive way of life, he was a vivid presence in Old Cluj, not necessarily from the political viewpoint, but as a lively part of the cultural sphere.

He drew with the precision of an engineer. Those who saw him drawing marvelled at how such a tall man was able to hold a pencil with such control, particularly given that, after fighting alongside the Székely Division, he had been left with a disability: he could no longer see with one eye.

In addition to parties, female company and fine wine, he had another vice: he loved flowers. The garden around his house was filled with flowers, as was his workplace at the library. His personal imprint was visible even in the archive on the second floor – a familiar atmosphere, rich in colour. Due to Lajos Kelemen's power of persuasion, an increasing number of noble families entrusted him with their family archives for safekeeping. Sebestyén repaid this gesture by designing the family coat of arms for those who deposited their archives in the Archive of the Transylvanian Museum. Lajos

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁰⁵ Szekeres, *Patrimoniul heraldic*, 56; *Ibid.*, 99.

Kelemen summarised Sebestyén's grandeur in a single sentence: "Józsi, here, in Transylvania, you are the only one able to exercise the right to grant the Hungarian coat of arms."¹⁰⁶

Áron Márton's letter from 5 November 1958 can be regarded as a fitting conclusion to what József Sebestyén K. represented, as a man and as a scholar in Transylvanian history:

You spared no effort in recording, cataloguing, and caring for our historical and artistic treasures, but did so generously, out of love for the cause... You undertook the task of preserving the memories of our past... You did everything within your power, conscientiously, with your individual skills and knowledge, to serve the cause of the people.¹⁰⁷

Undoubtedly, József Sebestyén K. was one of the most outstanding figures of Transylvania, through his heraldic achievements, his work in the field of cultural heritage conservation, and the protection of historical monuments. He was also one of the defining figures in the history of the University Library of Cluj. Through his entire body of work, József Sebestyén K. became a role model for the coming generations. He deemed his appointment to the University Library of Cluj as a "national gift." Yet, in fact, through his creations, he himself may be considered a gift bestowed upon the Hungarian people.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 101-104. Original text: "Józsi, itt, Erdélyben Te gyakorlod a magyar királyi címeradományozás jogát."

¹⁰⁷ Péter Sas, "A püspök és a heraldikus", *Művelődés*, 12 (1996): 42; Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 96. Original text: "Nagyságod fáradságot nem kímélve, önzetlenül, tisztán az ügy iránti szeretetéből ápolta olyan időkben is, amikor a közvetlenül értékelt és hivatalos tényezők figyelmét más kérdések és gondok kötötték le, és aki múltunk emlékeinek gondozására vállalkozott...a maga részéről lelkiismeretesen megtette mindazt, amivel egyénileg és tudásával népe ügyének használhatott."

Appendix

Table 1. 12 March 1945

(Archive of the "Lucian Blaga" Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Folyozáim	VEZETEK ÉS KÉRESZTNEV	Bodófi állítás	Fradés	Lakás	Szalkási hely és név	Családi állapot (név, gyermek száma és kor)	Vallás	lakóni végzet- ség vagy szakképesíté- s	Katonai helyzet	Műve van kiszolgáló- állam	Hoz és milyen kiszolgáló- állást töltött be	Volt e büntető és mikor	1941. X. 11. állás előtti előtti előtti előtti előtti	1941. X. 11. állás előtti előtti előtti előtti előtti	At. illetés hivatali juttatás	Megjegyzés
11. Dr. Somlauer Lászlóné		Besztercei szakközép- iskola	8/6- utas 6	Szécsényi Kolosvár 1913. febr. 27.				büntetés abszolútó- rium	---	1941. könyvtáros aug. 1. Kolozsvárt	---	---	---	---	---	---
12. Bartalis János		könyvtári főtiszt	10/6- utas 42.	Deák Ferenc 1893. júl. 29.		nős, 1. 25. hely. év.		polgáriok- sági ok- levél, 6/6 bűnös helye- sen.	t. 1917. t. 1917. júli. 1. máj. könyv- táros KOL- bűnös helye- sen.	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
13. Csermák Olga		könyvtári főtiszt	8/6- utas u. 10.	Hegyhás Sás- Orrova 1896. okt. 7.		házasság, rón. kat.		ővónai ok- levél	---	1917. tisztvise- lő okt. 1. 15. könyvtá- ros: könyvtá- ros, egyetemi, könyvtár	---	---	---	---	---	---
14. Kéki Bela		könyvtári főtiszt	8/6- utas u. 19.	Soltész Jé- Petrossány 1907. dec. 30.		nős, 2. rón. 6; 1. kat.		szim. éretti t. zász- sági, 10 l. 68 bölcsészeti főeljár	---	1940. tisztvise- lő okt. 2. 15. VIII.-bet könyvtáros Kolozsvárt.	---	---	---	---	---	---
15. Örv. Orbán Józsefné		könyvtári tiszt	7/6- utas 11.	Klimentér Kolozsvár, 1889. aug. 21.		8vegy, 1. rón. 28.		kereskedési folyón	---	1915. városi tisz- t. 1915. városi máj. 11. könyvtá- ros Kolozsvárt	---	---	---	---	---	---
16. K. Szabstény József		könyvtári tiszt	7/6- utas 4.	Király utca Szék 1878. nov. 12.		nős, 2. rón. 24; 22. kat.		heraldikus t. 1942. máj. 10. Kolozsvárt	---	1942. könyvtáros máj. 10. Kolozsvárt	---	---	---	---	---	---

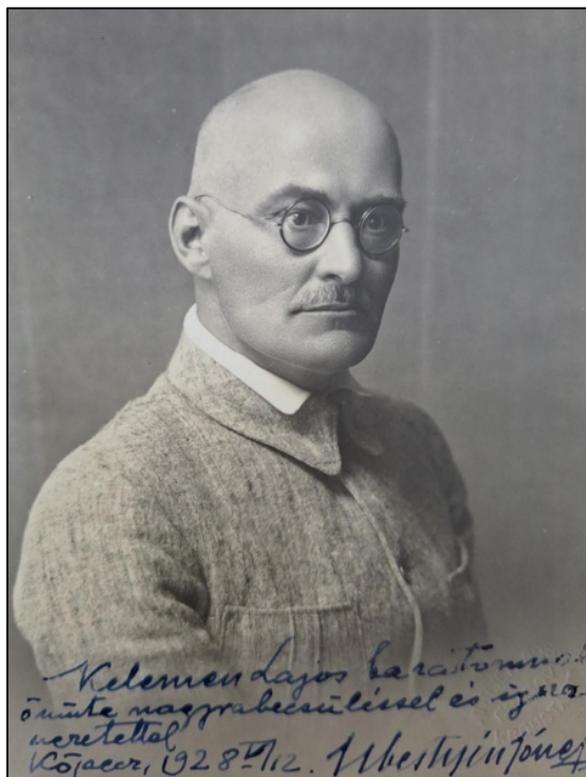


Fig. 1. A 1928 photograph dedicated by József Sebestyén K. to his friend, Lajos Kelemen (National Archives, Cluj County Branch, Transylvanian Museum Society Collection, fonds no. 298).

1

KEÖPEOZI
SEBESTYÉN JÓZSEF
M. K. TUD. EGYETEMI KÖNYVTÁRI TISZT
HERALDIKUS

KOLOZSVÁR

Fig. 2. József Sebestyén K.'s calling card (National Archives, Cluj County Branch, Transylvanian Museum Society Collection, fonds no. 298).



Fig. 3. The Sebestyén of Keöpecz family coat of arms (National Archives, Cluj County Branch, Transylvanian Museum Society Collection, fonds no. 298).

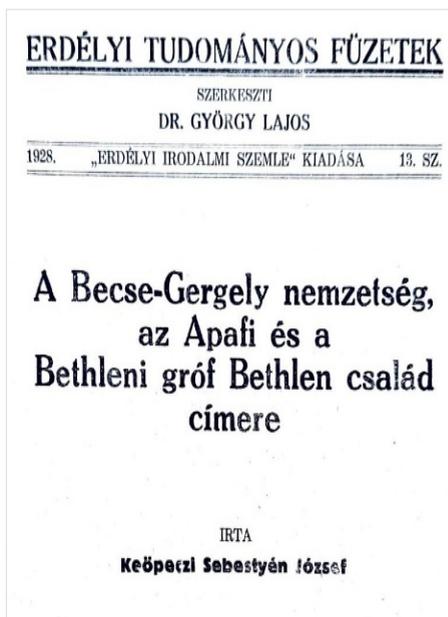
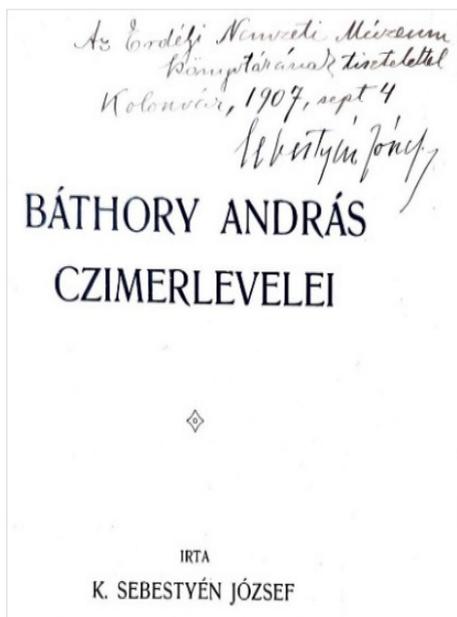


Fig. 4. Works authored by K. Sebestyén József / Keöpeczi Sebestyén József (from the collections of the “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca).



Fig. 5. The ex libris of the University Library of Cluj (From the collections of the “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca).



Fig. 6. Géza Entz, Lajos Kelemen, József Sebestyén K., Zsigmond Jakó – 1942 (Archive of the “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca).



Fig. 7. The staff of the University Library of Cluj – last row, left to right: Ede Kessler, János Bartalis, János Andrásófszky, István Monoki, Lajos Kelemen, József Sebestyén K., Arthur Reischel, Zsigmond Jakó – 1944 (Archive of the “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca).

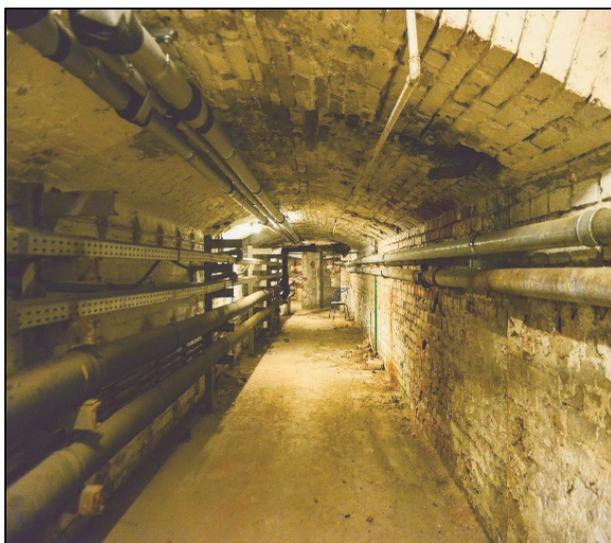


Fig. 8. The air-raid shelter located in the library basement (Photograph made by Kinga Tamás).

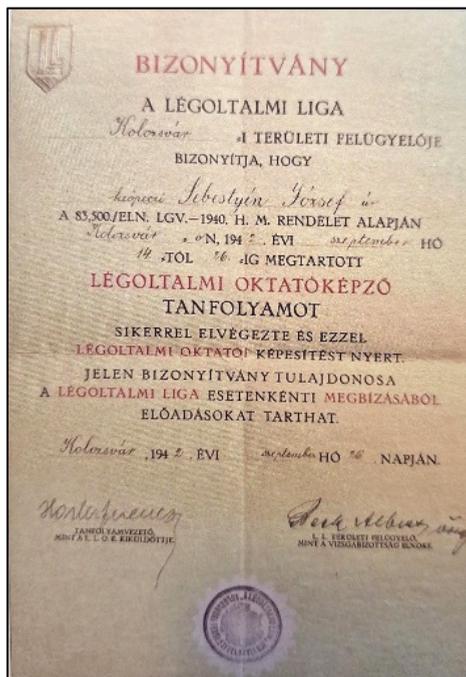


Fig. 9. The air-raid defence instructor certificate (National Archives, Cluj County Branch, Transylvanian Museum Society Collection, fonds no. 298).

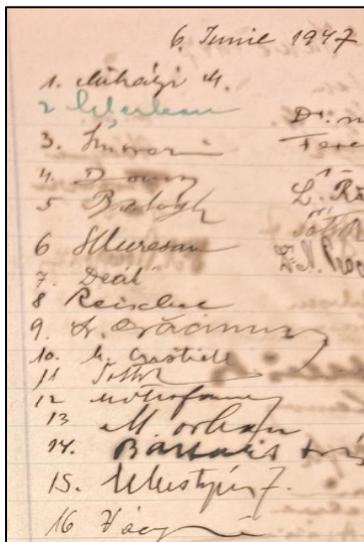
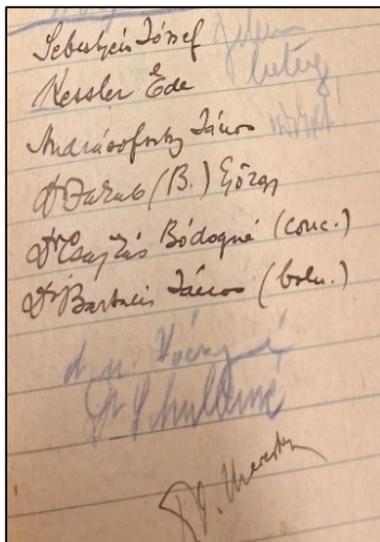


Fig. 10. Staff attendance registers from 1945 and 1947 (Archive of the “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca).

The City as an Ideological Palimpsest: Reactualizing the Middle Ages and Colloquial Nationalism in the Urban Toponymy of Cluj-Napoca

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Abstract: This study investigates the construction of national identity in contemporary Romania through the lens of critical toponymy, proposing the concept of *colloquial nationalism* to describe the tacit, everyday acceptance of nationalizing practices. Focusing on the municipality of Cluj-Napoca, we analyze the city as an ideological palimpsest, where the *city-text* has been successively rewritten by shifting political regimes—from the Austro-Hungarian period to the Interwar era, Communism, and the post-1989 transition. The research highlights how administrative power instrumentalizes the Middle Ages to legitimize current political narratives. We analyze the spatial displacement of historical figures from the city center (*intramuros*) to peripheral neighborhoods, and their substitution with the names of historians—a trend suggesting a preference for the *creators of the historical narrative* over the historical actors themselves. By decoding these *hodonymic* shifts, the article demonstrates how urban nomenclature serves as a tool for power, generating a “nationalism of disillusionment” where lived history diverges from the official, written history inscribed on the city streets.

Keywords: urban toponymy, ideological palimpsest, colloquial nationalism, Cluj-Napoca, hodonymy, politics of memory

Rezumat: Acest studiu investighează construcția identității naționale în România contemporană prin lentila toponimiei critice, propunând conceptul de *naționalism colocvial* pentru a descrie acceptarea tacită, cotidiană, a practicilor naționaliste.

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Concentrându-se asupra municipiului Cluj-Napoca, lucrarea analizează orașul ca pe un *palimpsest ideologic*, în care textul urban a fost rescris succesiv de regimuri politice schimbătoare – de la perioada austro-ungară la epoca interbelică, comunism și tranziția post-1989. Cercetarea evidențiază modul în care puterea administrativă instrumentează Evul Mediu pentru a legitima narativele politice actuale. Analizăm dislocarea spațială a figurilor istorice din centrul orașului (*intramuros*) către cartierele periferice și substituirea acestora cu numele unor istorici – o tendință ce sugerează o preferință pentru creatorii narațiunii istorice în detrimentul actorilor istorici înșiși. Prin decodarea acestor mutații odonimice, articolul demonstrează cum nomenclatura urbană servește drept instrument al puterii, generând un „naționalism al deziluziei” în care istoria trăită diverge de istoria oficială, scrisă, înscrisă pe străzile orașului.

Cuvinte-cheie: toponimie urbană, palimpsest ideologic, naționalism colocvial, Cluj-Napoca, odonimie, politicile memoriei

In the context of the contemporary Romanian state, which perpetuates a national history frequently fragmented by recent events, our research compels an investigation into how this historical narrative is integrated into the substratum of national identity. Since 1918, the national discourse has experienced a continuous drift, signified by the dynamic affixation of the *ism* suffix, marked by instability both at the level of political ideology and institutional rationale. In the absence of a solid historical foundation capable of consolidating a reassuring self-knowledge within the collective memory and the state mentality, Romanian society is traversing a crisis of interpretation regarding its past¹.

This *colloquial nationalism*² represents a distorted reflection of the evolution of the national imperative validated in 1918, alongside the achievement of Greater Romania. Although the interwar period represented, perhaps, the

¹ Sorin Mitu, *Români și unguri. Un război imagologic de o mie de ani* (Iași, Polirom, 2024), 456-469.

² Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage Publications, 1995), 6-9. We have opted against using the word *banal* because the national discourse and the strategies of this ideology may be perceived as banal, yet their task surpasses banality. We choose to use the word *colloquial* to express nationalizing practices embedded in a common routine, tacitly accepted in everyday life.

most fertile interval for cultivating a national narrative meant to offer symbolic legitimacy to the new state, this need often remained latent due to the ideological convulsions of the times. Its underlying aim was to direct public attention toward elements capable of instilling hope, or a glimpse of pride regarding the nation and the homeland³. However, we consider the crucial moment to be the National-Communist period, during which the national idea and ideology were doctrinally fetishized. The communist regime—initially oppressive-authoritarian and subsequently transformed into a nationalism centered on the cult of personality—instituted the concept of socialist nationalism, within this framework, history, key figures, and events became legitimizing markers for the regime.

Our research examines this ideological imprint within the spectrum of toponymy—the rewriting of urban and rural names, of symbolic places, and of hodonymy. This legacy remains visible today, despite the post-revolutionary process of toponymic cleansing an endeavor which, intentionally or not, omitted certain flagrant relics of totalitarianism. Within this interpretative key of a nationalizing narrative, which attempts a continuous education regarding a fragmented identity⁴, the current landscape—reflected in toponymy, architecture, and monuments—appears as a heterogeneous historical mosaic. At the administrative level, history is often instrumentalized to serve immediate political goals. The post-1989 Romanian state initiated a process of slow transition, a syncretism that amalgamated interwar diversities with communist ideological inoculations, generating a programmatic direction that often appears devoid of teleological coherence⁵.

Despite the aforementioned historical turbulence, the crystallization of a colloquial nationalism represented the natural outcome of the Romanian state's evolution. Within the framework of the present study, we employ onomastics—specifically toponymy—not merely as an auxiliary science of

³ Ibidem, 6. As the author notes: “banal nationalism is introduced to cover the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced... Daily, the nation is indicated, or ‘flagged’, in the lives of citizenry”.

⁴ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania* (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1991), 31-34. Eadem, *Compromis și rezistență: cultura română sub Ceaușescu* (București: Humanitas, 1994), 45-48.

⁵ We define this approach as programmatic because it constitutes a deliberate attempt to configure the urban toponymy by integrating elements from both the interwar and communist pasts, driven by a nationalist agenda to construct an image of the ‘correct’ history.

history, but rather we align ourselves with the critical turn that emerged in the 1980s. This paradigm shift imbues the study of place names with a profound historical and political valence. Transcending the function of simple geographic indices or cultural landmarks—whether referring to cities, villages, or streets—critical toponymy entails interrogating the power mechanisms that dictate these names. Thus, an indissoluble relationship is outlined between the power-society binomial and the educational act (formal or informal): political power, holding the decision-making monopoly, shapes society through its control over the symbolism of public space⁶

From the perspective of critical toponymy, the municipality of Cluj-Napoca constitutes a paradigmatic case study due to its historical multivalence. In the last century, the city has undergone four major waves of urban nomenclature reconfiguration, each directly correlated with changes in political regime. State authority has systematically sought legitimation through the most efficient process of trivializing ideology: replacing neutral or previous landmarks with names appropriated by the new political order. This process marked the transition from the Austro-Hungarian to the Romanian administration, traversing short totalitarian episodes that culminated in the Communist regime until 1989 when the transition to the actual democratic regims begins. Cluj-Napoca is an urban palimpsest par excellence because its city-text is rewritten by every political authority⁷.

An eloquent example is the current 21 Decembrie 1989 Boulevard, whose hodonymy faithfully reflects the political history of the 20th century. In the interwar period, the thoroughfare bore the name Strada Victoriei (Victory Street), making direct reference to the Act of Union of 1918. With the Vienna Dictate and the installation of the Hungarian administration, the street was renamed Kossuth Lajos utca (commemorating the revolutionary leader of 1848) and Magyar utca (resuming the old medieval name of Ulița Maghiarilor /

⁶ Lawrence D. Berg, Jani Vuolteenaho (eds.), *Critical Toponymies: The Contested Politics of Place Naming* (Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 1-18; Maoz Azaryahu, "The Power of Commemorative Street Names", in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 14, no. 3, 1996, 317. Mihai-Stelian Rusu, *Politici ale memoriei în România postsocialistă: atitudini sociale față de redenumirea străzilor și înlăturarea statuilor* (Iași: Institutul European, 2022), 25-26.

⁷ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford University Press, 2003), 72-75; Maoz Azaryahu, "The Power of Commemorative Street Names", 328; Idem, "Naming the Past: The Significance of Commemorative Street Names," in *Critical Toponymies: The Contested Politics of Place Naming*, 63-66.

Hungarian Lane). The advent of the communist regime brought a new ideological schism of the space: the artery was divided, with one section keeping the name Kossuth Lajos, and the other being named Armata Roșie (Red Army). Subsequently, during the process of Sovietization and the later national-communism of the 1960s, the entire artery became Lenin Boulevard. Today, through the name 21 Decembrie 1989, the street commemorates the fall of the totalitarian regime⁸. This succession demonstrates how political power penetrates the everyday, transforming street names into instruments for propagating the dominant ideology. The analysis above highlights the transformation of toponymy into political discourse⁹ and underscores, simultaneously, the ephemerality of urban memory in the Romanian and *Neo-Romanian* space, which has not yet succeeded in consolidating into a stable specificity¹⁰.

However, acting as a leitmotif of Romanian history and collective memory, medieval personalities propagated, preserved, and amplified by both central and local administration seem to distinguish themselves. Names of kings, rulers (*domnitori*), voivodes, princes, and generals are used with priority, among whom the names of theologians, philosophers, philologists, humanists, or popes find only a modest place¹¹, demonstrating the authority's appetite for heroes forged in fire and sword. This cult of the national hero is hardly surprising, as the pertinent repetition of certain national symbols

⁸ *General Map of the Municipal City of Cluj*, scale 1:10,000, compiled by A. Niklas, Ștefan Baga Lithography Institute, Cluj, 1923, in the Special Collections fund, Atlas and Map catalog of the "Lucian Blaga" Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca (hereafter: BCU), shelf mark H. 6/14; *Special Map of the Municipal City of Cluj*, Scale 1:10,000, compiled by A. Niklas, Ștefan Baga Lithography Institute, Cluj, 1929, BCU Special Collections fund, Atlas and Map catalog, shelf mark H. 64/36; *General Map of the Municipal City of Cluj*, realized by Petru Borteș, scale 1:10,000, Schildkraut Lithography, Cluj, 1937, BCU Special Collections, Atlas and Map catalog, H. 53/11; Petru Borteș, *Călăuza orașului Cluj: cu noul plan al orașului*, vol. I (Cluj: Tipografia Națională, 1930); *Denumirea Străzilor din Cluj*, ediție aprobată de Primăria Municipiului Cluj sub Nr. 2419/1946 (Tipografia Lyceum-nyomba kladása, 1946); Ștefan Pascu, Iosif Pataki, Vasile Popa, *Clujul – ghid istoric* (Cluj: Întreprinderea Poligrafică, 1957); *Map of the City of Cluj* (Consiliul Național pentru educație fizică și sport, 1968); *Map of the Municipal City of Cluj* (Cluj, Ed. Dacia), 1972.

⁹ Maoz Azaryahu, "The Critical Turn and Beyond: The Case of Commemorative Street Naming", *ACME*, 10, 2011: 56.

¹⁰ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Reinventarea politicului: Europa Răsăriteană de la Stalin la Havel* (Iași: Polirom, 1997), 30.

¹¹ Șerban Turcuș, "Papa Inocențiu al III-lea (1198-1216) și Clujul," in Susana Andea, ed., *Pe urmele trecutului: Profesorului Nicolae Edroiu la 70 De Ani* (Cluj-Napoca: Centrul De Studii Transilvane, 2009), 59-72.

aims to transcend local sentiment toward a univocal national one, adopted by the entire nation for the integration of the historical narrative.

Regarding the chronological framing of the personalities analyzed in the present study, we adopt the historical perspective created by the paradigm of historical asynchronism, based on the theory developed by Krzysztof Pomian regarding the coexistence of different temporalities within the same epoch¹². According to this theory, the phenomena defining mediocrity in the Transylvanian and Romanian space—social, confessional, and mental structures—remain active until the second half of the 16th century. This late moment is decisively marked by the impact of the Reformation and the printing press, thus justifying the inclusion of 16th-century personalities¹³, in this research and in Cluj's medieval pantheon¹⁴.

The utilization of names with historical resonance for toponymy or monuments within the Romanian state—personalities distinguished by significant battles, high-ranking functions, or organizational achievements for the medieval period¹⁵—is noted for the first time during the interwar period, when a total of 19 medieval toponyms and personalities (Matia Corvinul, Mihai Viteazul, Baba Novac, Ștefan cel Mare) found their presence in the urban toponymy of Cluj¹⁶. Today, Cluj's medieval toponyms are merely a part of local memory, not being marked in the public domain in a commemorative manner; nevertheless, records of these exist, and names such as Szén market (Hay Market), Kovács street (Smiths' Street), Claustrum street (Cloister Street) represent genuine toponyms of the medieval city preserved in the City Account Registry¹⁷. Exponential figures of the interwar period, who remained hodonyms

¹² Krzysztof Pomian, *L'Ordre du temps* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 40-57.

¹³ We also include persons born in the 16th century even if their activity takes place within the 17th century.

¹⁴ Șerban Turcuș, "Despre conceptul de Ev Mediu," *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Historia*, XLI, 1-2, 1996: 208.

¹⁵ The hero cult does not apply only to personalities from the medieval period. It is also present today through the commemoration of the victims of the 1989 revolution; however, we wish to mention the necessary differentiation between the hero cult distinguished by actions and the national hero cult. The latter is far more attractive due to the echo it holds in collective memory. Mihai Rusu, "Shifting Urban Namescapes: Street Name Politics and Toponymic Change in a Romanian (Ised) City," *Journal of Historical Geography*, 65, 2019: 51.

¹⁶ Petru Borteș, *Călăuza orașului Cluj*, 6-21.

¹⁷ Cluj-Napoca City Hall, Fund 1/1, *Registrul socotelilor orașului Cluj, 1594-1596*. The first urban toponyms of the city were in Hungarian, Latin and German.

of Cluj's urban toponymy through the communist period and up to the present, include: Matthias Corvinus, Michael the Brave (Mihai Viteazul), Stephen the Great (Ștefan cel Mare), and the military commander Baba Novac.

Regarding the communist period, the usage of medieval personalities' names increased, totaling 33 medieval hodonyms. In the 1970s, a stabilization of urban toponymy can be observed, undergoing several processes of selecting "suitable" hodonyms. Communist urban toponymy is distinguished by the broadening of the hodonymic pool into European universal history; thus, names like Nicolaus Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, or Giorgio Martinuzzi appear in the city of Cluj. In 1945, in the previously mentioned guide, a street of the medieval city appears: Apei street (Water Street), alongside the retention of Anonymus street. In the spirit of those times, the communist administration in Cluj rallied to a community compromise: city streets would be kept in both languages, providing a guide to signal both the old and the current names, utilizing this symbiosis of the city's communities in the new appellations¹⁸.

In the current urban toponymy of Cluj (according to the 2025 nomenclature), one can observe the symbiosis of interwar toponymy with the post-war communist one, albeit with a slight advantage for the former, and, simultaneously, a new impetus to broaden the hodonymic pool into universal history; thus, the number of hodonyms dedicated to medieval personalities has reached 38 streets (see *tabel* and *figure 1¹⁹*).

A striking trend is constituted by the commemoration of local personalities with national resonance; therefore, we decided to include another category of hodonyms in our research: the names of historians who distinguished themselves as researchers of the medieval period, representatives of the Cluj school of medieval studies, or those whose activity contributed to medieval historiography. The 1919–1940 period totals 15 hodonyms of historians, a number that has almost doubled currently, reaching 28 hodonyms, a figure boosted by the insertion of the names of Cluj medievalists into the urban toponymy²⁰. This toponymic trend debuted in 1990, when the medievalist

¹⁸ Thus, a brochure containing the new street names was compiled, which also cross-referenced the former names both those predating and those postdating August 30, 1940. *Denumirea străzilor din Cluj/ Kolozsvár város utcanévsora* (Lyceum Printing House edition, 1946).

¹⁹ The tables do not represent the evolution of streets, but the evolution of the number of personalities used.

²⁰ Ioan Lupaș, Nicolae Edroiu, Pompiliu Teodor, Silviu Dragomir, Ștefan Meteș, Ștefan Pascu.

historian Silviu Dragomir was commemorated²¹. Gradually, the names of medievalists were inscribed into the city, both in central zones and in newly constructed neighborhoods; thus, in the city center, only the hodonyms of historians George Barițiu, Samuil Micu, and Mihail Kogălniceanu are preserved today.

We thus advance the hypothesis that Cluj-Napoca and its administration have attempted, in the last 35 years, to build a personalized hodonymic heritage; however, from this 106-year period, distinct names stand out that have resisted within Cluj's urban configurations: A. D. Xenopol, Alexandru Papiu Ilarian, Augustin Bunea, Bogdan P. Hașdeu, Gheorghe Barițiu, Dimitrie Cantemir, Gheorghe Șincai, Samuil Micu, Petru Maior, Ioan Budai Deleanu, Nicolae Iorga, Nicolae Bălcescu, and Miron Costin. The hodonyms of historians reveal a greater affinity of the authority towards those who write history rather than towards the historical figures themselves. Nevertheless, the environment of excellence for researchers, regardless of their field of activity, reverts to the universities through the naming of lecture halls (see tabel and figure 2).

The analysis of the interwar period reveals a quantitative expansion of the commemorative fund, dominated by medieval figures and representatives of historiography. However, by focusing on the historical core of the city (the intramuros zone), we observe a distinct configuration of urban semantics. This reflects the imperative of political power to symbolically appropriate the central space through the insertion of personalities with universal resonance. Thus, in the interval of 1919–1940, the city center became the stage for the consecration of 11 hodonyms from the sphere of medieval studies and historical research.

However, a paradigm shift occurred in the 1970s, marking a systematic "toponymic cleansing" of the old citadel. The objective was the neutralization of aristocratic or Western resonances by replacing medieval hodonyms with functional or ideological names. The examples are eloquent for this process of desacralizing the past: Strada Guttenberg is converted into Strada Tipografiei (Printing Street), Strada Bathori becomes *Poștei* (Post Office Street—currently Octavian Petrovici), Strada Bethlen is renamed *Făcliei* (The Torch Street—today Baba Novac)²², and the artery Budai Nagy Antal is substituted by the

²¹ *Nomenclatorul stradal al municipiului Cluj-Napoca*, October 2025. Decision 537/1990. Also in the same year, through decision 408, the historian Constantin Daicoviciu was inscribed into the city's toponymy.

²² Baba Novac square is preserved!

name of the communist leader Dr. Petru Groza (currently Bulevardul Eroilor / Heroes' Boulevard). To this substitution process, the insertion of explicit ideological markers is added—23 August, 6 Martie, Lenin—reducing the central medieval fund from 13 elements (in 1945) to only 9. Currently, the street nomenclature conserves 8 such hodonyms in the intramuros zone, the difference being the result of relocating Gheorghe Doja Street to the Andrei Mureșanu neighborhood and the return of King Ferdinand Street to the central area.

Regarding continuity, a strong trans-regime affinity for certain emblematic figures is distinguished. Medieval personalities such as Michael the Brave (Mihai Viteazul), Ferenc Dávid, Matthias Corvinus, Paul Kinizsi (Paul Chinezul), and Baba Novac, alongside historians like Gheorghe Barițiu, Samuil Micu, and Mihail Kogălniceanu, have kept their place in the central public forum regardless of governance. Conversely, other historical names (Nicolae Iorga, Budai Nagy Antal, Ștefan Báthory) were displaced to residential neighborhoods, with the Andrei Mureșanu area standing out for its high density of adopted historical hodonyms.

A specific aspect of interest that has sparked debate within Romanian historiography concerns the name of King Matthias Corvinus. During the communist period, we observe how the interwar Matia Corvinul is inscribed as Matei Corvinul, not adopted from the preceding urban toponymy of the *Vienna Dictate* period—which recorded the king's name as Mátyás—but rather "Romanianized" using a common anthroponym from national onomastics²³. The name of the king on the Hungarian throne is Matia (Matthias), as noted: "Matia after the Apostle, not after the Evangelist"²⁴. The baptismal name given to the future king was inspired by the name of the Apostle Matthias, as the infant was born on the very day of the Apostle's commemoration, February 24²⁵.

²³ Sorin Mitu, *România și ungurii*, 457-458.

²⁴ Ioan Aurel Pop, "Numele din familia regelui Matia Corvinul – de la izvoarele de epocă la istoriografia contemporană", *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie*, XXVI, 2008: 112-113; Adrian Andrei Rusu, *Ioan de Hunedoara și românii din vremea lui: studii* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 1999), 22.

²⁵ After the Second Vatican Council, the Feast of Saint Matthias the Apostle was moved to May 14. *Constituzione sulla Sacra Liturgia: Sacrosanctum Concilium*, (December 4, 1963) chap. V, L'Anno Liturgico, nr. 102-111. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_it.html, Sacrosanctum Concilium (accessed January 30, 2026).

From an onomastic perspective, the arguments invoked for using the form Matei to designate King Matthias Corvinus lack scientific foundation, representing an improper adaptation of the anthroponym. The argument that the name Matia, Mathias, or Matthias does not exist in the Romanian language (although it is present in the Orthodox calendar) is invalid²⁶. In recent anthroponymic research conducted on Transylvania of the 11th–14th centuries, the authors survey the apostolic anthroponyms in use, finding the anthroponym Matia with 124 attestations in medieval Transylvanian onomastics, showing a significant increase beginning with the 14th century²⁷.

The analysis of interwar hodonymy reveals historical correctness: the artery originating near the Matthias House (Casa Matia) naturally bore the monarch's name in its consecrated form, Matia. The toponymic rupture occurred in 1945, the moment when the street's designation was altered to Matei Corvin. This semantic shift cannot be attributed just as a mistake, rather, it betrays the communist regime's strategy of instrumentalizing heroic historical figures to serve its own ideological legitimacy. The substitution of the form Matia with Matei functions as a subtle mechanism of onomastic assimilation, intended to reconfigure the identity of the Hungarian king into an autochthonous one²⁸. Current toponymy has preserved the hodonym of Matei to this day, despite the retention of the name Matthias House.

The present analysis of the street nomenclature of Cluj-Napoca highlights the mechanisms by which toponyms, hodonyms, and ergonyms²⁹, contribute to the identity construction of the urban space. The city thus becomes a readable text, a palimpsest in which every administration inscribes its own legitimizing narrative. Approaching toponymy from a critical perspective transforms the perception of the city, defining it as a public space for the reflection of power. The dynamics of changing political regimes inevitably

²⁶ Ioan Aurel Pop, "Numele din familia regelui Matia Corvinul": 113.

²⁷ Șerban Turcuș, A.-C. Dincă, M. F. Hassan, V. V. Vizauer, *Antroponimia în Transilvania medievală (secolele XI-XIV): evaluare statistică, evoluție, semnificații*, Vol. I (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 201), 138-148. See footnote 252 on page 139 for derivatives of the name Matia.

²⁸ We bring back into discussion the concept of colloquial nationalism. This action falls within the spectrum of this nationalizing ideology, being a tacit strategy, easily overlooked, yet significant due to its role in spatial orientation.

²⁹ For the concept of ergonyms in the urban landscape, see Oliviu Felecan, Alina Bugheșiu (eds.), *Onomastics in Contemporary Public Space* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013).

entail an update of urban symbolism, subordinating public space to new ideologies. However, the process of erasing old symbols is never absolute; traces of former administrations persist latently in community memory, coexisting with the new official toponymic structures.

The adoption of certain personalities as ideological markers and their preservation is the key to understanding, at the societal level, the ideology intended to be transmitted. The fact that historians are preferred over historical figures conveys a statement which, upon interpretation, suggests that the political sphere favors the historical narrative—which may sometimes diverge from historical authenticity—and, through its prominent exponents, sidelines history to serve a mundane construct with a political visage. The removal of history from the city's central forum, as we have shown, actually produces the instrumentalization of power over society, culture, and education. The confusions arising from the authorities' attempts to inoculate a totalitarian or democratic policy meant to outline this nationalism of disillusionment³⁰, which we experience even today, potentiate the discrepancy between lived history and written history.

³⁰ Camil Mureșanu, *Națiune, naționalism: evoluția naționalităților* (Cluj-Napoca: Fundația Culturală Română, 1996), 287.

Appendices

Table 1. Table by Sections: Medieval Personalities Utilized in the 1919–2025 Period.

Medieval Historical Figures in the Street Nomenclature			
	1919-1940	1945-1989	1990-2025
1.	Baba Novac	Anonymus	Albert Szenczi Molnár
2.	Banul Mihalcea	Apei	Baba Novac
3.	Banul Udrea	Baba Novac	Bethlen Gábor
4.	Călugăreni	Banul Udrea	Bogdan I al Moldovei
5.	Clastrului	Bethlen Gábor	Budai Nagy Antal
6.	Faurilor	Budai Nagy Antal	Diaconul Coresi
7.	Ferenc Dávid	Diaconul Coresi	Dragoș Vodă
8.	Gelu	Dragoș Vodă	Ferenc Dávid
9.	Izabela	Ferenc Dávid	Galileo Galilei
10.	Jean Calvin	Galileo Galilei	Gáspár Heltai
11.	Matei Basarab	Gáspár Heltai	Gelu
12.	Matia Corvinul	Gelu	Gheorghe Doja
13.	Mihai Viteazul	Giordano Bruno	Giordano Bruno
14.	Nicolae Olahus (Nicolae Românul)	Giorgio Martinuzzi	Glad
15.	Paul Chinezul	Gheorghe Doja	Iancu de Hunedoara
16.	Petru Cercel	Iancu de Hunedoara	Ioan Sigismund Zápolya
17.	Petru Rareș	István Bocskai	Ion Viteazul
18.	Piața Fânului	Jan Hus	Jan Hus
19.	Ștefan cel Mare	Jean Calvin	Jean Calvin
20.	-	Johannes Guttenberg	Johannes Guttenberg
21.	-	Ladislau I al Ungariei	Leonardo da Vinci
22.	-	Martin Luther	Martin Opitz
23.	-	Matei Corvinul	Matei Basarab
24.	-	Mihai Viteazul	Matia Corvinul
25.	-	Nicolaus Copernicus	Menumorut
26.	-	Paul Chinezul	Mihai Românul
27.	-	Székely Mózes	Mihai Viteazul
28.	-	Ștefan Báthory	Mircea cel Bătrân
29.	-	Ștefan cel Mare	Nicolae Pătrașcu
30.	-	Tinódi Lantos Sebestyén	Nicolaus Copernicus

Medieval Historical Figures in the Street Nomenclature			
31.	-	Toldi Miklós	Paul Chinezul
32.	-	Vasile Lupu	René Descartes
33.	-	Zsuzsanna Lórántffy	Rovine
34.	-	-	Ștefan Báthory
35.	-	-	Ștefan Bocskai
36.	-	-	Ștefan cel Mare
37.	-	-	Vasile Lupu
38.	-	-	Vlad Țepeș

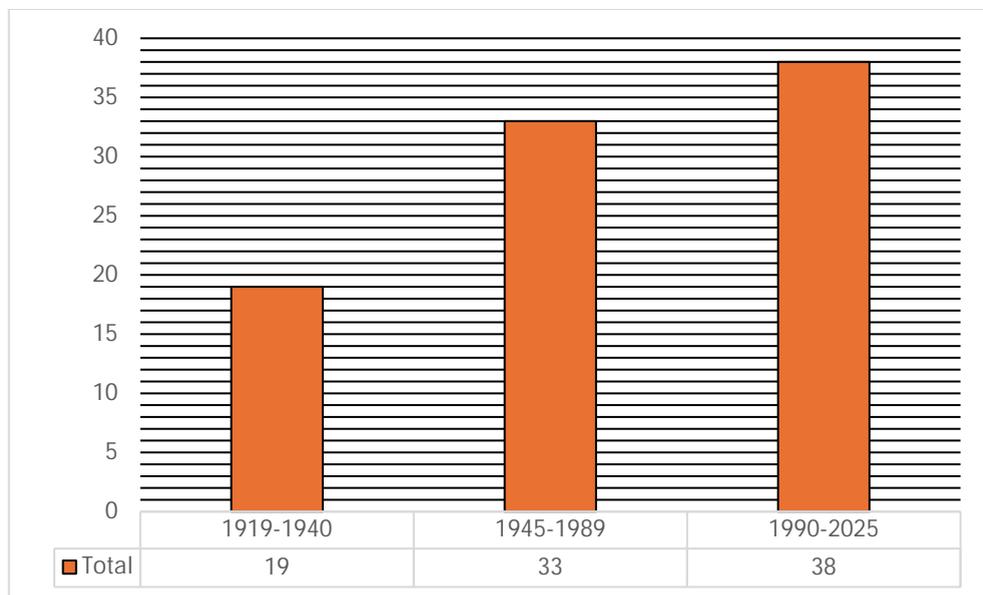


Figure 1. The Evolution of Medieval Historical Hodonyms in Cluj-Napoca, 1919-2025

Table 2. Historians in the Street Nomenclature of Cluj-Napoca, 1919-2025

Historians in the Street Nomenclature of Cluj-Napoca			
	1919-1940	1945-1989	1990-2025
1.	A.D. Xenopol	A. D. Xenopol	A. D. Xenopol
2.	Alexandru Papiu Ilarian	Alexandru Papiu Ilarian	Alexandru Lapedatu
3.	Augustin Bunea	Augustin Bunea	Alexandru Papiu Ilarian
4.	Bogdan Petriceicu Haşdeu	Bogdan Petriceicu Haşdeu	Augustin Bunea
5.	Dimitrie Cantemir	Dimitrie Cantemir	Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu
6.	Eudoxiu Hurmuzachi	Gheorghe Bariţiu	David Prodan
7.	Gheorghe Bariţiu	Gheorghe Şincai	Dimitrie Cantemir
8.	Gheorghe Şincai	Ion Budai-Deleanu	Dimitrie Onciul
9.	Ioan Budai Deleanu	Kővári László	Gheorghe Bariţiu
10.	Mihail Kogălniceanu	Márki Sándor	Gheorghe Brătianu
11.	Miron Costin	Mihail Kogălniceanu	Gheorghe Şincai
12.	Nicolae Bălcescu	Miron Costin	Ioan Lupuş
13.	Nicolae Iorga	Nicolae Bălcescu	Ion Budai-Deleanu
14.	Petru Maior	Nicolae Iorga	Kővári László
15.	Samuil Micu	Nicolae Românul (Nicolaus Olahus)	Márki Sándor
16.	-	Petru Maior	Mihail Kogălniceanu
17.	-	Samuil Micu	Miron Costin
18.	-	Szilágyi Sándor	Nicolae Bălcescu
19.	-	-	Nicolae Edroiu
20.	-	-	Nicolae Iorga
21.	-	-	Nicolaus Olahus
22.	-	-	Petru Maior
23.	-	-	Pompiliu Teodor
24.	-	-	Samuil Micu
25.	-	-	Silviu Dragomir
26.	-	-	Szilágyi Sándor
27.	-	-	Ştefan Metuş
28.	-	-	Ştefan Pascu

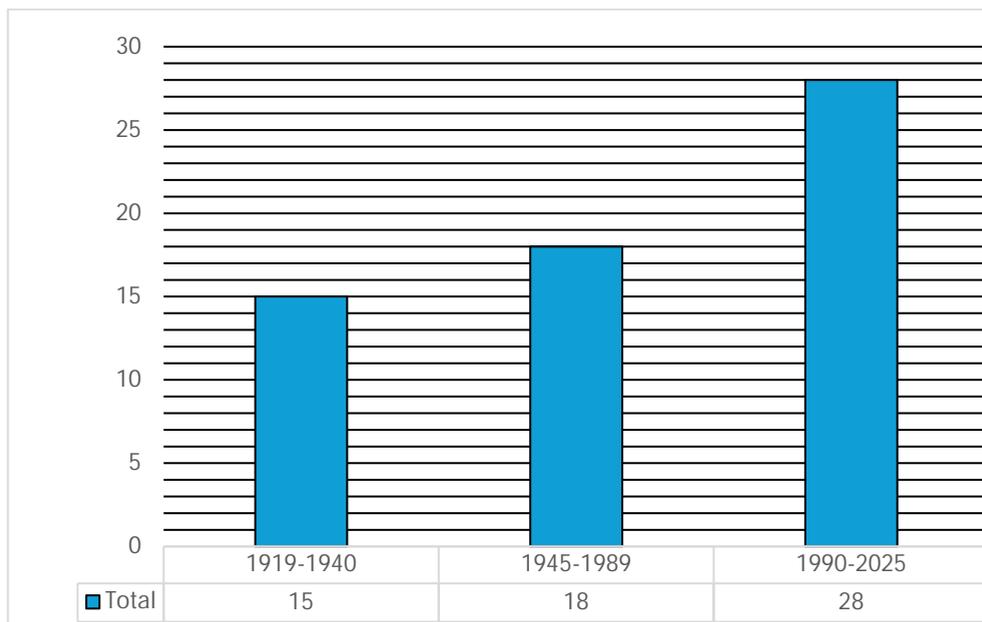


Figure 2. The Evolution of Historians Hodonyms in Cluj-Napoca, 1919-2025

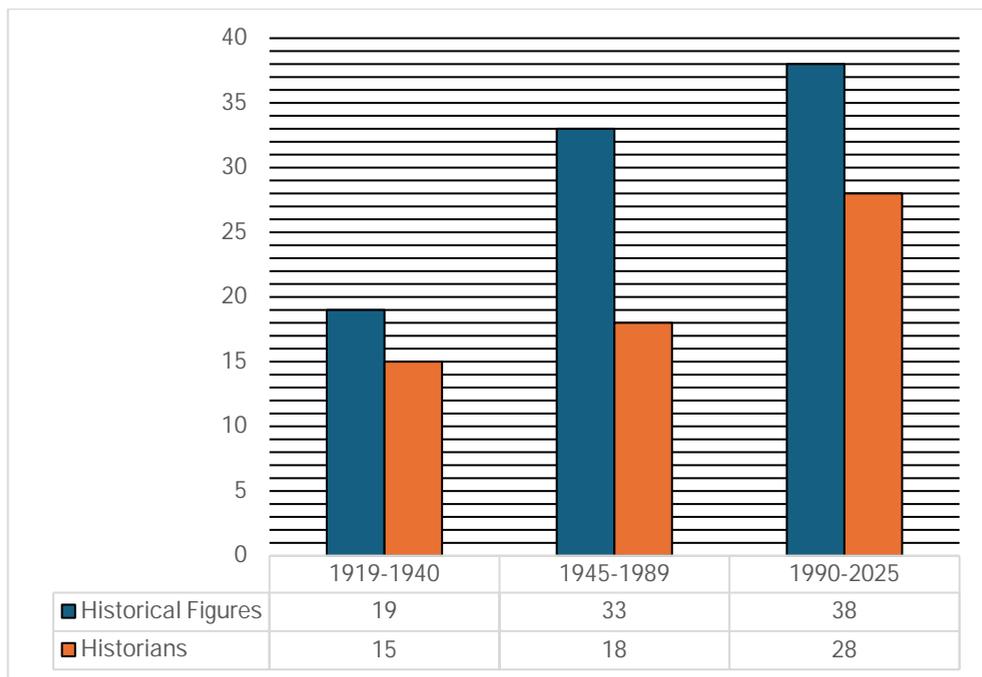


Figure 3. Comparative Evolution of Historical Figures and Historians Hodonyms

DISCUSSION

Michał Wasiucionek, *Înalta Poartă și Țările Române. Rivalități și alianțe în secolul al XVII-lea* [**The Sublime Porte and the Romanian Principalities. Rivalries and Alliances in the 17th Century**], transl. Lia Decei (București: Humanitas, 2024), **360 pages**

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Despite having been largely overlooked in Romanian historiography, this book¹ attempts to rethink “the political dynamics between the Sublime Porte, Poland–Lithuania and the Danubian principalities during the seventeenth century” (p. 8). The book's core tenet is that cross-border patron-client networks, rather than states and their formal institutions, were the main actors in the political life of seventeenth-century Eastern and Southeastern Europe. Accordingly, various episodes and processes are better understood through the lens of factional politics, rather than as relations – peaceful or conflictual – between states. Moreover, the author's argument amounts to a paradigm shift in how we conceptualize the relationship between the

¹ Original edition: *The Ottomans and Eastern Europe: Borders and Political Patronage in the Early Modern World*, (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2019). Although this is a review of the Romanian edition of the book, I use the English original when quoting directly or referring to the author's technical terms.

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principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, on the one hand, and the Ottoman Empire, on the other.

From a theoretical point of view, Wasiucionek claims that “the concept of the states as cohesive, unitary actors, led by ‘collective mind of the government’ and pursuing their own geopolitical interests” (p. 4), informed by the organization and function of the modern state, is unfit to explain early modern politics, especially in Central and Southeastern Europe. In line with the decentring of the state, he advocates the paramount role of “patronage ties and factional networks that bound together individuals of different creeds, identities and political allegiances in pursuit of their own political interests” and generated “an alternative, network-based geography of power” (p. 8). Instead of the state, Wasiucionek borrows the anthropological notion of *political arena*, which “constitutes a social space, in which political actors compete for resources” (p. 14), as more suitable for the context he is studying. Sensing, nevertheless, that the emphasis on factions is an overstatement, the author cautiously admits that states were not entirely irrelevant, as they provided political actors with legitimacy, financial and military resources, and set limits on the political arenas. Despite the stated goal of putting “formal institutions and patronage networks on an equal footing” (p. 12), the latter are privileged throughout the book.

Chapter 1 traces the geopolitical evolution of Eastern and Southeastern Europe from the 14th century onward, focusing on the rise of Ottoman power in the region. The second part of this chapter lays out the structure of the political arenas relevant to the book – Ottoman, Polish-Lithuanian, and Wallachian-Moldavian – that is, the organization of the elites. Despite marked institutional differences, the common trait is the growing importance of patron-client relations and the ensuing privatization of economic and military resources. Instead of a well-defined centre that would guide domestic and foreign policy, these factions competed for political power and resources, a behaviour that “did not necessarily align with what we would call state interest (p. 40).” The outline of the geopolitical dynamics prior to the 17th century is obviously useful as a historical introduction to the problem examined in the book. However, it is worth noting at this point that Wasiucionek “temporarily” (p. 20) employs the state-centred approach he criticizes throughout the book. It is hard to reconcile this solution with the main argument. If seventeenth-century politics cannot be understood as relations among coherent states pursuing

geopolitical goals, why can this be so for earlier periods? How can the statement about “Polish [...] expansion towards the Black Sea” in the 14th century, in competition with Hungary and Lithuania” (p. 21), be consistent with the conclusion that Zamoyski’s intervention in Moldavia in the late 16th century “was driven by factional concerns, and state resources were deployed to keep the chancellor’s faction together rather than pursuit geopolitical goals” (p. 171)? It seems to me that either the historical outline is incorrect, given the book’s theoretical position, or the overall argument must be relativized.

The rest of the book analyses cross-border patronage in the region at both the micro and macro levels. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss the tools used by the three elites to build cross-border factions: family, ethnic and regional solidarities, and military service and how these resources circulated. The analysis of conversions to Islam as a means of building factions is rather inconclusive, mainly due to the scarcity of evidence, a point the author himself concedes. The sections dedicated to marriage as a tool for faction-building are better documented and more convincing. The Movilă family used marriage to consolidate their alliance with Polish-Lithuanian factions, while Prince Vasile Lupu of Moldavia (1634-1653) secured powerful allies among Ottoman dignitaries through his marriage to Caterina Cercheza (“the Circassian”). The ethnic and regional solidarities played an equally important role in the construction of patron-client networks. This is suggested by the success and longevity of the Albanian faction led by Köprülü Mehmed Pasha and, later, by his son Köprülü Ahmed Pasha; its clients included Princes Vasile Lupu, Gheorghe Ghica (Moldavia: 1658-1659, Wallachia: 1658-1659), Grigore Ghica (Wallachia: 1660-1664, 1672-1673).

The rise of regional warlords (*celali*) towards the end of the 16th century explains the role of military services in the formation of factions. Such services were converted into political capital through the patronage of grand Ottoman dignitaries, as illustrated by the example of Ștefan Tomșa, Prince of Moldavia (1611-1615, 1621-1623), shows. The other example is slightly different: Prince of Wallachia, Matei Basarab (r. 1632-1654) did not fight as a mercenary in the armies of the Ottoman warlords, but instead benefited from the patronage of one of them, Abaza Mehmet Pasha. Combining patronage and armed resistance against the centre, both Matei Basarab and Abaza Mehmet Pasha “pursued a new pattern of politics that emerged during the *celali* rebellions” (p. 77).

Chapter 3 offers several revealing examples of how resources were mobilized, converted into capital and deployed to “oil” the factional mechanism. Again, the case of Matei Basarab is illustrative of the phenomenon. The increased tribute he assumed to pay did not go, as was customary, to the external treasury but to the internal one, controlled by the Wallachian prince’s patron, İbrahim Efendi, whose own patron Sultan Murad IV. This economic resource was converted into political capital by İbrahim Efendi, allowing him to maintain his position around the sultan and to protect his client, Prince Matei Basarab. When İbrahim Efendi died, Prince Matei Basarab was forced to seek a new patron at the Ottoman court and found one, in the new Sultan’s favourite, Silahdar Mustafa Pasha. Wasiucionek rightly emphasizes that the money circulating through these factions was not necessarily corruption, as later historians interpreted it, but a means of building trust and forging alliances in a highly competitive world. The stability of the tribute (*haraç*) during the 17th century, despite the persistence of the conditions that determined its steep increase in the second half of the 16th century, is explained by the rise of the factions. The most important circuit of financial transfer between the principalities and the Ottoman Porte became the gift (*pişkeş*) used by the Wallachian and Moldavian elites to curry favour with the Ottoman dignitaries. The large sums transferred to the Ottoman elites stand in contrast to the modest and occasional payments to elites in Poland-Lithuania. While the Polish-Lithuanian arena was also structured by rival factions, these elites were more interested in acquiring landed property. This was due to the Polish-Lithuanian economy’s reduced level of monetization based on serf labour, and to the culture of the nobility, which prized landowning as a status marker.

The third part of the book discusses the impact of patron-client networks on the region’s political life. Chapter 4, the most interesting and the most convincing part of the book, presents three conflicts which, according to the author, are to be understood within the logic of cross-border factionalism, and not as conflicts between coherent states vying for geopolitical supremacy: the rivalry between Matei Basarab and Vasile Lupu, the success and failure of the faction including Polish-Lithuanian and Moldavian elites from the late 16th and early 17th centuries, and the conflicts within the Köprülü patronage network. Perhaps the best illustration of the book’s overall argument is the conflict between Matei Basarab and Vasile Lupu: far from being a conflict between pro-Christian and pro-Ottoman parties, it was in fact a struggle

between factions stretching from Constantinople to north of the Danube, involving the two princes and high Ottoman dignitaries. The conflict reverberated beyond the territories of Wallachia and Moldavia, sending shockwaves to Constantinople. Two important Ottoman grandees from each faction, Tabaniyassı Mehmed Pasha and Silahdar Mustafa Pasha, were removed from power and, eventually, executed.

Chapter 5 addresses a question that has been much debated in Romanian historiography: the survival of the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia as distinct political entities in a region dominated by much more powerful states. The prevailing thesis in Romanian historiography is that Wallachia and Moldavia were never conquered by the Ottomans. This has been explained by the military resistance of the two principalities and by the prevailing balance of power in the region. Contrary to this, Wasiucionek argues that the factional struggles within the Ottoman elite prevented it from concentrating its efforts and thus undermined any effort to transform Wallachia and Moldavia into fully fledged Ottoman provinces. The Ottoman elites made no systematic attempt to annex the Danubian Principalities; the only such attempt, in 1595, foundered amid the factional struggle between Koca Sinan Pasha and Ferhad Pasha. Wasiucionek also mentions Michael the Brave's military success in 1595, but it is rather clear that for him this was of secondary importance. Moreover, during the 17th century, the extraction of resources through the cross-border patronage networks was efficient enough to be preferred over the introduction of direct administration.

Poland-Lithuania's failure to annex Moldavia is similarly explained in terms of factional struggles. The factional arrangements entailed a form of integration of the Moldavian principality into the Polish-Lithuanian Crown. According to Wasiucionek, annexation was never a state project but rather an attempt by Zamoyski to accumulate more resources to reward members of his faction. Ultimately, tensions within the faction hindered such attempts. This plan, which would have involved distributing landed property to Zamoyski's Polish-Lithuanian clients, conflicted with the interests of the Moldavian members of the faction, who feared competition from foreign aristocrats. Unable to satisfy the expectations of both parties, Zamoyski alienated members of both factions within his network – both Polish and Moldavian.

Wasiucionek's approach is innovative and his arguments are seductive, but they raise several issues that the book fails to address. Given that cross-border factions, and not states, were the main actors in the region, one question worth asking is why contemporary Moldavian and Wallachian chroniclers did not conceive of international relations in terms of factions. Why was the alternative geography of power delineated by factions invisible to them? Let us take, for example, the Battle of Khotyn (1621). Chronicler Miron Costin shows that, prior to it, the Polish king had summoned the parliament (*sejm*) and sent envoys to "Christian countries" (*țări creștine*) to ask for help against the Ottomans. Only the Dutch delivered some weapons, whereas other "Christian kingdoms" (*crăii creștinești*) refused to help and "left the Poles to confront the Ottoman Empire utterly alone" (*lăsasă toți pre Leși, numai singuri să răspundze Împărăției Turcești*).² It is true that the same chronicles are replete with references to the Ottoman protectors of the Wallachian and Moldavian princes, but they fail to convey the impression that states were less important than these patron-client links.

Explaining the failure to annex the principalities through factionalism seems, at times, too simplistic and the author himself provides counterarguments. In the case of Moldavia, he concedes that Prince Jeremia Movilă and the boyars "considered themselves rightful masters of the country and its resources, which they did not want to relinquish in order to satisfy Zamoyski's Polish clients" (p. 170). We can assume that not only the Moldavian members of Zamoyski's network felt that way, but the entire Moldavian elite did as well. Wasiucionek confirms this when he describes the reaction to the renewed annexation plans during the reign of John Sobieski (r. 1674–96): "[t]he Moldavian elite were ready to give up on the institution of the voivode, but they were clearly unwilling to relinquish monopoly on landholding" (p. 174). Finally, in the section titled "Why did Moldavia and Wallachia Survive," Wasiucionek writes that "Moldavian–Wallachian boyars had no qualms about involving Polish–Lithuanian magnates or Ottoman grandees into internal power struggles, but they dissociated themselves from any annexation attempts" (p. 180–181). This solidarity of the Wallachian and Moldavian elites, which "obstructed the attempts to merge the political arenas" (p. 179), is difficult to

² Miron Costin, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei de la Aron Vodă încoace*, ed. P.P. Panaitescu (București: Ed. Fundațiilor Regale, 1944), 51–52.

reconcile with the explanation that privileges the role of the factions. The boyars' opposition to the annexation plans suggests a reaction stemming from class consciousness, or from a coherent political identity (or a combination of both). In other words, a class- or state-oriented reading would better explain this attitude.

Finally, the problem of Wallachia's and Moldavia's status vis-à-vis the Ottoman Empire is ambiguously treated. Wasiucionek criticizes the Romanian historiography for claiming that the Ottomans never conquered Wallachia and Moldavia. This thesis has two major components: the "capitulations," that is, the treaties by which sultans granted autonomy to the principalities and the absence of direct Imperial administration, kadi courts and mosques. The first component is swiftly and rightly dispensed as the so-called capitulations were 18th-century forgeries. Wasiucionek does not outrightly reject the second component, but he downplays it. Following Viorel Panaite, he argues that by the mid-16th century, the Ottomans had conquered the principalities and that:

The Ottoman sultans considered both principalities an integral part of the 'well-protected domains,' and insisted that the voivodes were their officials just like any other governor. The status of the Danubian principalities relied on customary arrangements and evolved along with the balance of power between the voivodes and the Sublime Porte. No privileges or treaties fixed the juridical status of Moldavia and Wallachia in the long term, and the inhabitants of both principalities enjoyed a status similar to other zimmi inhabiting the Ottoman domains (p. 149-150).

Yet even in the absence of a treaty or a diploma defining the juridical status of Wallachia and Moldavia, there was a fixed set of rights that the two principalities enjoyed in their relations with the Ottoman Porte, which can safely be considered a form of autonomy. Wasiucionek himself reiterates the elements of this "autonomy" in his description of the Wallachian and Moldavian political arenas:

Ottoman officials trying to establish their factional presence in the Danubian principalities found their traditional toolkit inapplicable. The absence of provincial administration similar to that in the core provinces of the empire and the Christian creed of the local elite meant that they could not simply recruit mamluks, find prospective clients in the Janissary corps or dispatch members of their households. As was the case with many political arenas across the empire, there were also significant obstacles in the form of

the collective identity of the peripheral elite, which limited access for outsiders, forcing households from the imperial centre to seek alliances with local powerholders and play according to local rules (p. 79).

The collective identity of the elite, the Christian creed, and the maintenance of control over local administration, the absence of *kadi* courts, are the core elements of the so-called autonomy and of the idea that the principalities were never conquered. Moreover, the collective identity of the Wallachian and Moldavian elite, which jealously guarded its position against intruders, implies a degree of agency which Wasiucionek plays down. This cohesive elite, undermined annexation plans of Zamoyski or Sobieski and clung to its prominence inside Wallachia and Moldavia, admittedly at a high financial cost.

Impressive for the wide range of primary and secondary sources it employs, Wasiucionek's book accomplishes one of the main tasks of any intellectual endeavour: it challenges long-held assumptions and interpretations. It prompts us to look at political events and processes in Eastern and Southeastern Europe in new ways. His reconstruction of the formation, operation, and dissolution of cross-border factions, and their role in the region's political life, is compelling. By reading the sources through this concept, he casts fresh light on how states in the region functioned and interacted, how resources were extracted, transferred, and converted into political capital, and why annexation or integration into larger polities succeeded or failed. Along the way, he offers fresh interpretations of the stability of the tribute during the 17th century and of the survival of the Danubian Principalities as distinct political entities. The demonstration is convincing, and the role of patron-client networks in Central and Southeastern Europe during the 17th century, though sometimes exaggerated, cannot be downplayed by future research. In sum, it is hard for researchers of early-modern politics not to find something of value in this book.

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Michał Wasiucioneck's book *Țările Române și Înalta Poartă în secolul XVII, Rivalități și alianțe în secolul al XVII-lea* succeeds in reinterpreting the political dynamics in Eastern and Southeastern Europe between the 17th and 18th centuries from a new perspective. The author discusses the power relations between elites and the way in which they transcend aspects such as territory, ethnicity, religion, family, or state entities. The author is a researcher at the "Nicolae Iorga" Institute of History of the Romanian Academy and his work focuses on network theory, patronage and clientelism, and peripheral communities in Southeastern Europe in the 17th century. His research interests include the history of the Ottoman Empire, the Romanian Principalities, and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The present work is a translation into Romanian of *The Ottomans and Eastern Europe; Borders and Political Patronage in Early Modern World*. It is structured in two parts, *Mechanics of Cross-Border Patronage* and *Factional Macro-Politics*, preceded by an introduction that provides political and historical contextualization.

The Polish historian uses an impressive amount of unpublished and published documents, from Ottoman, Polish, and Romanian sources. With regard to the secondary sources, the book is distinguished by its engagement with very recent works in Western, Polish, Turkish and Romanian historiography.

At the outset of the "Introduction," Wasiucioneck recounts the episode involving the Polish ambassador Romaszkievicz in Constantinople, who was forced to remain at the Sublime Porte following the defeat of Tabanyassi Mehmet Pasha. Thus, factionalism in the Ottoman Empire is portrayed by showing how it influenced the internal evolution of the Romanian Principalities and affected the authority of the members of the groups involved. The episode in question illustrates one of the book's central ideas: the role of factions and cross-border relations. From the outset, the author addresses the issue of state formation and development in the pre-modern era. Wasiucioneck engages with the historiographical debates and argues that the state in premodernity represents a *joint enterprise* shaped by factional interests. By maintaining power, these factions sought to accumulate capital, status, and privileges.

In the first part, *Mecanismeale patronajului transfrontalier (Mechanics of Cross-Border Patronage)*, Wasiucionek highlights the ways in which these cross-border relationships are formed. The factions acted in accordance with their own rules, and families played a crucial role in these political games. Through them, properties, offices, and privileges were monopolized and passed down throughout generations in order to prevent the decline of the group. The importance of family was so great, that even Michael the Brave constructed a genealogy different from the real one. However, belonging to an aristocratic family did not automatically guarantee political advancement, idea point convincingly demonstrated by the author.

Wasiucionek also offers examples of political advancements owed to *ethnic solidarity*, illustrating the importance of such *identities*. For example, he discusses the connection between the Albanian Duca and Ghica families, marked by political and matrimonial alliances. The meaning of the title “*Greek*” is also discussed, as it came to function as a pejorative term, synonymous with “*foreigner*.” Wasiucionek also notes a similar analogy in the case of those who converted to Islam, who came to be described as “*Turkicized*.”

In the case of these patronage relationships, the author observes the development of certain *cross-border* and *cross-religious* relationships through the rise of figures such as Abhaza Pasha. Wasiucionek presents him in the context of the formation and consolidation of support networks that facilitated the political rise of figures such as Matei Basarab and Miron Barnovschi. What the author observes is the surprising game played by the Sublime Porte, which tolerated pro-Polish rulers in order to counteract the influence of this figure in the area – as a private individual who cultivated local political rivalries and used them to his own advantage. For Wasiucionek, this was also a constant in the military field, where, in addition to the *country's army*, the private retainers of patrons, i.e. *mercenaries*, also played a role. Hence, the author argues that the political developments in the 17th century were largely shaped by the personal interests of influential patrons. Wasiucionek correlates this system with the developments within the Ottoman Empire, where the power was decentralized and *political houses* were formed, which then became *the backbones of factionalism*. Thus the political investment in the peripheral areas of the Empire, such as the Romanian Principalities, proved to be rather profitable.

In the second part, *Factional Macro-Politics*, Wasiucionek examines the pre-modern state's efforts to address the problems of the era, the rulers acting as the main mediators. Therefore, the chronicles were meant to portray rulers as virtuous, constantly at odds with their rivals. This chapter focuses on the conflicts within the Romanian Principalities and on the influence of factionalism on power dynamics.

The conflict between Matei Basarab and Vasile Lupu truly stands out and is presented within a new analytical framework. Wasiucionek argues that it is misleading to analyse the aforementioned conflict from an anti-Ottoman perspective, given that both sides were supported by factions in Constantinople. Even chroniclers of the time (Miron Costin, for instance) were aware of this factionalism. Likewise, Wasiucionek discusses the case of the Cantacuzino and Duca families in relation to the Köprülü dynasty of viziers. This example illustrates how political conflicts were resolved following the decline of the Köprülü dynasty, leading to the marriage alliance between the Cantacuzino family and the Duca family. The members of the Movilă family did not share the same fate, becoming victims of internal conflicts caused by the Polish noble patrons.

Referring to these patrons, Wasiucionek presents the case of Jan Zamoyski. He received his education in the West and benefited from a political rise owing to Stephen Báthory. In this way, he secured offices, privileges, properties, and other such levers that enabled him to achieve his political objectives. However, as the author notes, despite his influence, Zamoyski was not capable of monopolizing the political authority in the Romanian Principalities, largely due to the political context marked by the rise of Michael the Brave. Moreover, this setback was also due to the self-interest of the local boyars, who did not tolerate the Polish nobleman's plan. A similar case reveals the failure of Jan Sobieski and his son, Joseph, to conquer Moldavia. The nobility, the clergy, and the local population harassed the new Polish administration, and authority was ultimately taken over by Constantin Cantemir. However, what Wasiucionek observes is that the boyars of the Costin family, despite having supported Cantemir against the Poles, were accused of conspiracy and killed. This plot was the work of rival boyars, Lupu Bogdan and Ruse. The paradox presented by Wasiucionek is that they subsequently fled to Poland, despite having initially supported pro-Ottoman interests.

Drawing on such examples, Wasiucionek observes the distortion of reality by historians through the creation of pre-established political frameworks (pro-Ottoman or pro-Polish) and emphasises that the boyars positioned themselves according to their political and economic interests. Their primary aim was to preserve their own wealth, and to this end they resorted to various means, such as the intervention of foreign powers or the formation of patronage networks. These networks could muster power, influence, and resources to sustain themselves, in addition to being truly transnational. Every network was driven by personal interests. While Sobieski's Poles sought to strengthen their authority, the Ottomans were only interested in financial resources and therefore supported the creation of loyal and influential networks to collect the tribute. However, the nobility of the Romanian Principalities sought to defend their own interests, the state being considered a *joint enterprise*. From this perspective, we can better understand the relations of the nobility with both the Polish and the Ottoman worlds, which guaranteed their rights and privileges in exchange for their submission.

Eliminating historiographical schematics facilitates both the work of the historian and the reinterpretation of the past. Although some may view it as a deconstructive exercise, the merit of Michał Wasiucionek's work lies in his reinterpretation of a historical era considered to be overstudied and in his highlighting of nuances overlooked by Romanian historiography. The employment of certain modern concepts related to *state entities* or to *the power relations* enables a better comprehension of the political relations and developments, in terms more closely aligned with the vision of the era under study.

In conclusion, through an innovative methodology, Michał Wasiucionek highlights the origins of factionalism in the political history of Southern and Eastern Europe, marked by the formation of factions based on financial, ethnic, territorial, or dynastic grounds. These groups were often unstable and shaped by the interests of each actant, regardless of their origin, as well as by the influence of other factions. This was the political environment of the late medieval period and the beginning of modernity, in which personal interests and those of political groups would often take precedence in the unfolding of political developments.

BOOK REVIEWS

**Martyn Rady, *Habsburgii. Ambiția de a stăpâni lumea*
[The Habsburgs. The ambition to rule the world], transl.
Lia Decei (București: Corint, 2023), 592 pages**

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A fundamental question for any new work is: what does it truly add to the existing historiography? This question may have been the starting point for Martyn Rady in his project, which resulted in the work titled *The Habsburgs. To Rule the World*, published in 2020. It was translated into in Romanian under the title *Habsburgii. Ambiția de a stăpâni lumea*,¹ published in 2023. The history of the Habsburgs has been the subject of substantial monographs in terms of both volume and quality; to name but a few: R.J.W. Evans, A.J.P. Taylor, Jean Berenger, Charles. W. Ingrao, Jean des Cars, or the synthesis of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. Accordingly, at first glance, considering the qualitative and quantitative consistency of earlier scholarship, Martyn Rady's work could appear redundant within Habsburg historiography.

Concerning the author, it is crucial to note that Martyn Rady is a renowned medievalist and specialist in Slavic studies. Professor Emeritus at University College London, Rady has devoted his research to Central and Eastern Europe, focusing on areas such as Poland, Hungary, and Transylvania.

1 The original version: Martyn Rady, *The Habsburgs. To Rule the World* (New York: Basic Books, 2020), 416 pages.

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Owing to his extensive studies and research dedicated to the history of Transylvania, this region remained a recurring theme throughout his work. It was rare for the Romanian space to be mentioned so frequently and integrated to such an extent in a work of Western historiography. Thus, his familiarity with Central and Eastern Europe gave him greater insight into the political, cultural, and economic influence and hegemony of the Habsburgs.

Through this work, Rady undertakes an ambitious and remarkable project. Although the history of the Habsburgs has been extensively studied, the author aims to present it from an atypical perspective. Rady's engaging writing style makes the book a pleasure to read, despite the substantial amount of information. Divided into 29 chapters, the work covers the entire history of the *House of Habsburg*, from its founding to its demise at the end of World War I. In addition to its narrative style, the work demonstrates consistent academic rigour, making it both an essential academic resource for those new to the history of the House of Habsburg and an easy read for history enthusiasts.

The author offers an innovative perspective on Habsburg history by attempting to reconstruct a general history of the dynasty based on several *micro-histories* covering various subjects and themes. These micro-histories revolve around certain key figures from the history of the Habsburgs. Therefore, the reader is guided through a work that addresses a cultural, social, economic and, last but not least, political history. For the author, the history of the Habsburgs is not limited to political and military developments alone.

Martyn Rady's work stands out for its method of analysis. The history of the Habsburgs is presented through the relationships between *the centre* and *the periphery*. This method is innovative, as seen in studies such as those by Peter Burke.² As a matter of fact, this kind of approach is necessary for the history of a dynasty that ruled a state in continuous expansion. In this regard, Martyn Rady's work integrates the history of the Romanian space and of Transylvania. This mention must also be linked to the author's scholarly background, as his research demonstrates a deep familiarity with the historical realities of this political and geographical area. For example, in his work, the author attaches considerable importance to the city of Cluj, which is present both in the history of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation.

² See Peter Burke, *Renașterea europeană. Centre și periferii*, transl. Alina Radu (Iași: Polirom, 2005).

The author notes how the two religious movements influenced the history of the city through two examples: St. Michael's Church and the Jesuit/Piarist Church. Furthermore, the history of Transylvania is present in Rady's work through the adventures of the Rákóczi princes, through the Enlightenment and the Uprising of 1784, and through the Revolution of 1848 and the political competitiveness of the peoples of the empire. Nonetheless, the Romanians' history remains secondary to that of the Hungarians and the achievements of Lajos Kossuth. In the modern era, the author does not hesitate to present the position of Romanian diplomacy in relation to the Dual Monarchy, through the activities and decisions of Ion I.C. Brătianu. The inclusion of the Romanian lands in a work dedicated to world history is most welcome.

Additionally, this work manages to underscore Habsburg genealogies and marriage policies. In this regard, Rady starts from the famous saying *Bella gerant alii, felix Austria tu nube*. Thus, the author starts from the medieval origins of the Habsburg dynasty and highlights how, through marriage alliances and the development of legitimizing ideologies and narratives, a simple family from Switzerland rose to dominate an entire segment of European and global history. Moreover, the author also takes certain legal aspects into account. Starting from the first Habsburg division in the 16th century, between Ferdinand and Charles V, and continuing until the issuance of the *Pragmatic Sanction* by Charles VII, Rady notes the Habsburgs' legal focus on shaping policies that would ensure their domination. These measures played an important role in shaping later legacies and political projects. For example, the Pragmatic Sanction is for Rady the act that not only facilitated Maria Theresa's rise, but also prepared a legal basis for the establishment of the *Ausgleich* of 1867, through the efforts of Empress Elisabeth (Sissi) among the Hungarian elite and society.

Within this context, Martyn Rady's work is notable for its approach to the major figures in the history of the House of Habsburg. The author presents the history of the Habsburgs through the biographies of various historical figures (emperors, empresses, generals, military leaders, diplomats, bankers, clergymen) and offers a nuanced portrait of them. These figures are portrayed not only through the prism of their successes but also through their personal failures (the case of Don Juan of Austria, for instance). Moreover, the idealization of such figures disappears with the revelation of details from

their private lives, such as the health issues or promiscuity of many rulers. In this regard, Rady shows particular skill in his portrayal of the private lives of Francis Joseph and Empress Elisabeth (Sissi). Through these biographies, Rady attempts to present the lives and histories of often idealized historical figures from a more nuanced and objective perspective. This phenomenon is specific to contemporary historiography.

At the same time, a defining aspect of the work is the focus on the role of women. Rady challenges the stereotypical image of a strictly patriarchal history by adding nuances to the ways in which women played an essential role in the Habsburg dynasty. Their authority stemmed precisely from their dynastic origins. The author starts with marriage policies and observes how they facilitated the Habsburgs' seizure of political and territorial authority. Furthermore, power could also be held by women in the Habsburg dynasty (Isabella of Parma, Maria Theresa). The author also mentions the more atypical cases (Marie Antoinette), integrating them into a somewhat broader discussion around women's means of asserting themselves in politics. Concurrently, the author nuances the cultural and administrative contribution of Habsburg women, who played an important role in strengthening the bureaucratic system, as well as certain institutions and cultural activities. Their charisma and charm often ended up saving the dynasty, as was the case with the myth of Empress Sissi in Hungarian society.

The author manages to provide a very good and engaging overview on the history of the Habsburgs, analysing it from its medieval beginnings to the contemporary era. Such a vast history is depicted in an accessible manner, which makes the work interesting not only for professional historians, but also for history enthusiasts. The author's interest in the Romanian space is also commendable. References to Romanian history effectively integrate local and regional history into a broader historical approach, while paying close attention to *centre-periphery* relations.

Alex Drace-Francis, *Istoria mămăligii. Povestea globală a unui preparat național* [The Making of Mamaliga. Transimperial Recipes for a Romanian National Dish], transl. Anca Bărbulescu (București: Humanitas, 2023), 290 pages

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Alex Drace-Francis is an Anglo-Scottish historian from the University of Amsterdam, who has been familiar with the Romanian space for several decades. He has an intimate knowledge of its literature and culture. Going through his publications, Alex Drace-Francis seems to have discovered it as a result of his broader concerns regarding the South-East European and Balkan space. In reality, he has known the Romanian space, from the perspective of cultural history, for more than 25 years, as his doctoral thesis, defended at the University of London in 2001, is called *Literature, Modernity, Nation. The Case of Romania, 1829-1890*. The thesis was published as a book a few years later: *The Making of Modern Romanian Culture. Literacy and the Development of National Identity* (I.B. Tauris, 2005), in several editions, intone of which was the Romanian translation (by Marius-Adrian Hazaparu): *Geneza culturii române moderne. Instituțiile scrisului și dezvoltarea identității naționale. 1700-1900* (Polirom, 2016). It is one of several important works published in recent decades on this topic.

In parallel, Alex Drace-Francis became known for his numerous contributions and publications dedicated to travel literature. He coordinated, together with Wendy Bracewell, several significant volumes: *Balkan Travel Writing* (Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2005), *Under Eastern Eyes. A Comparative Introduction to East European Travel Writing on Europe* (Central European

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University Press, 2008) and published numerous valuable studies and articles dedicated to this topic. He also published in two prestigious historical syntheses dedicated to his major themes of interest: travel literature and the history of Central and Eastern Europe in the modern period: *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing* (eds. Nandini Das, Tim Youngs) (Cambridge University Press, 2019) and *The Routledge History of East Central Europe since 1700* (eds. Irina Livezeanu, Arpad von Klimo) (Routledge, 2017).

In recent years, Alex Drace-Francis has approached a more unusual theme, but in perfect agreement with his previous concerns (Central-Eastern European and Balkan area, cultural history): the history of gastronomy, more precisely the cultural history of polenta (Rom. *porumb, cucuruz, mămăligă*). In 2022, he published the book *The Making of Mămăligă. Transimperial Recipes for a Romanian National Dish* (Central European University Press, 2022), very quickly translated into Romanian: *Istoria mămăligii. Povestea globală a unui preparat național*, translated by Anca Bărbulescu (Humanitas, 2023).

At first glance, a simple but spectacular topic, or perhaps a difficult one in reality, because the author chose to treat it in a complex way, as we will try to demonstrate in the following. The book on the history of *mămăligă* could even be seen as a synthesis of his major research themes.

The first chapters are a kind of chronological approach to the introduction of corn into Europe and especially into Central-Eastern Europe. A fascinating subject, as is everything linked to cultural transfer and interference. Alex Drace-Francis very well observes that corn “is a product not only of nature, but also of culture” (p. 24). Given that for the medieval and early modern period there are no statistical, economic, fiscal or customs sources, as there are for the modern period, it is quite difficult to determine the precise channels through which corn was introduced, as a post-1492 acquisition, into Central and Eastern Europe. The most plausible (even if unusual) hypothesis seems to be the Ottoman channel, but it is likely that there were several ways for corn to penetrate the economy of Central-Eastern European countries (p. 24-30). The author does not miss anything, he is attentive to the smallest historical sources, while also aiming to introduce the terms that designate corn in the languages of the region. An interesting argument is the word *törökbúza* (Turkish wheat), attested in Hungarian already in the second half of the 16th century (p. 33). Towards the end of the book, the author introduces an appendix in which he discusses the terms that

designate corn in Romanian (*cucuruz*, *mălai*, *mămăligă*, etc.) (p. 161-175). There we learn about another interesting Hungarian term: *tengeribúza* (sea wheat, in the sense of a variety of wheat brought by sea/from overseas (?), a term that is still used in the form *tenchi* in the Oradea area (p. 171). Fabulous history!

During the 17th century, corn is already attested in Transylvania, Hungary and other Central European countries, as well as in the Romanian Principalities. In the 18th-19th centuries, corn cultivation spread, becoming – for example, in the case of the Romanian Principalities – a dominant crop (chapters II-IV). The author makes an important note – that the introduction of corn is not singular, as there are also other “American” plants introduced to Europe during that period (p. 41-42).

In the 19th century, corn is intensively cultivated in the Romanian Principalities; the increase in the number and diversification of the categories of historical sources helps the author following tracing the “career” of corn, which thus becomes an export commodity and even the subject of diplomatic negotiations between the Romanian Principalities, the Austrian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and Russia (for example, chapter 5 “Corn without borders. Mămăliga is globalizing. 1829-1856”). The success of this agricultural crop had a considerable impact on the demography and health situation of the Romanian Wallachia and can also be attested in the scientific literature and works of fiction (p. 74-81).

One of the merits of the book (and of the author!) is the exploitation of a wide variety of historical sources, from private correspondence to illustrations, engravings, even commercial packaging, all of which help the author to reconstruct a very convincing cultural history of corn. Additionally, the author employs literary sources, folklore, toponymy and anthroponymy, even statistics on the production and export of corn and other agricultural plants (p. 122-123). Without adequate knowledge of the literature of the period, it would have been impossible to write a chapter such as the one dedicated to recipes (p. 124-141) or the one dedicated to “imaginary mămăligă” (p. 142-152).

Finally, it must be said that the author has achieved a feat that does not exist in the historiography of the country that is so closely linked to corn (Romania): writing a spectacular and convincing book about the cultural history of corn. Alex Drace-Francis’ work deserves to be continued.

Bert Roest, Pietro Delcorno (eds.), *Observant Reform and Cultural Production in Europe: Learning, Liturgy and Spiritual Practice* (Nijmegen: Radboud University Press, 2023), 302 pages

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The collective volume under review represents the outcome of a collaborative research initiative aimed at examining diverse aspects of the Observant reforms. Edited by Bert Roest and Pietro Delcorno – both recognized for their substantial work on medieval religious life, particularly concerning the mendicant orders – the volume brings together papers originally presented at a virtual workshop hosted by Radboud University (Nijmegen) in 2021. The workshop, and by extension the volume, centres on a topic with great potential and solid premises: the impact of the Observant movements on the cultural production during late middle ages and early modern times. A part of the contributions, especially those concerned with the Italian context, also address the interplay of Observance and Humanism/ Renaissance as reflected in the written production, preaching strategies, as well as in various artistic expressions (architecture, church decoration, music).

The open-access volume comprises twelve scholarly contributions, framed by an introductory chapter signed by Bert Roest, and a series of very useful indices of places, names, and subjects. The introduction, besides presenting the concept, aims and limits of the book, provides an excellent synthetic discussion of the previous scientific acquisitions related to the impact of religious reform movements on the late medieval cultural output. The cultivation of specific literary genres, the production of vernacular religious

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writings, library formation, the pursuit of higher education, “the late medieval preaching revolution” stimulated by printing, female literacy and scriptorial activity are highlighted as features and consequences of the Observant reforms explored in the historiography during the last decades. Within this reference frame, the volume is announced to provide further insights into three key aspects: the book culture, education and preaching; liturgical practices; and “Observant spiritualities and their practical and material consequences” (p. 23). Each of these facets of the Observance is explored across four papers, although this organization of the materials is not outlined by their division into chapters.

Pertaining to the investigations of preaching in Observant contexts are the studies of Cecile Caby and Pietro Delcorno, both emphasizing the rise of the humanist rhetoric and the interest in education cultivated in various Reform movements. Caby deals with the topic of preaching in general and provincial chapters – a type and context of preaching that hereby receives its well-deserved attention – as means of communication, identity formation and reform promotion within religious orders. After a short overview on the evolution of chapter preaching from the 12th century onwards, the author insists on the profile of this homiletic activity in 15th-century Italy, underlining the adoption of humanist oratory, the topics commonly addressed and how Observance was encouraged through chapter speeches in the context of Franciscan, Augustinian and Olivetan reform. Pietro Delcorno sheds light on a lesser-known Franciscan Observant preacher, Apollonio Bianchi. The author proposes the inspired concept of hybrid or “amphibious” cultural identity for characterizing this Italian friar, able to both act as a popular preacher and to exercise fine humanist discursive techniques. Moreover, his case is chosen as an example of how Franciscan reform was practiced, defined and advertised by a less prominent figure, offering a broader, presumably more representative perspective on the phenomenon and revealing its variety and complexity.

Leaving aside the order of the studies in the volume, preaching is also addressed in the study signed by Pablo Acosta-Garcia, from the perspective of homiletic activity conducted in female religious houses. Dealing with a sermon collection of a female preacher, Juana de la Cruz – one of the charismatic, visionary figures of the Castilian Observance – in preparation of a critical edition, the author convincingly argues that this work involved a collective authorship. *Libro del Conorte* appears as a product of *scrittura comunitaria*,

reflecting not the “original,” “authentic” ecstatic preaching of Juana, but rather the reception, recollection and remembrance of her sermons by her fellow nuns. Therefore, beyond the undertaken analysis, Acosta-Garcia’s contribution illustrates the dynamic literary activity of female Observance. Patricia Stoop offers further insights into access of female communities to Observant sermons. Her paper focuses particularly on the case of Middle Dutch sermons of Observant Friars Minors and their circulation in female convents associated with *Devotio Moderna* from the Low Countries. Stoop proves that these women benefited not only from the preaching services of their confessors, but also invited preachers from outside their order, actively participating in the recollection of their sermons, while also copying homiletic texts of important Observant Franciscan friars. Hence, the study demonstrates the impact of the message of the Friars Minor in the Low Countries, surpassing the confines of their order, and its transmission through the conscious involvement with the written culture of female communities. Silvia Serventi provides a further example in this respect. Her study examines the influence of Catherina of Siena’s writings outside the Dominican order, by analysing the works of two Italian Poor Clares, with similar aristocratic origins and humanist education: Caterina Vigri and Camilla Battista of Varano. While the Catherinian influence is not always water-clear or seems sometimes to have been mediated by other authors, the article proves that all these female authors shared a common ethos, a similar approach and sometimes very close wording choices, showing the intersecting paths of different Observant movements.

Along the same lines of the female Observant experience and its contribution to cultural production, Kristin Hoefner examines the liturgical books produced for internal use within a female Dominican convent from Aveiro, Portugal. The study focuses on the chant repertoire in the 17 preserved manuscripts, produced between 1470 and approx. 1500, in order to identify specific Observant features. A different approach to the musical landscape of Observant churches is brought by Hugo Perina, who sought to grasp the attitude of the Reform movements concerning an innovative and expensive instrument, the organ. Methodologically, the article approaches the topic from the perspective of norms vs. practice. Perina underlines certain initiatives meant to regulate the presence and the use of organs in liturgical context – in order to avoid distractions from the service or the mishearing of certain

prayers – but no coherent program of forbidding this instrument. In practice, the mendicant churches were often adorned with the popular instrument, while friars were involved in both building and playing organs.

In terms of liturgical space and practices, Haude Marvan contributes with a study concerning the modernization of church interiors at the turn of the 16th century, trying to discern if and how the Observant movement influenced the options of the Dominican Order in this regard. Her provisional conclusions, based on a handful of Italian case studies, suggest that no correlation can be stressed between the architectural alterations – referring exclusively to the elimination of the rood screen or the relocation of the choir in the apse – and the return to the pristine ideals of the Friars Preachers. When such modifications occurred, the reasons were circumstantial and functional.

Architecture and especially decoration in Observant context are also explored in Roberto Ciobianchi's paper from a fresh and interesting angle. The author considers spaces that became instrumental to the pursuit of education, namely libraries, conducting a comparative examination of the visual messages transmitted by the decor of such rooms in Dominican, Franciscan and Augustinian convents. These examples demonstrate that although lavish decoration would have contravened the Observant aspiration towards poverty and humbleness, libraries were often adorned with large frescoes, intended to forge an Observant self-identity. The depiction of portraits of illustrious members of the order, significant for their intellectual achievements (not necessarily saints), seems to have been the chosen strategy. It can be, thus, added to the traditional repertoire of Observant identity politics, as order historiography, hagiographical writings and other means of promoting older and newer internal saintly figures. The last-mentioned approach makes up the topic of a study signed by Ana Marinkovic and Valentina Zivkovic. Addressing the reformation of the convents of the Friars Preacher in south-eastern Adriatic, the two authors investigate the appropriation of the cults of Dominican saints in the region, as attested by visual sources, churches and altars dedications, and hagiographies. Different stages of the adoption of the Observance seem to have been associated with different saints, be they universal (Vincent Ferrer, Catherine of Siena) or local/regional (Marcolino of Fiorli, Guido of Naples, Osanna from Kotor or Margaret of Hungary), depending on who were the supporters and promoters of reform.

The intricacy and variety of Observantism are brought to light by Koen Goudriaan and Emilia Jamroziak, in addition to some of the already discussed papers. Goudriaan's contribution discusses the profile of an lesser-studied group of convents of the Tertiaries in Western Flanders, called "the Ypres group," delineating a set of peculiarities that define their spirituality. From the very beginning, the functioning of these convents included the adoption of the three vows, but not the enclosure, thus putting great emphasis on liturgical obligations, while allowing labour without very clear regulations. Moreover, this group of Tertiaries resisted all initiatives related to their submission to the Friars Minor and was also "outside the orbit of *Devotio Moderna*," not involved in the dynamic manuscript culture of most female communities from the Low Countries, creating its own path, that was neither fully contemplative, nor particularly active. This interesting case illustrates the difficulties encountered when trying to define what Observance is or is not. In the same line of thought, Emilia Jamroziak's study questions the existence of an Observant movement within the Cistercian Order. While there was "no institutional, formalized" Observance, the author demonstrates that typical Observant concerns can be traced in the various reform projects related to Cistercians in the late Middle Ages, whether they came from papal or internal initiative, but often under the influence of other religious orders.

The volume closes quite abruptly, without a section dedicated to conclusions. Although the introduction brings together the results of the comprised studies in a coherent narrative and opens further research perspectives, a concluding chapter would have benefited those interested in reading the book from cover to cover by providing a recapitulation of the main arguments and formulating critical reflections concerning the outcomes, challenges and further questions. This is only a minor shortcoming that does not diminish the great value of the reviewed volume. It represents a useful resource, appropriate both for sequential reading – which brings a polyangular comprehension of the subject – and for the more common non-linear, selective approach, able to meet the interests of a diverse public (medievalists interested in religious and ecclesiastic history, literacy and book culture, sermon studies, urban history or gender studies, theologians, art historians, musicologists, codicologists etc.). The volume offers a rich and nuanced picture of the Observant reforms as they unfolded in Italy, the Low Countries, Castile or Dalmatia. A complementary examination of Central European evolutions

would further enhance the panorama, enriching the broader understanding of the movement's European dynamics. Following a historiographical dossier (2018) and recently joined by another collective approach of the Observant reforms (2025), the volume contributes greatly to the objectives of the project "Observer l'Observance," facilitating a thorough understanding of these polymorphous religious movements. In addition to the significant individual input of each essay, often presenting cutting-edge research, the volume as a whole has the great merit of implementing "order-transgressing approaches" (p. 25) to the study of late medieval religious life, literature and reforms.

Kateryna Dysa, *Ukrainian Witchcraft Trials: Volhynia, Podolia, and Ruthenia, 17th-18th Centuries* (Budapest-New York: CEU Press, 2020), 254 pages

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Witchcraft trials in Eastern Europe have not received the same attention as those in the West, a fact attributed in part to the limited documentary evidence, and to their less spectacular nature. In Ukraine, cases were handled in a remarkably rational manner for that era, lacking the intensity encountered in Western Europe. This approach was due, on the one hand, to the enforcement of the Magdeburg Law by the city councils, and, on the other hand, to the influence of the Orthodox Church on the studied area, determining the non-application of Western demonological principles. The accusations appeared mainly in the context of social conflicts or serious events, such as the death of a child or the loss of crops, and could be brought against anyone, without there being a fixed image of the witch or a major concern for a pact with the Devil.

Kateryna Dysa's work contributes precisely to the reconstruction of these witchcraft trials in the three palatinates (Volhynia, Podolia and Ruthenia) within the Polish-Lithuanian Union, in nowadays Ukraine. The author goes beyond the positivist approach characteristic of previous historiography, which focused on the strict quantification of executions and the unjustified application of large-scale persecution models in the West. By avoiding this approach, Dysa aims to reconstruct the "anatomy of accusations of witchcraft," focusing on the qualitative and anthropological dimension of the phenomenon, which reflects the everyday nature of social conflicts (family, neighbourhood, economic). Moreover, the author focuses on understanding the dimension of

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the cultural relationship between “popular fears and fantasies,” with the precise purpose of examining the multifaceted contexts that preceded the trial before the court in the 17th-18th centuries.

An extensive international academic experience underlies the expertise of the author, who is a PhD lecturer at the Department of History of the National University of “Kyiv-Mohyla Academy”. She was a *visiting fellow* at prestigious institutions such as Harvard, Stanford, L'Institut d'Etudes Avancées (Paris) and Oxford University. Her main areas of interest include the history of witchcraft, sexuality, and medicine in the early modern period, especially in regions corresponding to today's territory of Ukraine and Poland. The author's research topics have continued to evolve, and, currently, Dysa studies the process of building the image of Kyiv in travel literature, from the end of the 18th century to the beginning of the 20th century. Through the rigorous analysis of a substantial sample of 198 cases of witchcraft trials, Dysa manages to dismantle traditional clichés related to the phenomenon of witchcraft in Ukrainian regions. The theoretical rigour of the paper is ensured by a quantitative and qualitative method, based on multiple sources: witchcraft trials, the trial books of the city magistrates, visual sources and the sermons of Orthodox theologians, all of which contribute to the outline of a nuanced image of the phenomenon.

The work *Ukrainian Witchcraft Trials: Volhynia, Podolia, and Ruthenia, 17th-18th Centuries*, signed by Kateryna Dysa, which comprises 254 pages, constitutes a valuable scientific contribution to the study of witchcraft in Eastern Europe, coming into prominence as a fundamental analysis that distinguishes the Eastern European phenomenon from Western patterns. The paper constitutes a complex radiography of the judicial mechanisms, the social context and the specific religious and superstitious underlay that governed the accusations and beliefs in the three palatinates, between the second half of the 17th century and the end of the 18th century. Although the author acknowledges that the study cannot be exhaustive due to the lack of historical sources, the structure of the book puts forth a thorough analysis. It provides valuable insights about social conflict and social and professional tensions, revealing behind-the-scene stories about the daily fears and ailments of the people involved in these witchcraft-related conflicts. This is achieved by defining the legal framework and the profile of the participants (Chapter 1: *Constructing the Ukrainian Witchcraft Trial*), by exploring the views of the elite and of the Orthodox Church regarding the role of the Devil in relation to witchcraft (Chapter 2: *Ukrainian Orthodox*

Demonology), and by the sociological anatomy of accusations, understood as a result of neighbourhood, family and professional rivalry conflicts (Chapter 3: *Beyond the Trials*). The final chapter (*A Case of Infanticide and Witchcraft in Szczurowczyky*) is a case study of the events which occurred in 1753 in a village near Kremenets, providing the opportunity to compare official attitudes towards two “female murders” (witchcraft and infanticide) and to test the notion of fantasies about witchcraft.

The first chapter establishes the legal and sociological framework of witchcraft trials in Ukraine, especially in Volhynia, Podolia and Ruthenia, in the 17th and 18th centuries. Dysa demonstrates that although the legal framework was severe (based on the Magdeburg code of laws, and on the manual annotated with legal comments such as those of Bartłomiej Groicki, derived from *Carolina* and *Sachsenspiegel*), its enforcement was much more nuanced, as judges were often reluctant to apply capital punishment, and torture was used marginally (7 out of 198 cases), having little influence on the final result. The author also turns her attention to the role of rumours as a trigger for accusations, and analyses the typology of those accused and the accusers, showing that they often came from the same social environment and had equal status. Although 78% of the defendants were women, the accusations were often made officially by men on behalf of their wives or female relatives, who were the initiators of the conflict. This suggests that the trials were essentially “women’s business” from the domestic or neighbourhood ambit, where women exerted a direct influence.

The second chapter focuses on the religious and ideological background, comparing the view of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine with the intensely elaborated demonology of the West. The author argues that, unlike the Catholic and Protestant tradition, Orthodox demonology was minimally elaborated and played a marginal role in theological, polemical and legal discourse. As a result, in popular beliefs, the Devil and the pact with the Devil were not essential elements in defining the witch. Witchcraft was not regarded as heresy, but rather as a superstitious practice associated with sin, having social, rather than theological implications.¹

¹ As previously discussed in Kateryna Dysa, “Orthodox Demonology and the Perception of Witchcraft in Early Modern Ukraine,” in *Friars, Nobles and Burghers – Sermons, Images and Prints: Studies of Culture and Society in Early-Modern Europe, in memory of István György Tóth*, eds. Jaroslav Miller and László Kontler (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 341–360.

The third chapter represents the sociological core of the book, where Kateryna Dysa investigates the causes of trials, having their roots in the deepest levels of social dynamics within the community, the same layers where accusations were generated. Thus, through this chapter, the author aims to analyse the anatomy of the conflicts leading to trials, showing that witchcraft was a manifestation of the tensions in everyday life: neighbourhood contentions related to assets, professional rivalries or dissensions within the extended family (especially between sisters-in-law and mothers-in-law)² or power relations (the master-servant relationship). Witchcraft was perceived as a practical instrument of causing harm (diseases, loss of crops) or obtaining advantages (love spells), which thus makes it a matter of managing resources and interpersonal relationships, not a matter of undermining divine order. Lastly, witchcraft served as a social discipline mechanism, targeting individuals who engaged in non-compliant behaviour and disrupted community order. Most often, the accusations did not target the people known to practice magic, but rather frequently the persons perceived as antisocial, contentious, or ungrateful.

The last chapter takes the form of a case study focused on a single criminal investigation from 1753, in the village of Szczurowczyky. It reaches significant conclusions and specifically points to the differences in perception and legal treatment between the two crimes considered inherently “female,” – witchcraft and infanticide –, in the three palatinates from the early modern period. The results of the research are revealing: although the judges were reluctant and lenient towards accusations of witchcraft, they displayed particular severity in cases of infanticide, sentencing mothers to death even when the baby was stillborn, especially if it was not buried as a Christian. This demonstrates that the courts’ priorities were focused on maintaining order in the society and applying fundamental moral norms (like in the case of infanticide, which implied a clear victim), and not on conducting witch hunts for crimes that were much more difficult to prove in the physical realm.

The major contribution of the research lies in the decisive rejection of the hypothesis of the widespread persecution of witches. Through a thorough analysis of 198 cases from the archives of the city courts, Dysa demonstrates

² See also: Kateryna Dysa, “A Family Matter: The Case of a Witch Family in an Eighteenth-Century Volhynian Town,” *Russian History*, 40 (2013): 352-363.

a functional discrepancy between the written laws (similar to the Western European ones, which provided for punishment by burning) and the actual legal practice. In fact, accusations of witchcraft were handled with remarkable caution and visible leniency by the judges, who preferred alternative punishments or dismissal of cases. At the same time, the argument is consolidated by the statistics regarding the marginal role of torture, applied in only 7 cases of the entire sample, and the fact that there were only 13 recorded sentences to burning at the stake, clear indicators of the fact that the courts did not support large-scale persecution and did not rely on Western demonology, which was specific to Protestant and Catholic areas.

In this context, the author redefines the nature and the relationship between society, the court and the beliefs about witchcraft. She convincingly argues that the phenomenon was perceived rather as an ordinary and practical part of everyday life, whether it was a matter of causing illness, failure of a treatment or impairing the growth of the household or crops, rather than as a demonic heresy. This useful view is delimited by Orthodox demonology, which, unlike the Western one, was less spectacular and elaborate, the Devil not being a central element in popular accusations. Witches were not seen as apostles of evil, but as “enemies within”: contentious neighbours, rivals of equal social status, or in-laws. This profile of the defendants (78% women) thus shifts the focus of the analysis from religious persecution to the social dynamics of the community.

In the conclusion of the work, Kateryna Dysa invites us to take a look at the evolution of the perception of the image of the witch over time: from the conflictual and popular witch of the 17th-18th century trials, a contentious female neighbour, accused of practical magic, who found herself in the service of the community, to the fantastic figure augmented by the romantic intellectuals of the 19th century, later transformed into a mere satirized superstition in the Soviet era, and finally into a mystical star in modern popular culture, thus perpetuating a standardized image, which has almost nothing in common with historical reality.

The only reserve related to this work is the need to present a broader context of local historical evolutions. A more detailed overview of the history of the three palatinates, correlated with a detailed analysis of the inter-community, confessional circumstances and hazards (epidemics, droughts, etc.) or exceptional natural phenomena (eclipses, comets, etc.), as well as of

private life, would render the study more complete. Such a micro-historical approach would be essential to capture the subtle dynamics of everyday life that led people to seek supernatural culprits or to release their daily frustrations through accusations of witchcraft.

Finally, Kateryna Dysa's book stands as a fundamental work thanks to its methodological rigour, which thus provides a detailed analysis and an elaborate perspective, supported by a multidisciplinary approach and comprehensive research conducted on archival sources. Thus, the study becomes an indispensable resource for anyone who studies the early modern history of Eastern Europe and the complexity of the phenomenon of witchcraft. Moreover, its continuation by extending the research to other community dimensions could elevate the study to an unprecedented level of completeness and would present an overview of the history of the phenomenon of witchcraft in the three Ukrainian regions.

Natalie Zemon Davis, *Listening to the Languages of the People. Lazar Sainéan on Romanian, Yiddish and French* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2022), 200 pages

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This discussion concerning Natalie Zemon Davis' book, *Listening to the Languages of the People: Lazar Sainéan on Romanian, Yiddish and French* could begin by asking: What's in a name? This particular question would be inspired by the fact that the book's main protagonist is Lazăr Şăin, who became Lazăr Şăineanu and later Lazare Sainéan, bringing to the fore the transformations, the refashioning, that a change of name could elicit. The book, acknowledged as a biography by its author, relies partly on an autobiographical essay written by Şăineanu in 1901, when he had decided to leave Romania, and partly on several other sources, mainly reviews of Şăineanu's work, written by his contemporaries, friends, enemies, scholars, politicians and renown public figures. Starting from this enmeshing of stories, the one written by the subject and the one pieced together by his biographer, this review would like to start a discussion about narrative, the function of narrative in the field of history and the role of one well-documented biography as illustration for the mood of an era.¹ This attempt will be framed by a larger issue, bringing into question the value of a story, in this case a biography, as a source in the writing of history.

¹ The return to narrative has been discussed by Lawrence Stone, "The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History," *Past and Present*, 85 (1997): 3-24; James West Davidson, "The New Narrative History. How New? How Narrative?," *Reviews in American History*, 12/3 (1989): 322-334; Peter Burke, "History of Events and the Revival of Narrative," in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992) suggests that historians should borrow the anthropological principle of thick description, which integrates story and context.

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In thinking about this particular biography, one is first of all compelled to ask what motivated Natalie Zemon Davis to write the story, as her interest in Lazăr Șăineanu may come from several sources. First of all, the two individuals, subject and biographer have a lot in common: their interest in language, in stories and in crossing borders, not to mention their ability to live in multiple and diverse contexts. In the case of Lazăr Șăineanu, his interest in stories, obvious in the study of folklore, brought him notoriety as a scholar, while Natalie Zemon Davis, who first made her mark as a social historian of the Reformation in France,² was increasingly interested in stories, forcing history to return to the narrative, while staying true to its analytical dimension. The two, subject and biographer also share their interest in identity, from the perspective of an outsider, which makes them think about inclusion and exclusion, and ultimately about being Jewish in a Christian world. Finally, they may have been brought together by their interest in fashioning identity, in situations where the subject takes matters into his\her own hands and crafts an identity for him\herself.

By the time she had embarked on writing the book on Lazăr Șăineanu, for Natalie Zemon Davis, this process of self-fashioning was already a much-older concern, which started with her portrayal of Arnaud du Tihl, the imposter who wished to become Martin Guerre in sixteenth-century France,³ or with her focus on Hasan al-Wazzan, otherwise known as Leo the African (Leo Africanus), who also assumed a new name, or merely a new identity, whenever he immersed himself into a new world and who lived between Africa and Europe and between Islam and Christianity.⁴ Thus, it is not very surprising that Natalie Zemon Davis's attention should land on Lazăr Șăineanu's life, which is a story of major transformations, that she felt tempted to fashion into a biography. From the historian's perspective, Lazăr Șăineanu fits the marginal, or peripheral mould, as he constructed his identity as a continuous process of adaptation, while living in several countries, for various lengths of time, without being able to call any of them his own.

² Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975).

³ Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

⁴ Natalie Zemon Davis, *Tricksters Travels: In Search of Leo Africanus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006).

In focusing on Lazăr Șăineanu's life, Natalie Zemon Davis does not produce a classical biography, because this is not a text put together by an impartial external observer. Instead, the author pieces together her subject's life meandering between the details of his biography and his work, as if each segment of his life was marked by a particular scholarly interest. The story is also not written from the, perhaps detached, point of view of the author/biographer, or of Lazăr Șăineanu as its subject, for that matter, but rather from the perspectives of various recipients of his work, admirers as well as detractors. In a way, one might say that the point of view is dictated by the sources the historian has used, articles in the media, praising him or disparaging him, allowing us, the readers, to hear several voices and become aware that they each represent a distinct perspective and a particular understanding of the main character. What results is a portrait similar with Salvador Dali's *Lincoln in Dalivision* (1977), where one sees two characters/two portraits in the same image, one of Abraham Lincoln and one of Gala, Dali's wife, pending on the vantage point. Lazăr Șăineanu's auto-biographical memoir, which Davis uses is just one of the voices in this polyphony, sharing the space with his works, articles written about him in the media, some in praise, others openly disparaging him, correspondence between the subject and his friends, mentors and like-minded scholars. One is thus led to the conclusion that the storyline is decided by the sources used, shifting the point of view from which Lazăr Șăineanu is seen and forcing us, the readers, to look at him in a different way each time.

Besides the issue of multiple viewpoints, which is brought forth by the use of very different types of sources, Natalie Zemon Davis was concerned with the fictional element in storytelling, which derives from the crafting of the story itself, thus becoming a process of self-fashioning for the protagonist. I have already mentioned her interest in this process, as illustrated by the stories of Arnaud du Tihl and Hasan al-Wazzan. This is also obvious in her book dedicated to the biographies of three women, Glikl bas Judah Leib, Marie de L'Incarnation and Maria Sybilla Merian, who travelled the world, crossing all sorts of boundaries and immersing themselves in different cultures.⁵ The historian pieced together their lives, focusing on their beliefs, their values,

⁵ Natalie Zemon Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth Century Lives* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

their dreams, their relationships with families and children, with men, with cultural others, gleaned in their entirety from the writings, of very different nature, that these women left behind. This *modus operandi* is, in a sense, also used in Lazăr Șăineanu's case, as every aspect of his life is addressed as if it were framed by all possible entanglements. His story is always set against the backdrop of political upheavals, social tensions and a bumpy road towards modernization.

If the stories mentioned so far in Natalie Zemon Davis's work are, at least partly, anchored in reality, the tall tales told by those who sought royal pardon for crimes they were actually guilty of, and which are the subject of Natalie Zemon Davis's book, *Fiction in the Archives*, are fake narratives – in other words, lies – that tell us more about the socially-acceptable than about the events themselves.⁶ One must consequently surmise that they provide information about groups, world views and appropriated social norms. This is again similar to examining Lazăr Șăineanu's life through its own fake narratives, particularly tendentious reviews of the scholar's work, or undisguised attacks and accusations levelled at his person, placing his biography in the context of a world where prejudice and discrimination prevailed.

By choosing these two perspectives, stemming from the subject himself and from the spectators of his life, Natalie Zemon Davis has successfully avoided the packaging of the story in one neat box. Instead, we are faced with an untidy bundle, which includes scholarly interests, career development, life decisions, big and small, success and disappointments, recognition and neglect. A messy bundle, like life itself. The gist of the story can be reduced to a couple of sentences: Lazăr Șăineanu was a great, internationally-recognized scholar, a linguist and folklorist who was not allowed to integrate into society in the country of his birth.

The book is extremely informative in minutely following Lazăr Șăineanu's work, his interest in language and folklore, in comparative linguistics and comparative mythology, while mapping his descent into a maelstrom of inclusion and exclusion, in his efforts to obtain an academic position at the University of Bucharest and citizenship in Romania, as both a position and naturalization were denied to him, despite several attempts and the weight of arguments in favour of his rightful and well-deserved recognition.

⁶ Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

Natalie Zemon Davis's interest seems to have been captured by the details of Lazăr Șăineanu's biography, which are likely to project him as an individual with a dual identity, as all his life he tried to find a balance between being a Jew and being a Romanian. This again raises complicated issues about how he saw himself as a Jew, how he saw other Jews and how he dealt with how "others," particularly his countrymen, saw Jews. The Jewish question is already complicated enough, as outside observers at least find it difficult to decide whether they are dealing with an ethnicity or a religion. Living in a post-modern age where ethnicity is recognized as a construct, a construct busy creating the polar opposition of "us and them," should make it easier to tackle the issue.⁷ But it does not, because Lazăr Șăineanu's story is intertwined with that of anti-Semitism, a fact made obvious by several pivotal events in his life.

Although he had a Jewish circle of friends and a Romanian circle of friends, mentors and, up to a point, supporters, as well as an international scholarly community that he was part of, Lazăr Șăineanu appears to have been a perpetual outsider, as he was always on the fringes of each group, never fully included, despite all his efforts. This is best illustrated by the story of his conversion, which separated him from some of his Jewish friends, without really bringing him any closer to being accepted within mainstream society. It is as if his one pragmatic decision was held against him by both groups. The event itself, namely the baptism, and its aftermath raise the question of what being Jewish meant to him, an issue that Lazăr Șăineanu himself grappled with. He tried to define Jewishness, but he had never been a practicing Jew and he did not end up practicing Christianity either, posing difficulties for those who wished to put him in a box. The dual identity that seems to have suited him best, being a Jew and a Romanian at the same time, was never fully understood by his contemporaries and remains a tough nut to crack for his biographers.

Oddly enough, it is precisely his identity as a scholar that provides the most valuable clues for Lazăr Șăineanu's worldview. His opinion is hidden within his work, especially his work on folklore, where his choices clearly spell out that he believed in the universality of human experience.

⁷ Michael Banton, "Ethnic Origin and Ethnicity," in Michael Banton, *What We Know about Race and Ethnicity* (New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2018).

The anthropological approach to folktales, the motifs present in the genre, his effort to classify folk tales according to type and prevailing narratives, amount to his belief that human nature was the same everywhere. Folk tales also offer the opportunity to discuss, and one might add, with great subtlety, the issue of difference. What seems to interest Lazăr Șăineanu is the stigmatization of difference which he approached by looking at antitypes, the culprit or the trouble maker in a story, who often deceived by impersonating the hero. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the antitype is often the “Gypsy” and obviously the “Jew”. The lower position or the more negative perception of the Jew is highlighted, in Lazăr Șăineanu’s opinion, by the fact that, while Gypsies were occasionally also storytellers, and thus able to craft their own narrative, the Jews were never cast in that role, and were thus deprived of their voice. This again highlights the issue of self-fashioning that seems to have been central to Natalie Zemon Davis’s work and thus Șăineanu joins the cast of characters featured in her books who wished to craft their own narratives.

This concern for the excluded translates to Șăineanu’s studies in linguistics, where the language of the marginals increasingly becomes the subject of his research. This peaked during his early visits to France, when he became aware of studies dedicated to “patois” and regional dialects, and then, after 1901, when he actually made France his home. At this later point he studied the “argot,” the language of criminals from which he moved on to the study of Judeo-German dialects in east central Europe. His work is consequently innovative, because communication stands at its centre. His interest in language, his life-long struggle to show that languages are hybrids and full of borrowed words are strong arguments in this respect. This is once more aligned to Davis’s interests in language as a form of integration, which surfaces in many of her books as she dwells on the young Martin Guerre’s efforts to learn the dialect spoken in Artigat, as opposed to the Basque language spoken in his territories of origin, or on the fact that Glikl wrote her memoir in Yiddish, or on the circumstances that compelled Marie de L’Incarnation to learn a native language for her work as a missionary in Canada. Insofar as this is a story about language(s), it is also a story about a historian who, towards the end of her career, learned Dutch in order to read sources from Surinam.

Finally, to Natalie Zemon Davis, Lazăr Şăineanu must have been interesting because he was, in many ways, ahead of his time. By choosing the comparative method in linguistics and in the study of folklore he anticipated what was about to happen a few decades later in the field of history.⁸ Moreover, his interest in storytelling is inspiring for what happens in history as a field to this day, as competing, ideologically-informed, hegemonic and subaltern narratives continue to take centre stage. One could even note that this may act as a cautionary tale for what might happen in history in the future, as digital stories, which are an exercise in self-fashioning, take over and will become the headache of future historians.

To end on a more sober note, Lazăr Şăineanu's career should also be a cautionary tale. Although his commitment to Romania is obvious in the fact that he wished to study its language and its folktales, his career highlights his exclusion, as his two major wishes, to obtain a position within the University of Bucharest, in a field he was more than qualified for, and to become a citizen, were never fulfilled. The reason may have been a combination of professional rivalries, petty jealousies, and a complicated political and social context, as Natalie Zemon Davis astutely suggests, but as historians we need to be aware of the bigger dangers of intolerance, bigotry and discrimination. Lazăr Şăineanu's commitment to his work and attachment to the country of his birth remained explicit as he continued to refer to himself as a scholar and to Romania as his country until the end of his life. Although this leaves questions concerning his identity open-ended, it is also a sobering reminder that, in the words of Natalie Zemon Davis "Identity is not just a scholarly question."⁹

⁸ Marc Bloch, "A contribution towards a comparative history of European societies," in Marc Bloch, *Land and Work in Medieval Europe* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 44-81 was originally published in 1928.

⁹ Quote taken from an interview. See https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/ecc/people/davis_tribute/#:-:text=Medal%20in%202013.-,music%20and%20charivari.%5B2%5D (accessed on January 2026).

Michal Ďurčo, *Cesty a diaľnice na Slovensku v medzivojnovom období. Nástup automobilovej doby v znamení Československej Republiky* [Roads and Highways in Slovakia during the Interwar Period. The Beginning of the Era of the Automobile under the Sign of the Czechoslovak Republic] (Bratislava: VEDA vydavateľstvo SAV - Historický ústav SAV, 2020), 230 pages

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A few years ago, a book was published in Bratislava that, at least for Romanian historiography, deals with an unusual theme. While the field of railway history has produced a substantial body of scholarly literature (in Romania), the history of road transport is only beginning to emerge as a field of study.

The book written by historian Michal Ďurčo, a researcher at the Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava, is a history of road transport in Slovakia during the Interwar period. The subject is by no means easy, and yet the author did not make it any easier for himself. He made a great documentation effort, which involved going through an impressive bibliography of hundreds of journal articles, volumes, monographs, etc., but he also visited 12 archives on the territory of Slovakia, where he consulted numerous fonds (government institutions, local administration).

We have provided these details, which are normally written at the end of a review, from the very beginning in order to emphasize the effort made by the author. The result is a complex and comprehensive book. It has a logical structure, starting with general considerations and aspects of the history of the subject it focuses on, before moving on to the subject itself and its details.

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From the *Introduction*, the author discusses theoretical aspects, which he then develops in the first chapter, *Theoretical-methodological considerations* (pp. 21-42). One aspect is the relationship between road (highway) building and prosperity, but most interesting was the discussion of the capital-periphery relationship and the ideological valences of road (highway) building, relevant to the subject of the book (pp. 16-33). Let us not forget that until 1918, the territory of Slovakia was part of Hungary (the Austro-Hungarian Empire) and it was linked, in terms of infrastructure (roads and especially railways), to the Hungarian communications system. Thus, after the establishment of Czechoslovakia, one of the great challenges for the new state was that of... the “de-Hungarianization” of the Slovak road system (but, in a broader sense, of the entire economy and other aspects of society) and linking it to that of Bohemia and Moravia, which were much more advanced in this regard. In relation to these, Slovakia’s road network was peripheral, Prague was far away, and Bratislava had – in relation to the Slovak territory – an equally peripheral position (p. 24). As the author will point out several times in the book, the unification of the country (Czechoslovakia) was one of the great economic problems of the Czechoslovak state in the two Interwar decades. He also discusses the specificities of the relief and geography of Slovakia and their impact on the road system (pp. 24-28).

In the same chapter, two other sections should be noted: one devoted to the historiography of the issue, outlining the current state of the Slovak scholarship and using with numerous references to the European and American bibliography of the topic, including the presentation of the relevant archival fonds (pp. 36-42), and another consisting of a brief dictionary of specialized terms used (pp. 33-36).

Chapter II is quintessentially historical: *Formation of the modern road network system (18th century-1918)* (pp. 43-59). The author provides an excellent history of road building in the modern era at a European level, then moving on to the Austrian Empire, Hungary and Austria-Hungary, and provides a case study of road connections in the Moravian-Slovak (Hungarian) border area up to 1918 (pp. 51-59). The matter is particularly interesting, precisely because, before 1918, the area was (and, after 1993, became again) a border area, that at that time separated very different regions in terms of their historical evolution.

The next chapter deals with the period of the consolidation of the system of communication ways (1918-1928) (pp. 61-112). This is one of the central chapters of the book. Transport history is seen not only as a chapter of wider economic history, but in a more comprehensive sense: political, ideological and even cultural, which sets Michal Ďurčo's research apart from many of the typical transport history works, which are highly technical. The author carefully followed the situation in Slovakia during the period when its territory was part of Hungary, as well as during the subsequent transition period. It was a transition that took place during wartime (until the first half of 1919, there were battles on the Slovak territory between the Czechoslovak army and volunteer forces associated with the Hungarian army of the Béla Kun Communist regime), during which the new Czechoslovak authorities tried to establish a functional relationship between the Czech-Moravian and Slovak territories. The transition had an interesting human dimension. As in the railway sector, the specialized personnel in the road sector were partly of Hungarian origin, and they refused to collaborate with the new state authorities. Meanwhile, the specialists coming from Bohemia were unfamiliar with the specifics of the place or the Hungarian language, which made it difficult for them to restore and operate the road system in Slovakia, which was in need of major repairs after the war. In addition, the Slovak road system had to abandon the North-South orientation (Slovakia to Hungary and the capital Budapest) in favour of the East-West orientation (Slovakia to Bohemia and the capital Prague) (pp. 61-67).

The author does not overlook the geographical specificities of the Slovak territory. Its central and northern parts are mountainous (in the north, on the border with Poland, the High Tatra Mountains, and in central Slovakia, the Low Tatra Mountains), which has caused numerous problems for the road network. He then reviews the existing road categories and closely follows the projects intended to improve and develop the network. This approach highlights the importance of using archival sources and certain specialized publications, which allowed the author to reconstruct the entire "landscape" of the Interwar Slovak road transport history in great detail: institutions, power factors, the connection between the central institutions from Prague and the state authorities in Bratislava and in the territory, the legal framework (Hungarian legislation was in force in Slovakia, which was different from the laws in Bohemia and Moravia), financial aspects, currents of opinion and,

above all, numerous and endless projects. At the end of the book, the author summarizes: in 20 years, 320 km of new roads were built in Slovakia, 600 km of road were modernized (a term is used in the Slovak language – *bezprašný* – which would translate as “without dust,” i.e., covered with an asphalt or concrete layer), 77 iron-concrete bridges, all of this while the number of motor vehicles increased from 143 (1920) to over 20,000 (1938) (p. 205).

Returning to the third chapter of the book, dedicated to the 1918-1928 decade, the author notes the personnel problems (insufficiency of qualified personnel – engineers, foremen, as well as workers), the lack of construction materials and fuels, especially during the first years after the war, the consequences of the war of 1919 (the retreating Hungarian army destroyed road and railway bridges, railways, including railway signalling systems and dykes) (pp. 72-74). It was even found that one of the causes of the difficult advance of the Czechoslovak army in Slovakia during the battles with the Hungarian army was the poor conditions of the roads (p. 80).

Interestingly, in the early years of the Czechoslovak regime, the population or local administration often associated automobiles with the power in Prague and the Czechoslovak army (p. 77-79). For the same period, the author points out a great paradox: the few automobiles in Slovakia travelled on very poorly maintained roads, which led to breakdowns that could not be repaired because there were no... automobile repair facilities.

As noted above, the author proposes several case studies. One is dedicated to the so-called “Masaryk road,” built in the 1920s in the area of the Low Tatra Mountains, in a difficult terrain. There was an older road there, attested from previous centuries, but Czechoslovak planners decided to build a new one (pp. 85-102). The author is a very good historian, attentive not only to the geographical setting and the challenges of the 1920s, but also to the historical background of the region. He observes, as in other cases, the competitive relationship that developed between the old roads of the 19th century and the railway that was built in the area for economic reasons (it served local industries, especially metallurgical plants) (pp. 92-93).

Chapter IV is titled *The “democratization of motoring” period (1928-1935)* (pp. 113-172). It is a period marked by the Great Depression and its consequences, which hit the economy of Slovakia (Czechoslovakia), especially the metallurgical plants in the area of the Low Tatra Mountains. Again, the author presents the general historical framework and the consequences on

a local level very well, especially for the road sector (pp. 114-118). During this period, the effects of legislative and administrative unification within Czechoslovakia begin to emerge, new projects are made, in some cases construction commences, but funding remains chronically insufficient. However, as the author notes, it is the period in which, for the first time, roads begin to really compete with railways, but without surpassing them. He also notes that road transport does not become dominant over animal-drawn transport all across Slovakia (p. 118).

In the many projects and debates that the author discovered in the archival sources from the 1930s, we must note the emergence of new and interesting arguments. One idea promoted by the authorities and road designers was to highlight, through the chosen routes, locations with touristic potential: spa resorts, which abound in Slovakia (e.g., Trenčianske Teplice, Turčianske Teplice), mountain resorts (in the High Tatra Mountains), and caves. Additionally, the idea of building roads that highlight the landscape (pp. 142-145) also appears. This is how the tourism argument emerges in the discourse of the Slovak (Czechoslovak) authorities. However, as the years pass (especially after 1933), the Czechoslovak army begins to put more and more pressure on the civil authorities to speed up the construction of strategic roads (p. 128). Slovak decision-makers are beginning to assert the need to build roads that connect Slovakia not only to the Czech Republic, but also to the surrounding countries, in order to capitalize on the country's geographic position in Central Europe and to take advantage of international trade opportunities.

At the time, the issue of "economic nationalism" also arose, and Czech tourists were encouraged to visit Slovakia, not only to become better acquainted with their country, but also to support its less developed regions (of Czechoslovakia) in the difficult aftermath of the Great Depression. However, in the 1930s, for Czech and Moravian visitors and tourists, Slovakia was still a great unknown. Traveling through Slovakia and especially through Subcarpathian Ukraine (Zacarpattia) was an outright adventure (p. 143). To attract tourists from the western parts of Czechoslovakia and especially from abroad (p. 145), quality roads were needed, yet these were almost entirely lacking. The real situation on the ground has been described in considerable detail by several Czech travellers who journeyed by car and even by motorcycle throughout Slovakia (pp. 146-151).

During the 1930s, Slovak decision-makers, politicians and the press began to lament the underdevelopment of Slovakia's road transport infrastructure (as well as the country's overall situation), fueling the Slovaks' political dissatisfaction with the joint state with the Czechs (pp. 120-130, 138-142).

Moreover, in this chapter, the author offers us some case studies of roads built in the years 1928-1935. During the Great Depression, road construction also played a social role, providing jobs for hundreds of unemployed workers from metallurgical enterprises in the region, which were severely affected by the crisis (pp. 163-172).

The fifth and last chapter of the book is titled *The Czechoslovak Highway (1935-1939)* (pp. 173-204). The author focuses on the discussions and projects that concerned the construction of motor-only roads (motorways) in Czechoslovakia, with a specific focus on Slovakia. The author shows that, while before the Great War the automobile was regarded as a luxury or sporting item, after 1918 it became a practical means of transport for the middle class. The number of cars increased greatly and, at least in and around big cities, car traffic became more congested, so the necessity of building roads became quite obvious.

In this chapter, the author provides a very compelling historical introduction to the topic under scrutiny: the beginnings of highway construction worldwide (the United States of America in 1908 – motor parkways, Italy in the early 1920s, Germany after 1933), noting the size of this construction effort in the last two mentioned countries (pp. 173-178). He also mentions the problems caused by the poor road infrastructure during the First World War (p. 175), which gave an impetus after the war to the military commanders of European countries to press their governments for the construction of strategic roads or highways.

The same happened in Czechoslovakia, where the first highway projects were drawn up in 1934-1935, with Germany playing the role of both model and political and military threat (pp. 178-183). The so-called “country project” formulated in 1937 by the well-known businessman Jan Antonín Baťa, the owner of a very well-known and popular shoe factory, was very interesting. In his book, symbolically titled *Let's build a country for 40 million people (Budujme stát pro 40 000 000 lidí)*, he stated that “transport builds unity” and proposed an extensive network of highways and roads for the entire Czechoslovak territory (pp. 192-194). In addition to Baťa's project, there were many others, which

aimed at the administrative, economic and cultural unification of the country, but not a single kilometre of highway was built. After the *Anschluss* and the territorial losses suffered by Czechoslovakia in 1938, highway projects became more and more necessary. However, with the country's proximity to Germany, the projects started to support German interests (linking Germany to Romania via Vienna, Budapest with the access to the Black Sea, the Breslau/Wrocław - Brno - Vienna highway, etc.) (pp. 197-204).

The author concludes his analysis with the year 1938, which is historically justified (given the title of the book). However, perhaps it would have been worthwhile to extend the inquiry into the subsequent years, in order to trace the epilogue of the discussed subject. In the territory of Bohemia and Moravia, the first (few) kilometres of highway were built during the Protectorate (German occupation, 1939-1945), and work was resumed immediately after the war for several years. During the Slovak State (1939-1945), not a single kilometre of highway was built in Slovakia, only ordinary roads. In Czechoslovakia, including Slovakia, the systematic highway building effort would resume in the late 1960s, when construction of several highway segments began. By 1989, approximately 650 kilometres had been put into use (figures taken from the Czech and Slovak Wikipedia pages by the author of the review).

Returning to the book *Cesty a diaľnice na Slovensku v medzivojnovom období. Nástup automobilovej doby v znamení Československej Republiky*, published by the Slovak historian Michal Ďurčo, it is a highly remarkable volume. The author went through extensive documentary material, leading to serious, systematic research. It encompasses both the big picture and the international context, as well as detailed research (case studies). It is a book that focuses on the administrative and political aspects of the history of the road network in Interwar Slovakia, but does not neglect the cultural aspects either. The documentation is exemplary, as evidenced by the impressive bibliography at the end. With his book, Michal Ďurčo makes an important contribution to this relatively unexplored field of historical research and will hopefully motivate other historians to engage with it.

Didier Rey, *Le timbre-poste, une mémoire de l'histoire européenne 1840-2020* (Rennes : Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2025), 431 pages

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In our times, philately, and the more general habit of collecting objects such as stamps, banknotes and coins, postcards and other collectibles, is in decline. Perhaps that is why historians are increasingly turning their attention to these fascinating fields of research. Not only is (or was) philately the most widespread hobby, but the historical research dedicated to it is also surprisingly extensive. There are entire libraries dedicated to this subject around the world, a fact confirmed by the book published in early 2025 by Didier Rey, historian, professor at the University of Corsica and, last but not least, avid stamp collector. In Romania, the historical analysis of philately is in its infancy, but historical research is not lacking (see, for example, the book by Cristian Andrei Scăiceanu, *Istoria mişcării filatelice din România* [A history of the Philatelic Movement in Romania] (Bucureşti: Ed. Oscar Print, 2011).

Didier Rey's book is dedicated to European philately between 1840-2020. However, the geographic framework extends well beyond Europe, because the author (also) takes into account the huge and complex system of colonies, possessions and territories held by European countries outside the Old Continent. Nonetheless, we should note that the author starts from the premise – to which we fully subscribe – that the stamp is a keeper of European historical memory, regardless of whether it is colonial history or the history of European countries themselves. The book demonstrates a thorough knowledge of European political history (including its overseas dimensions), but also of

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modern and contemporary world history. At the same time, the author is well acquainted with the ideologies circulating in Europe during this period of almost two centuries and understands philately as an instrument for affirming, expressing and manifesting ideologies – for example, national ideologies, not coincidentally citing the fundamental book of French historian Anne-Marie Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales. Europe XVIIIe-XXe siècles* (Paris : Éd. du Seuil, 1999).

“Each stamp corresponds to an intention,” the author states in the *Introduction* of the book (p. 9), citing one of the works he consulted. These words capture the essence of the book: stamps are part of the long list of tools (institutions, press, books, images, media) which helped the State promote its political and ideological messages, but, at least in the case of stamps, it is difficult to quantify their efficiency. Moreover, the *Introduction* convincingly explains the intentions of the book and its “philosophy.”

Didier Rey's book is systematically organized, following chronological and thematic lines. Part I (chapters I-V) represents a general excursion through the beginnings of philately: the emergence of postage stamps in the context of the postal revolution and their place in modern society (as early as 1840-1850). Stamps were perceived as a sign of civilization: a country that wanted to be modern and important internationally had to print stamps, which soon came to reflect political and territorial realities, but also claims and demands (pp. 22-23). Just as early, by abandoning the representations of monarchs, the stamps issued by different countries began to express political ideas, even ideologies; for example, the South American countries printed stamps representing their *founding fathers* (Simón Bolívar and others) (pp. 63-68). Very interestingly, the author demonstrates that shortly after the spread of stamp production, they became collectibles and even investment items (pp. 27-39, 65). Additionally, he discusses the institutionalization process of philately (publications, magazines, catalogues, associations, collections, even museum collections) (pp. 41-67).

Part II investigates stamps as instruments for representing the Nation and other identity values. Even though stamps are a medium in which the possibilities of linguistic expression are very limited, Didier Rey convincingly demonstrates that the linguistic policies of the issuing states are represented on them (chapter VI, pp. 71-87). Colonial philatelic issues, to which the author will refer in the following chapters, are also analysed here. In chapter VIII,

the author traces the emergence and evolution of themes linked to identity on European philatelic issues, namely political figures, historical characters and scenes, symbols, mythology, folklore, and landscape. He also observes how much the countries' relationship with their own philatelic themes changes over time. There are numerous examples, some of which are rather spectacular – for instance, the relationship between Republican Türkiye and the Hittites or Troy, and especially the Ottoman Empire, particularly today, when we are talking about Neo-Ottomanism (p. 108). Other examples are also interesting: Spain, Belarus, Italy. As can be seen in other media used to represent the nation (for example, postcards), stamps depicting *national* landscapes contribute to the consolidation and popularization of regions deemed important to the Nation-State and, implicitly, to the development of tourism (pp. 136-138).

Chapter IX is deeply historical, tracing the changes suffered by philately at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, amid a dramatic decline in the postal circulation of stamps and in the number of collectors, as well as in the context of the growing competition from audio-visual media (which postal stamps could not realistically counteract). The author provides a compelling analysis from the perspective of cultural history, following the new relationships between the State (Nation) and the stamp, thus, implicitly, between society and stamps. There are also numerous references to literature, films, and popular culture (pp. 149-163).

Part III of the book is dedicated to colonial philately. Although Didier Rey's book focuses on Europe, it by no means neglects the colonial empires of European countries. From the very beginning of Chapter XI (*A Stamp for Every Colony*, pp. 177-184), the author notes that the development of European colonial empires had a major impact on philately, leading to the printing of a huge number of stamps for the multitude of colonies, territories and possessions spread throughout the world (p. 167). The author states that colonial stamps are a form of triumph (including domestically) and international prestige for the issuing states, and is not wrong when he speaks of a true "imperial mystique" (p. 177). Moreover, it should be noted that the author is very attentive to the colonial issue and often vehemently condemns colonial domination, exploitation and violence.

The next chapter discusses the main themes depicted on colonial stamps and analyses the extent to which the stamps reflect the political discourse and ideology of the issuing states in relation to the colonies' own

themes. To what extent do colonial stamps represent the Metropolis and to what extent do they represent the colonies? Obviously, they largely express the political discourse of the Metropolis, exemplifying the economic, cultural, social and even sanitary benefits brought to the colonies (pp. 185-219). The author drawn attention to the stamps depicting natural landscapes in the colonies as an exhortation to promote tourism (even before the First World War) (pp. 206-207). Another interesting aspect is the portrayal of the local populations on stamps (pp. 208-219).

Chapter XIII, entitled *The So-called Return of the Latins to the Maghreb* (pp. 221-233) offers us a very interesting case study that starts from the previous chapters, dedicated to colonial philately. The chapter analyses how France, Italy and Spain, the “Latin” countries that acquired colonies and possessions in the Maghreb, justified their colonial policies with the help of stamps that invoked historical references, especially to the Roman Empire. The most interesting and spectacular examples are those of Italian philately (“Roma torna!”, references to the Mediterranean as “Mare Nostrum,” the evocation of Rome’s victory over Carthage, etc.) (pp. 223-229). The following chapter deals with the participation of the colonies in the wars waged by the Metropolis (the European colonial states) and the reflection of this participation through postage stamps (pp. 235-247).

The last chapter of Part III is dedicated to the decolonization process and its consequences for philately (pp. 249-282). Didier Rey demonstrates that this historical process is accurately reflected by philatelic issues. How do colonial powers react – philatelically – to the decolonization process? What is the nature of their relationship with the former colonies? How do the newly independent states relate to the former Metropolises? The author demonstrates that the (philatelic) answers are extremely varied, because the historical process itself was long and extremely uneven. However, we can see that the new states have preserved the philatelic traditions of colonial times, and in many cases their philatelic issues were proposed, designed and even printed in their former Metropolises (pp. 251-252).

Perhaps in these chapters dedicated to colonial philately (“the paper empire,” p. 185) one can best see how spectacular and interesting philately is. Echoing both minor and major political gestures, as well as territorial assertions and claims, expressed through hundreds of thousands of philatelic issues, these small stamps illustrate the larger historical narratives. The author, a true

connoisseur of colonial philately, identifies several particularly compelling examples: some philatelic colonial issues did not even enter circulation in the respective colonies, having been strictly intended for collectors in the Metropolis; in times of war, colonial countries continue to issue stamps even for colonies that are occupied by the enemy (pp. 187-188). In World War II, the Vichy regime and Free France (*France libre*) confronted each other for the French colonies not only by military and political means, but also by philatelic means (pp. 240-241).

The chapters in part IV of Didier Rey's book investigate particular themes of European philately: the participation of European countries in wars ("the stamp in uniform," pp. 285-309), the contestation and claim of territories, revisionist actions and demographic mutations (pp. 311-335), the Cold War (pp. 337-361). In chapter XIX (*The Return of History*) (pp. 363-377), he discusses the political and territorial restructurings after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe. The Holocaust is also discussed here. These major themes of European political and military history are reflected in numerous philatelic representations, which the author of the book analyses very well: victories on the battlefield, the issue of the repatriation of prisoners of war, the triumphalist propaganda of the Soviet Union and the countries of the Communist Bloc, the representation of persecuted or contested personalities, the breakup of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, territorial revisionism; all of these give the author the opportunity to make pertinent analyses and comments that result not only in an excellent overview on European philatelic issues, but also on European history in general. Moreover, it should be noted that without a very good knowledge of European history, political and territorial developments, ideologies, national histories, personalities, and great European cultural themes, the author would not have been able to write this impressive book.

Didier Rey's book is very valuable for historical research. It illustrates the vastness and variety of historical processes that have taken place in Europe (and the rest of the world) in the last two centuries by appealing to the stamps that have reflected them with great precision. At the same time, the book is also valuable for philatelic research, because it provides the historical substance without which philately would remain a merely superficial field. Whether approached from the perspective of a historian or a philatelist, Didier Rey's book makes it clear that stamps document the explosive growth

of the world in the consciousness of the general public and of stamp users (i.e., billions of people) and collectors alike. It is an awareness of the size of the world that began with the Age of Discoveries/Age of Explorations (15th-18th centuries), reaching its peak during the Industrial Revolution, with printing and postage stamps, and continuing today, in the age of the Internet.

We must confess that we read the book alongside several online philatelic catalogues, as we wanted to admire as many of the stamps presented and discussed by the author as possible. He tried to insert numerous illustrations of the stamps into the book, but most of the images are too small and do not capture their graphic or written details. All of the stamps illustrated in the book would have deserved to appear in excellent graphic conditions, like those in the four colour pages that can be found after page 282. This is not the fault of the author, who is an exceptional historian and philatelist. This small shortcoming can be an opportunity for the philatelic reader to open their catalogues or even their own collection, and for the non-philatelic reader it can be an incentive to take up philately...

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