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The Political-Religious Mission of Papal Inquisitor John of Capistrano in Banat and Transylvania

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Abstract

In the enthusiastic atmosphere of the initialling, at Ferrara-Florence (1438-1439), of the union between the Western and the Eastern Church, in Banat and in south-west Transylvania appeared the papal inquisitor John of Capistrano, emblematic personality of the Roman missionary in the middle of the XVth century. The purpose of his arrival was that of consolidating the union between the two Churches and through this, of strengthening the common anti-Ottoman front, in the eve of the great battle of Belgrade (1456), battle in which, as a matter of fact, he gave his life, together with his main collaborator, the Romanian voivode John Hunyadi.

Keywords

Papal inquisitor, John of Capistrano, John of Caffa, Iovanychik of “Nandor”, Transylvania, religious union.

I. Historical-ecclesiastical preliminary

After many unsuccessful previous attempts, the union between the Catholic and Orthodox Church was concluded at Ferrara and Florence, in the years 1438-1439. For the Byzantines, the initiators of this act, the

document was, from a political point of view, of capital importance, given the fact that the Turks were “knocking” on the gates of Constantinople; for the Westerners, on the contrary, this moment was a good opportunity for accomplishing a union in the terms imposed by the papal Curia, that is of bringing back the Orthodox within the Catholic Church after five centuries of alienation. If with the Byzantine Empire and the states orbiting within its sphere of influence – among these Moldavia and Wallachia – the results of this political-religious act are well-known, namely that this union did not have obvious and long-lasting practical consequences, the same cannot be told about Transylvania, connected at the time, as part of the Hungarian Kingdom, with the Central-European geopolitical realities¹. The effects of the Florentine union locally were, during the last decade, the object of several pertinent researches, and were presented in a new light, without previous confessionalist partisanship².

In mid XVth century, despite the conciliatory spirit it displayed, the offensive meant to bring back the Orthodox on the “right path” of the Catholic Church was still wrapped in intolerance, papacy enjoying the support of the armed “secular arm”. At the time, the action of inquisitor John of Capistrano / Giovanni da Capestrano (1386-1456), was seen as emblematic. He was canonized by the Vatican in the year 1690 and he is known as the one who, between 1455-1456, turned – according to Orthodox historiography – the papal campaign promoting a new anti-Ottoman Christian crusade into one converting Easterners to Catholicism³.

¹ Nicolae CHIFĂR, *Istoria creștinismului*, vol. III, Editura Trinitas, Iași, 2004, pp. 212-233; Vasile V. MUNTEAN, *Istoria creștinătății de la Hristos până la Reformă*, Editura Sophia, București, 2004, pp. 329-332; Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, vol. I, Editura Trinitas, Iași, ³2002, pp. 302-305.

² For example, in the XIXth century, the Transylvanian scholar Timotei Cipariu was the first to talk about the effects of the Florentine union in Transylvania, even coming up with a figure – unrealistic, however – concerning the number of Romanians to have embraced Catholicism, namely around 30.000 people (cf. Timotei CIPARIU, *Acte și fragmente latine romanesce pentru istoria Bisericii romane mai alesu unite*, Tipariul Diecesan, Blaj, 1855, p. XVI), data nevertheless unconfirmed by any other historiographic source.

³ Zenovie PĂCLIȘANU, “Propaganda catolică între românii din Ardeal și Ungaria înainte de 1500”, in: *Cultura Creștină*, Blaj, IX (1920) 1-2, pp. 28-29; Eugen ARĂDEANUL, “Din istoria Eparhiei Aradului și Hunedoarei de la mijlocul secolului al XV-lea”, in: *Mitropolia Banatului*, Timișoara, XXXII (1982) 1-3, p. 90; Marius DIACONESCU, “Les implications confessionnelles du Concile de Florence en Hongrie”, in: *Mediaevalia Transilvanica*, Satu Mare, I (1997) 1-2, pp. 41-46; Ioan DRĂGAN, *Nobilimea*

II. A papal inquisitor in the parts of Banat and Transylvania

Italian by origin, John of Capistrano had filled the position of magistrate and governor of Perugia until the year 1416. A well-known Franciscan preacher, received the mission, since 1426, to bring order dissident of “Fratricelli” in obedience to Rome, he undertook, together with Jacob of Marchia, a vast action of elimination of the Hussite social-religious movement in Bohemia⁴. Answering an invitation by king Casimir IV Jagiellon (1447-1492), in the year 1451, he went to Poland, with a view to bringing The Orthodox Ruthenians in that kingdom under the wing of the Catholic Church. When he took part in the Győr Diet of July 1455 – the reason for summoning it was the necessity to find a solution concerning the disastrous situation of the Christian defensive facing the Ottoman danger – Capistrano came into contact with the confessional realities of the Hungarian Kingdom. From that moment on, the conversion of Romanians and Serbs to Catholicism became the goal of his new mission. As such, in the autumn of 1455, he came to Banat, specifically to the region of Cenad, Timișoara, Lipova and Caransebeș, from where he was called later on by the Transylvanian voivode John Hunyadi, governor (1446-1453) and then captain general (1453-1456) of Hungary, to his castle in Hunedoara; the presence of the inquisitor as part of the entourage of the Romanian leader was owing to the same attempts of coalising the Christian world in the form of a new crusade⁵. At that moment of his activity he must have come into contact – directly or indirectly – with the leader of the Romanian Orthodox Transylvanians, Metropolitan John, native of Kaffa in Crimea (today Feodosiya, Ukraine).

Taking advantage of his capacity as “inquisitor haereticae et schismaticae pravitatis”⁶, Capistrano launched, on 6th January 1456, from the Franciscan monastery in Hațeg, a call to all the Transylvanian nobles, asking that they burn down all the Orthodox churches on their estates,

românească din Transilvania între anii 1440-1514, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2000, pp. 100-101.

⁴ Maria SOMEȘAN, *Începuturile Bisericii Române Unite cu Roma*, Editura All Educational, București, 1995, p. 13, n. 14.

⁵ M. DIACONESCU, “Les implications confessionnelles...”, pp. 41-44.

⁶ Iulian Mihai DAMIAN, “Iancu de Hunedoara, Ioan de Capestrano și Biserica transilvană de rit răsăritean: noi mărturii despre mitropolitul Ioan de Caffa”, in: *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie*, Cluj-Napoca XLIII-XLIV (2006-2007), p. 4.

calling them “synagogues of Satan”, and that they send away their priests in the event that they refused reconfirmation in the Catholic religion; the provisions of the Florentine Council, through which the validity of the Eastern Holy Mysteries had been acknowledged, were thus violated⁷.

Moreover, around the same date, the great papal inquisitor asked John Hunyadi to have John of Kaffa arrested and brought before him in order to be tried⁸. Consequently, around the middle of the same month, while on a canonic visit in the region of Deva, Șoimoș and Lipova, the Transylvanian metropolitan was arrested and transported to Timișoara⁹, from where, on 17th January, John Hunyadi announced his imprisonment to Capistrano:

“Yesterday this disbelieving leader was brought to this place, having been arrested, and we would have gladly sent him to Your Holiness, but the horses were tired and we don’t even know where to send him to Your Holiness. This is why we insistently request that Your Holiness write to us as soon as he reads this and tell us where to send him, because, as we have ascertained Your Holiness, we shall not allow this man to stay in this Kingdom. This is why we ask that you answer as hastily as possible so that the soldiers can bring him to Your Holiness”¹⁰.

On 25th, January, the same Romanian leader let his chamberlain Ambrose know that the Orthodox hierarch had been sent to justice:

“We hereby send, through this Bejan, the disbelieving leader, and therefore assign to you the task of faith to hold the arrested

⁷ Z. PĂCLIȘANU, “Propaganda catolică...”, p. 29; Ștefan LUPȘA, “Catholicismul din Ardeal și Ungaria până în anul 1556”, in: *Candela*, Cernăuți, XXX (1929) 1-2, p. 124; Ioan LUPAȘ, *Istoria bisericească a românilor ardeleni*, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, ²1995, p. 40; M. DIACONESCU, “Les implications confessionnelles...”, p. 43; I. DRĂGAN, *Nobilimea românească...*, p. 101.

⁸ Șt. LUPȘA, “Catholicismul din Ardeal...”, pp. 141-142; Ioan D. SUCIU, Radu CONSTANTINESCU, *Documente privitoare la istoria Mitropoliei Banatului*, vol. I, Editura Mitropoliei Banatului, Timișoara, 1980, no. 45-46, pp. 93-95.

⁹ I. LUPAȘ, *Istoria bisericească a românilor...*, p. 40; M. PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe*, I, pp. 262-263.

¹⁰ Șt. LUPȘA, “Catholicismul din Ardeal...”, p. 141; I.-D. SUCIU, R. CONSTANTINESCU, *Documente...*, no. 45, pp. 93-94.

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man under close guard at Saint Peter's [church] as soon as you read this and to send him forward, following the instructions of brother Bartholomew"¹¹.

During the captivity of the Orthodox high-hierarchy, his residence, as well as "Saint Hierarch Nicholas" church in Hunedoara, serving as a metropolitan cathedral, were burned down, following the order of Capistrano, and his goods were confiscated¹². Following the same measures, on 6th February 1456, John Hunyadi ordered the castellans in Șoimoș, Hunedoara and Deva the following:

As soon as you see this, at the preaching and sound urge of devout brother Székely Mihályi, banish and send away all the Romanian priests ordained by the metropolitan and who are on your lands, after you find out that they were ordained by the so-called leader, but before that were not priests, because they would not receive the [Catholic] faith, and bring such priests yourselves before the aforementioned brother Mihályi, on the grounds of your authority, granted to you by this¹³.

On the 8th of February, in a new letter addressed to Capistrano, John Hunyadi reconfirmed the help he had promised¹⁴. The latter measure had been taken at the insistence of preacher Székely Mihályi¹⁵, who, on 10th February 1456, complained to John of Capistrano that:

"until those false priests [...] are exterminated, the conversion of the schismatic kin will not be accomplished, because in the region of Hunedoara and Deva it is said that the people are inclined to conversion, if not otherwise urged by Peter, archdeacon of the Romanian priests in Hunedoara, with his sermons like red-hot iron, which, as we have well found out, the people fear and, rather than convert, would enter fire, as taught by that man, rather than receive Catholic Baptism"¹⁶.

¹¹ Șt. LUPȘA, "Catolicismul din Ardeal...", p. 142; I.-D. SUCIU, R. CONSTANTINESCU, *Documente...*, no. 46, pp. 94-95.

¹² Zenovie PĂCLIȘANU, "În jurul ierarhiei românilor ardeleni în secolul XV", in: *Revista Istorică Română*, București, XIII (1943) 2, p. 13.

¹³ Șt. LUPȘA, "Catolicismul din Ardeal...", p. 141; I.-D. SUCIU, R. CONSTANTINESCU, *Documente...*, no. 47, pp. 95-96.

¹⁴ E. ARĂDEANUL, „Din istoria Eparhiei...”, p. 91.

¹⁵ Z. PĂCLIȘANU, "Propaganda catolică...", p. 29; Șt. LUPȘA, "Catolicismul din Ardeal...", p. 141; I.-D. SUCIU, R. CONSTANTINESCU, *Documente...*, no. 47, pp. 95-96.

¹⁶ I.-D. SUCIU, R. CONSTANTINESCU, *Documente...*, no. 48, p. 96.

He was talking about a close collaborator of Orthodox Metropolitan John, who had become, after the arrest of his hierarch, the leader of Orthodox resistance¹⁷.

The attitude of the Romanian leader seems surprising. The legitimate question is whether John Hunyadi was a supporter or an adversary of the catholicizing campaign of the great inquisitor, campaign which was targeted at his very Orthodox co-nationals. A conclusive answer is hard to phrase, as long as the documents preserved present him in both instances; the religious policy of the great crusader John Hunyadi was an obviously oscillating one anyway. Thus, if in the year 1456 he had ordered that the priests on his lands be banished, allowing the church in Hunedoara to be burned down, and Metropolitan John of Kaffa to be arrested and sent under escort, in order to be judged, to John of Capistrano, the same Romanian leader had surrounded himself with small Orthodox nobles – some of whom were priests-knezes –, had tolerated the presence of the high-hierarchy in the vicinity of his citadel and had allowed the monks near Oltenia, from Tismana and Vodița, to activate undisturbed in Transylvania. To remain in the same sphere of uncertainty, we have to mention the fact that there is no conclusive evidence that he was a fervent supporter of Capistrano, nor are there any decisions through which he specifically favored Orthodoxy¹⁸.

His negative attitude might have been a reaction to the autonomous policy of leader Vladislav II of Wallachia (1447-1456), with whom he was in conflict, the Transylvanian church embodying the uninterrupted connection of the Romanians on both sides of the Carpathians¹⁹. At the same time, John Hunyadi took into account the likely political outcome of collaboration with the Grand Inquisitor, namely a general mobilization against the Ottoman offensive, the only chance to salvage the East of Christian Europe²⁰. Therefore, a definite answer to the question asked above is hard to phrase.

¹⁷ M. PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe*, I, p. 263.

¹⁸ Z. PĂCLIȘANU, "Propaganda catolică...", p. 30; Șt. LUPȘA, "Catolicismul din Ardeal...", pp. 124-125; Ioan D. SUCIU, *Monografia Mitropoliei Banatului*, Editura Mitropoliei Banatului, Timișoara, 1977, p. 61.

¹⁹ E. ARĂDEANUL, „Din istoria Eparhiei...”, p. 91.

²⁰ M. PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe*, I, p. 263.

III. Orthodoxy and religious union

Back to what happened to the Transylvanian hierarch, he, being imprisoned in the Franciscan monastery in Buda, was submitted, in the presence of Catholic high-prelates and nobles of the Kingdom, to an inquisitorial inquiry. Following this, rebaptized in the Roman rite²¹, he was sent to Rome, in the second part of April²². He was carrying a letter of recommendation from the papal inquisitor to Domenico Capranica (1400-1458), cardinal of Fermo²³:

“I recommend the carrier of this to receive through the mediation and insistence of Your Most Glorious Eminence the mercy of His Sanctity, Our Lord. Being the captain of schismatics and heretic among the disbelieving Wallachians, the many schisms and mistakes were spread in the lower parts of the Hungarian Kingdom under his protection, and by deciding this, God was brought to light and, being brought to me, he willingly renounced all the mistakes and schisms, [promising] to obey The Holy Roman Church; that before, he had acted as a bishop, but did not know the truth of the Holy Apostolic Chair and, not being confirmed by it, ordained Romanians in his own way. Questioning him for a long time about the Holy Mysteries of Church and the main aspects of faith regarding salvation, I realized that he was completely mistaken and mislead. But, as the gates of truth and light opened to him, admitting that he had been in a bad state together with all his people, he asked to be baptized, so I arranged for him to be baptized, keeping the lawful procedure. This is why, through the authority of the Holy Apostolic Chair, he must be reinstated in his rightful place. For this I send him to Your Most Glorious Eminence, which may Jesus Christ protect for a long time, for the preservation of Catholic faith and our poor people which I especially recommend to Your Most Glorious Eminence”²⁴.

²¹ M. DIACONESCU, “Les implications confessionnelles...”, p. 44.

²² Augustin BUNEA, *Ierarchia românilor din Ardeal și Ungaria*, Tipografia Archiepiscopala, Blaj, 1904, p. 6.

²³ I.-M. DAMIAN, “Iancu de Hunedoara...”, p. 5.

²⁴ I.-D. SUCIU, R. CONSTANTINESCU, *Documente...*, no. 50, p. 98.

The same ideas are then outlined in a letter sent from Buda to Pope Callixtus III (1455-1458) the same month:

“Being in the lower regions of Hungary, where before my arrival almost everyone was schismatic and disbelieving, moreover, being urged and pressed by the leaders of the Kingdom, I preached the word of God with manhood, as God made me talk. But there was great trouble, because, being brought to light, many fought it, running to John of Kaffa, who had caused it, who had made himself the bishop, heresiarch and teacher of all the schisms and heresies. The latter, together with many followers and comrades, holds neither the Roman, nor the Greek faith. Then he happened to be brought to me by the great leader John Hunyadi, former governor of the Kingdom. I questioned him carefully and found that he had reached the position of bishop, without ever having been confirmed by the authority of the Apostolic Chair. Thus, he acknowledged neither the Church of God [the Catholic one], nor the Pope, nor the Holy Apostolic Chair, but was torn and alienated from these”²⁵.

Until recently it was known that, once in Rome, Metropolitan John was submitted to a ritual of reconfirmation as hierarch, as a result of which Pope Callixtus III sent him, as a missionary, “to Wallachia”²⁶. Two letters recently discovered in the archives of the Vatican show, however, that the hierarch’s destination was a different one, namely native Crimea. Thus, on 2nd July 1456 the Pope confirmed for “Iohannutius” the title of “Archiepiscopus Gothensis”, attributed by former Ecumenical Patriarch Gregory III, and justified the measure of rebaptizing him in the Latin religion, taken at the request of inquisitor Capistrano:

²⁵ Șt. LUPȘA, “Catholicismul din Ardeal...”, p. 143; I.-D. SUCIU, R. CONSTANTINESCU, *Documente...*, no. 49, p. 97.

²⁶ Zenovie PĂCLIȘANU, “Cel dintâiu vlădică românesc ortodox din Ardeal”, in: *Cultura Creștină*, Blaj, III (1913) 6, pp. 164-165; Ștefan METEȘ, *Istoria Bisericii și a vieții religioase a românilor din Transilvania și Ungaria*, vol. I, Tipografia Tiparului Arhidiecezan, Sibiu, ²1935, p. 63; E. ARĂDEANUL, „Din istoria Eparhiei...”, p. 90; M. DIACONESCU, “Les implications confessionnelles...”, p. 44.

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“Revered brother Iohannutius, Archbishop of Gothia, may you have health etc. [...]. In the Church of Gothia, as our revered brother Gregory, Patriarch of Constantinople, relieving our brother Macarius, archbishop of Seres, at that time archbishop of Gothia, of the bond through which he was tied to the Church of Gothia, the leader of which he was, through his ordinary authority had him transferred to the Church of Seres, then vacant [...], the aforementioned Patriarch, again by virtue of his ordinary authority, took care of the Church of Gothia, thus vacant, through you, then a monk in Saint Theodore monastery in Cizycus, the jurisdiction of Constantinople, in the order of Saint Basil, and appointed you archbishop and pastor, wholly attributing pastoral care, leadership and administration of the aforementioned Church of Gothia to you, regarding both spiritual matters and temporal ones, and you, worthy of the episcopal consecration and rise in rank, willingly accepted the diocese, as well as the promise to manage and administer its goods. Because, as the contents of the petition recently presented to us on your behalf showed, because our beloved son, John of Capistrano, member of the order of Minorite brothers, who was in Hungary, appointed by the Apostolic Chair inquisitor of heresy, found you there without any letters of episcopal consecration and rise in rank of this kind, had you arrested and, as he strongly doubted that you had been baptised according to the Evangelical rite, after you were baptized by him lawfully, sent you to us and to this authority, because your rise and episcopal consecration were questioned and due to other reasons of this kind regarding you. Thus, as no other accusation was proven right in the course of our checks, certifying the fact that what was done ambiguously must not be understood as reiterated and intending to grant you the allowance of the aforementioned Church of Gothia, hoping that you, remarkable in your enthusiasm for the Christian faith, dedicated to the knowledge of letters, careful in spiritual matters and cautious in temporal matters and endowed with many gifts of various virtues as we have found out from testimonies of trustworthy people who have been witnesses to your praiseworthy deeds in this respect, you must be the head

of the Church of Gothia in the future, with God's will, for many reasons [...]. Reinstating and placing you in the exercise of your pontifical duties and in the right of performing the canons of the Church of Gothia, we wish and by our authority we decree that your episcopal consecration and your rise in rank, done as shown above, shall be valid and shall receive full legal power [...]"²⁷.

In another letter, addressed, on 9th July 1457, to the consul and two Genovese treasurers of Kaffa, Duke Pietro di Campofregoso (1417-1459) and members of the Genovese Senate reinforced the consecration of Metropolitan "Iohannucius", holder of the chair of Mangop-Theodoro, asking the local authorities to give him support in order to extend his jurisdiction over neighboring territories:

"Our Most Holy Pope and many of the cardinals placed under our guardianship, through their letters, the revered father in Christ Ioanucius, archbishop of Gothia in the city of Kaffa, in its diocese and in other places around it, vicar general in the name of the Most Revered Father and Lord in Christ Gregory, patriarch of Constantinople, asking that, as he wishes to set off to those places to exercise his jurisdiction, we favor him and do so that he is favored and protected in everything that pertains to the aforementioned patriarch and which is in his care and administration for any reason [...]. Give him material support and help in requesting and keeping the rights of the Patriarchy and in exercising pastoral care towards the believers and even extending it, so that he doesn't lack anything that is in your power according to justice and correctness"²⁸.

IV. Metropolitan John of Caffa / Iovanychik of "Nandor"

After 1457, apparently no other details are known about his life and activity. It is assumed that he served in native Kaffa for two decades, namely until the year 1475, when the flourishing North Pontic commercial

²⁷ I.-M. DAMIAN, "Iancu de Hunedoara...", pp. 5-7, 11-12.

²⁸ I.-M. DAMIAN, "Iancu de Hunedoara...", pp. 7-8, 12-13.

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center was conquered by the Turks; with Matthias Corvin's approval he is said to have returned to the territory of the Hungarian Kingdom²⁹. Starting from the discovery that the name "Iohannutius" or "Ioanucius" in the aforementioned letters is none other than a translation into the Pontifical office Latin of the Greek anthroponym "Ioanichios" – in Romanian, Ioanichie –, under which he was known in the media of the pro-unionist patriarchal curia in exile, it has been recently proposed that "Ioanichios" of Kaffa (returned to Transylvania after 1475) should be identified with that "Iowannychik, metropolitanus Nandoralbensis"³⁰, mentioned in the royal diploma from 20th March 1479, through which rex Matthias Corvin forever spared Orthodox priests in Maramureș of any tax to the state³¹.

In light of these considerations, it seems more likely that the arrival "in Wallachia", where he presumably converted 10,000 Romanians and Slavs to "Roman Law" – the mention belongs to Jesuite Peter Skarga (1536-1612), author of *The Lives of Saints*, which appeared in Vilnius in 1579 –, happened in 1475³²; the figure representing those who embraced the union has, however, no correspondent in reality, but was a purposeful confusion with the about 10-11,000 presumed Transylvanian and Banat inhabitants converted that Capistrano mentioned in the years 1455-1456³³.

Reinstated in Hunedoara, in his old cathedral (rebuilt with the approval of John Hunyadi's sons, Ladislaus and Matthias Corvin), the Orthodox hierarch passed away after about a decade, and in 1488 a successor, Daniil³⁴, was mentioned as living in Feleac, near Cluj-Napoca. As a matter of fact, archaeological research in 1996 inside "Saint Hierarch Nicholas" church in Hunedoara confirms his burial inside the church, through the inventory of a medieval tomb discovered near the wall which separates

²⁹ Radu GĂINĂ, "Unirea ratată", in: *Magazin Istoric*, București, XLI (2007) 4 (481), p. 90.

³⁰ I.-M. DAMIAN, "Iancu de Hunedoara...", pp. 10-11.

³¹ Nicolae POPEA, *Vechea Mitropolie Ortodoxă Română a Transilvaniei, suprimarea și restaurarea ei*, Tipariul Archiepiscopiei, Sibiu, 1870, pp. 22-23; Ioan MIHĂLYI, *Diplome maramureșene din secolul XIV și XV*, vol. I, Sighet, 1900, p. 536; Teodor V. PĂCĂȚIAN, *Istoriografi vechi, istoriografi noi. Studiu critic în chestia vechei Mitropolii ortodoxe românești*, Tipografia Tipariului Archiepiscopiei, Sibiu, 1904, pp. 53-55.

³² I.-M. DAMIAN, "Iancu de Hunedoara...", pp. 4-5, 10-11.

³³ E. ARĂDEANUL, „Din istoria Eparhiei...”, p. 90; M. DIACONESCU, "Les implications confessionnelles...", p. 44.

³⁴ Șt. LUPȘA, "Catholicismul din Ardeal...", p. 127; Iosif PATAKI, *Domeniul Hunedoara la începutul secolului al XVI-lea. Studii și documente*, Editura Academiei Române, București, 1973, p. LXIII.

the nave from the narthex; suggestive are two metallic rings, one delicate, made of silver wire, on which a little heart made from the same metal was glued, the other one a signet ring, massive, on which there is the image of a chalice with another little heart and a cross (over the sealing space of the latter was glued a denarius issued by king Vladislav I Jagiellon of Hungary), symbolic representations which allow them to be attributed to a high clergyman³⁵.

At first sight, we might be tempted to believe that the different positioning of the deceased, namely east-west, and the presence of the signet ring would suggest the burial of a Latin hierarch. Yet, the presence of a western high-prelate in an Orthodox church cannot be admitted, given the fact that Catholic bishops in Transylvania were buried, according to the customs of the time, in Alba Iulia. In these circumstances, the only plausible explanation would be that the “character” buried there was Metropolitan John / Ioanichios of Kaffa himself, and the ritual “inadvertences” noticed are owing only to the post-Florentine confessional climate of the age.

Left around the crusader-voivode, John of Capistrano eventually had to reconsider his position towards the Orthodox: in balance lay the awareness of the fact that only by keeping and strengthening the union between Christians could Europe be saved from conquest, and respectively from forced Islamize³⁶. Thus, in the summer of 1456, in the eve of the great battle of Belgrade, the tone of his speech – he could probably speak Romanian, too, necessary in the missionary action he had set out to do³⁷ –, he became downright conciliatory: “Anyone who wishes to stand with us against the Turks is our friend”, among these counting “schismatic Serbs, Romanians, heretic Jews and any kind of disbeliever”³⁸. If we were to believe the documents of the time, the number of those converted by the great papal inquisitor would sum up to about 11,000³⁹. Given, however, the fact that

³⁵ Zeno Karl PINTER, Ioan Marian ȚIPLIC, “Cercetările arheologice de la biserica Sf. Nicolae din Hunedoara”, in: *Buletinul Comisiei Monumentelor Istorice*, București, X (1999) 1-4, pp. 61-62.

³⁶ I. DRĂGAN, *Nobilimea românească...*, p. 101.

³⁷ Doru RADOSAV, *Cultură și Umanism în Banat. Secolul XVII*, Editura de Vest, Timișoara, 2003, p. 53.

³⁸ M. DIACONESCU, “Les implications confessionnelles...”, p. 46.

³⁹ Z. PĂCLIȘANU, “Propaganda catolică...”, pp. 28-29; E. ARĂDEANUL, “Din istoria Eparhiei...”, p. 90; M. DIACONESCU, “Les implications confessionnelles...”, pp. 41-46; I. DRĂGAN, *Nobilimea românească...*, pp. 100-101.

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at least in Banat and south-west Transylvania, his mission, as suggested by contemporary documents, as well, ended in failure, this figure must be viewed with reserve. Indeed, despite the exceptional measures taken, the action of attracting Romanians into Catholicism failed. Conversion did not have notable success, except in some of the cnezes families, which were in full process of assertion on the social-political stage of the Hungarian Kingdom⁴⁰.

It is a known fact that taking part in the great anti-Ottoman campaigns initiated by John of Hunedoara opened to the Romanian cneziality the possibility of accession to a superior hierarchic social status, a nobiliary one. Indeed, in accordance with the customs of the time, proving faithful to the Kingdom on the battlefield was followed by the recognition of rightful properties for the ones who did it, by a royal privilege standardized; those properties had been owned previously, but only in virtue of a customary *jus keneziale*, thus lacking the regulation of their judicial status. This accession was conditioned, at least formally, by aligning to the official conciliarism, of Florentine structure, promoter of the union between the two churches⁴¹.

V. Instead of conclusions

Only seen from this angle can the passing of part of the Romanian social elite to the Catholic religion seem believable. As a matter of fact, evidence of this kind of religious translation date back to the pre-Florentine age⁴², being known the case of the fresco in Transylvanian churches in Crișcior, Ribița, Remetea, Tileagd and Mălâncrav⁴³, in which the faces of the three Hungarian holy kings Stephen I (997-1038), Ladislaus (1077-1095)

⁴⁰ Adrian Andrei RUSU, *Ioan de Hunedoara și românii din vremea lui*, Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca, 1999, p. 127.

⁴¹ In extenso: M. DIACONESCU, “Les implications confessionnelles...”, pp. 29-62; A.-A. RUSU, *Ioan de Hunedoara*, pp. 77-127.

⁴² Adrian Andrei RUSU, “Biserica românească de la Ribița (jud. Hunedoara)”, in: *Revista Monumentelor Istorice*, București, LX (1991) 1, pp. 7-8.

⁴³ Liana TUGEARU, “Biserica Adormirea Maicii Domnului din satul Crișcior (comuna suburbană a orașului Brad, jud. Hunedoara)”, in: Vasile DRĂGUȚ (ed.), *Repertoriul picturilor murale medievale din România (sec. XIV-1450)*, V/1, Editura Academiei Române, București, 1985, p. 78.

and Emeric (1196-1204) are depicted. The same unionist atmosphere is suggested in a fragment from the text of the inscription on the church of Ribița, no longer in existence today, in which there was a mention of the double ecclesiastical jurisdiction under which Zarand territory was placed at the beginning of the XVth century: “It was built under the service of pope Gregory and of Anastasius, 1404”⁴⁴.

Thus, only part of the Transylvanian knezes accepted this kind of confessional mutation, which was to have profound subsequent ethnical repercussions. The ordinary people remained Orthodox⁴⁵. Seen in this light, we can draw the conclusion that great inquisitor John of Capistrano’s mission reached only its final target, namely that of coalition the entire Christian war force against the Turkish-Ottoman troops of sultan Mehmed II (1451-1481); its secondary purpose, that is, the accomplishment of church unification in the terms set at the Council of Ferrara-Florence, continued to remain a desideratum of the Roman Curia.

⁴⁴ Silviu DRAGOMIR, “Vechile biserici din Zarand și ctitorii lor în secolele XIV și XV”, in: *Anuarul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice – Transilvania*, Cluj, 1930, pp. 233-236, 248-249; Florin DOBREI, Ioachim LAZĂR (eds.), *Cultură și spiritualitate în comuna Ribița (jud. Hunedoara). 600 de ani de la atestarea bisericii „Sfântul Ierarh Nicolae” din Ribița (1417) și 25 de ani de la reactivarea Mănăstirii Crișan (1992)*, Editura Argonaut / Editura Episcopiei Devei și Hunedoarei, Cluj-Napoca / Deva, 2017, passim.

⁴⁵ Adrian Andrei RUSU, *Ctitori și biserici din Țara Hațegului până la 1700*, Editura Muzeului Sătmărean, Satu Mare, 1997, pp. 42-43.