

# Setting up Confessional Borders: The Uniates and the Orthodox in Hunedoara County in a Time of “Temptation” (1759-1761)

**Greta-Monica Miron**

*Faculty of History and Philosophy, Babeş-Bolyai University,*

*Cluj-Napoca, Romania*

E-mail: gretamiron@yahoo.com

## **Abstract**

In this study, I aim to reconstruct the distribution of religious denominations in the county of Hunedoara and to present the dynamics of conversion from the Uniate to the Orthodox faith and vice versa in the first half of the 18th century, with particular emphasis on the Orthodox movement led by the monk Sofronie from Cioara (1759-1761). The case study reveals the balance of power between the episcopacy and the local clergy, the centralizing tendencies of the former and the centrifugal tendencies of the latter (as evinced by the ordinations that took place outside the diocese and by several priests' attempts to operate in the parish without the consent of the bishop). The presence of Orthodox priests, alongside Uniate clerics, in the parishes of this county throughout the first half of the century showed that they had become accustomed to one another, so much so that, following the movements of conversion to the Orthodox faith, just their proportions changed, in favour of Orthodoxy. The time of the Sofronian conflict was a time of harsher delineations between the Orthodox and the Uniates, primarily as an effect of Sofronie's anti-Union discourse, which took over some of the themes of the Orthodox propaganda from the past, more precisely, from the time of Visarion, and resumed the allegations that had been made against the Uniate priests, reactivating or strengthening thus some older fears instilled in the faithful. Moreover, the Uniate bishop was facing now a new crisis of Union with the Church of Rome after that triggered by Visarion. This time he found himself in a more delicate position: on the one hand, he established lines of demarcation between the Uniates and the Orthodox through the confessions of allegiance to the Union that he elaborated; on the other hand, he needed to fluidize the denominational borders and to encourage a comeback to the Union in order to recover the lost territory. The apostate priests' return to the Uniate Church was a negotiated phenomenon, which had to take into account the local context and the local resistances.

**Keywords:** Transylvania, Hunedoara County, Uniate Church, Orthodox, confessional conflict, confessional boundary, apostasy, conversion

**Rezumat: Crearea de frontiere confesionale: uniți și ortodocși într-un timp al „ispitei” în comitatul Hunedoarei (1759-1761).** Mi-am propus să reconstitui tabloul confesional din comitatul Hunedoara, dinamica alunecărilor dinspre unire înspre ortodoxie și invers din prima jumătate a secolului al XVIII-lea, cu insistență asupra mișcării ortodoxe a călugărului Sofronie din Cioara (1759-1761). Studiul de caz dezvăluie raportul de putere dintre episcopie și clerul local, tendințele centralizatoare ale celei dintâi și tendințele centrifuge ale clerului (sesizabile îndeosebi prin hirotonirile în afara diecezei, prin funcționarea în parohie fără acordul episcopal). Prezența în parohii a preoților ortodocși alături de cei uniți pe tot parcursul primei jumătăți a secolului arată că s-au obișnuit unii cu ceilalți, astfel că în urma mișcărilor ortodoxe s-au schimbat doar proporțiile, în favoarea ortodoxiei.

Confruntat cu noua configurație ecleziastică, episcopul unit s-a aflat într-o poziție delicată: pe de o parte, prin mărturisirile de unire elaborate a stabilit linii de demarcație între uniți și neuniți, pe de altă parte, avea nevoie să fluidizeze frontierele confesionale, să încurajeze revenirile la unire pentru a recupera teritoriul pierdut. Reintrarea în rândul Bisericii unite a fost o acțiune negociată în funcție de contextul local, de rezistențele locale.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** Transilvania, comitatul Hunedoarei, Biserica unită, Biserica ortodoxă, conflict confesional, frontieră confesională, apostazile, convertire

Hunedoara was a frontier zone, a safe haven for refugees from and into Banat, a county in which several religious confessions had co-existed even before the Union with the Church of Rome, due to the influences of Calvinism. It was the first area exposed to the Orthodox propaganda carried out by the monks Visarion Sarai (1744) and Sofronie of Cioara (1759-1761). In other words, it was an outpost of the movements that were directed against the Union and that fuelled or, in some cases, deepened the denominational divisions in the villages. The fact that confessional borders<sup>1</sup> were therefore erected by way of collective conversions, in a time of interfaith conflict, betrays the reaction of the majority of the community to the anti-Union discourse. As such, it is difficult to see what the reasons underlying the parishioners' personal options were, particularly given the lack of sources such as diaries, memoirs, reports or statements made by the individuals in question. In the attempt to reconstruct the confessional picture from the time of the Sofronian movement, the dynamics and the proportions of conversions from Orthodoxy to Greek-Catholicism and vice versa, the reasons for these conversions and the

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<sup>1</sup> As regards the concept of denominational borders, my theoretical reference points are the forms that Keith Luria identifies and defines in his analysis of the relations between Catholics and Protestants in 16th-century France, in *Sacred Boundaries. Religious Coexistence and Conflict in Early-Modern France*, (Washington, The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), pp. XXVIII-XXXI.

discourses the mobilized such phenomena, we have resorted, in our analysis, to the oaths/confessions of faith drawn up by the Uniate Church, as well as to statistical sources (censuses). So what do the statistics tell us about the Uniates and the Orthodox?

*Confessional diversity in figures*

Although, from a legal-institutional point of view, all the Romanians belonged to the Uniate Church in the first half of the 18th century, Orthodoxy had subsisted throughout this period, as attested by several priests who, in 1733, at the time of the census undertaken by Bishop Inochentie Micu Klein, declared that they were non-Uniates.<sup>2</sup> They represented 8.56% of all the priests who were active in the three archdeaneries which comprised the parishes in the county (Hunedoara, Dobra and Vinț). The largest number of Orthodox priests (non-Uniates, as they were called at that time) was in the archdeanery of Vinț (the future Bobâlna): 14% (10 out of 71 priests).<sup>3</sup> There were parishes in which only Orthodox priests were active (4)<sup>4</sup> and others in which both Uniate and Orthodox priests served at the altar (11).<sup>5</sup>

As such, the existence of clerics belonging to a different religious confession in the communities was not a novelty caused by the anti-Union movements. The priests felt a sense of belonging to Orthodoxy, enhanced by the ordinations outside the diocese. The Uniate and the Orthodox priests had coexisted in the diocese even before, so what changed during the pro-Orthodox movements were just the proportions between them. According to the census undertaken by the officials of Hunedoara County in 115 parishes in 1747, following the movement led by Visarion Sarai, the number of Orthodox, "schismatic" priests accounted for 61% (as the census revealed, there were 140 Uniate priests and 85 "schismatics").<sup>6</sup> Who were the ones who swelled the

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<sup>2</sup> Nicolae Togan, *Românii din Transilvania la 1733. Conscriptia episcopului Ioan In. Klein de Sadu* [The Romanians of Transylvania in 1733. Bishop Ioan In. Klein de Sadu's Census], (Sibiu: Tiparul Tipografiei Arhidieceșane, 1898), pp. 20-21, 36-39.

<sup>3</sup> In the archdeanery of Dobra, the number of Orthodox priests represented 10% of the total number of clergy (there were 6 Orthodox priests out of a total number of 58), while in the archdeanery of Hunedoara the percentage was 4.6% (6 priests out of 128), *Ibidem*.

<sup>4</sup> Only Orthodox priests were active in the parishes of Lăpușnic and Fintoag (the archdeanery of Dobra), Costești (the archdeanery of Hunedoara) and Bobâlna (the archdeanery of Vinț), *Ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> In the parishes of Mănerău, Valea Sângeorgiului, Dâncu Mare and Ocolîșu Mic, in the archdeanery of Hunedoara, and in eight other parishes from the archdeanery of Vinț (Almașu Mare, Nădăștia, Glod, Balșa, Băcăinți, Bulbuc, Acmaru and Cârnești), *Ibidem*.

<sup>6</sup> Magyar Országos Levéltár, F 71. *Commissio Aulica*, reel no. 30382, pp. 138-160; Greta Monica Miron, "Acțiune ortodoxă-acțiune catolică. Efectele mișcării lui Visarion Sarai în Hunedoara, Hațeg, Zarand și Alba," ["Orthodox Action-Catholic Action. The effects of Visarion Sarai's

ranks of the already existing Orthodox priests? Some had come from other areas (from Wallachia, Banat or Crisia).<sup>7</sup> Others, who were “unstable,” according to the census, took refuge, after Visarion’s movement, in Banat and in other areas they considered safe. Yet others officiated clandestinely, in secret. Some Orthodox priests, registered in the censuses, did not officiate (the one in Băţălar, for instance) or were not recognised as regular, ordinary priests (even though there were two Orthodox priests in Bretea Română, the data collectors noted that “*ecclesia sine ordinario popa est*”). Some Orthodox priests functioned with the consent of the local Uniate archpriest, either in vacant parishes (Simu from Ardeu), or in others in which Uniate priests officiated (Tămăşasa), revealing the fluidity and flexibility of confessional borders.

As regards the Uniate priests, in the years immediately following the movement of Visarion, their situation was also very diverse. Some were no longer allowed in their parishes and were forced to find a place elsewhere and to be accepted by other parishioners. While some solidarities were broken, others were about to be formed. It was not easy, however. Fr. Ianos, banished (“*turbatus*”) from Hunedoara, settled in Bârcea Mică but did not officiate in the church (“*ibidem sine ecclesia moratur*”), while Fr. Petru, banished from Cristur, could barely make ends meet in his new parish, Archia. Fr. Ianos was luckier: having been expelled from Leşnic, he settled in a vacant parish (Mintia), where the villagers, who had no other priest, handed him over the keys to the church (“*siquidem hi ordinarium popam non habeant, huic datae sunt claves templi*”).<sup>8</sup> Settling into a new parish was also not easy from a legal point of view: without the consent of the archpriest and of the parishioners, the priests who had newly arrived in the parishes could not be appointed ordinaries (this was the case of Fr. Gheorghe, who had taken refuge from Săcămaş in Lăpuşnic).<sup>9</sup> Some of the Uniate priests were prohibited from entering the churches by the parishioners who had left the Union three years after the movement led by the monk Visarion Sarai. They were allowed in the parishes and permitted to use the parish assets, but had remained without churches. Or, even if, thanks to the intervention of the lay officials, their churches were restored to them, the parishioners refused to enter those places of worship. The situation brought to the awareness to the Uniate Church by this survey was rather worrisome. The Uniate priests who had been driven out of churches during the time of

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Movement in Hunedoara, Zarand and Alba”], in *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai. Historia*, 50(2005), 2: 4.

<sup>7</sup> The priests Bagiu from Roşcani, Mihai from Şoimuş, and Narb and Chezan from Bozeş had come from Wallachia, Petru from Brâznic and Gavrilă from Rapolt had come from Banat, and Todor from Vălişoara and Ion from Mada had come from Crisia, *Ibidem*, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> M.O.L., F71. *Commissio Aulica*, reel no. 30382, pp. 153-154.

<sup>9</sup> Miron, “Acţiune ortodoxă-acţiune catolică,” p. 7.

Visarion's movement and who were now reinstated in their possession were shunned by the parishioners. What they had regained were churches that were to remain empty (at least for a while). They witnessed the insertion of further Orthodox priests in the parishes. The composite picture of the confessional situation in the parishes across the county, different from one parish to another, had nonetheless a common denominator: the priests and the faithful, Uniates and Orthodox, had continued to live side by side. The degree of acceptance of people with a different confessional background and of communication with them was also not the same in each and every parish. Orthodoxy had been continuously present in the parishes. Moreover, it had gained ground in some of the parishes that were to turn entirely Orthodox from 1733 to 1750. Resorting again to figures, namely the data provided by the Uniate archpriest Samoilă from Ciugud (the archdeanery of Bobâlna), we can see that in the census dated 26 July 1750,<sup>10</sup> 25.65% of the priests who were active in the archdeanery were Orthodox. In 3 of the 16 recorded parishes there were only Orthodox priests "with people" (Almașu Mare, Techereu and Băcăința),<sup>11</sup> which suggests the fact that these were Orthodox parishes. In two other parishes there were both Uniate and Orthodox priests, each with his parishioners (in Bobâlna – "a leading village," according to the archpriest – there were a Uniate priest and a Orthodox priest, while in Cib, the Orthodox community must have been much larger than the Uniate one because here a Uniate priest and four other Orthodox were active). The overall picture that was provided more than half a year later by Bishop Petru Pavel Aaron, in a communication addressed to the Gubernium on 18 February 1751, was optimistic about the state of the Union in the county.<sup>12</sup> The bishop showed that, after almost the whole county had defected, from 1749 on, the people were now slowly returning to the Union, at first in the district of Hațeg, which was brought back entirely into submission; the legitimate Uniate priests were being readmitted into the parishes, while the "schismatics" were making a

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<sup>10</sup> National Archives, Alba County Directorate (further A.N.D.J.A.), *Fond Mitropolia Română unită Blaj [The Romanian Uniate Metropolitan See Fund]*, no. 4/1750. The first three headings of this census, which include data relating to the number of churches and of active (*fungeși*) and inactive Uniate priests, can also be found in the census published by Costin Feneșan, *Izvoare de demografie istorică [Sources for Historical Demography]*, vol. I, Secolul al XVIII-lea. Transilvania [volume I, The 18th Century. Transylvania], (București, 1986), p. 275. National Archives, Cluj County Directorate (A.N.D.J.C.), *The Blaj Collection of Documents Fund*,

<sup>11</sup> In 1733, three Uniate priests were registered in Almașu Mare; in Băcăința, there were two Uniate and two Orthodox priests, while in Techereu there was only one Uniate priest, Togan, *Românii din Transilvania*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>12</sup> Silviu Dragomir, *Istoria desrobirii religioase a românilor din Ardeal în secolul XVIII [The History of Religious Liberation of the Romanians from Transylvania in the 18th Century]*, (Sibiu: Editura și tiparul Tipografiei arhidiecezane, 1920), vol. I, Annexes, p. 104; vol. II, (Sibiu, 1930), pp. 5-6.

profession of faith in the Union. The only village that had remained Orthodox ("*qui adhucdum in defectione perseverat*") was the village of Jiu, situated on the border with Wallachia. The villages located to the left and right of the river Mureş were also returned to obedience to the bishop: even the fiercest, Binţinţi, came to serve as a good example for the return to Greek-Catholic Church for other village communities. The district of Dobra had mostly been quiet, the "schismatic" priests here making a profession of faith in the union; only those of a humble condition were still Orthodox in the town of Dobra.<sup>13</sup> The bishop stated the terms of "return," of conversion from Orthodoxy to Union: "everlasting" submission to the diocesan see of Făgăraş, the attendance at the Uniate churches by the faithful, receiving the sacraments and the sacramentals according to the rite of the Greek Church and the doctrine of the Holy Fathers, the promotion by the priests, in church and outside it, of the teachings of the "Holy Union," according to the books printed recently in Blaj.<sup>14</sup> In formulating these terms, the Uniate bishop had in mind the behaviour of the faithful and of the priests during the Orthodox movement led by Visarion Sarai. He wanted the clergy to be well-disciplined, active in the parish and trained so as to be able to explain the Union and to gain the loyalty of the parishioners. The requirement that the sacraments should be administered/received according to the rite of the "Greek church" was meant to remove any suspicion of Latinization. Subsequent events showed that those commitments were not to remain in place forever, and that the promise of "everlasting" loyalty was often perceived as being devoid of binding connotations. The explanations provided by the priests regarding the significance of the religious union, if they ever went to so much trouble, were not convincing. The possibility of crossing the confessional border remained open, despite the efforts of the Uniate high prelate and the support offered to the Uniate Church by the Court in Vienna. After the movement led by Visarion, the Viennese Court took a series of measures for boosting loyalty to the union, ranging from material incentives (the increase of the canonical portion) to social (ennobling some of the priests devoted to the union) and strategic measures, such as the protection of the Uniates in relation to the local officials (the appointment, for example, of protectors of the Union).

Orthodoxy was continuously present in the diocese and, implicitly, in the county also because of the ordinations celebrated outside the diocese, especially in Wallachia and Banat.<sup>15</sup> As seen above, priests ordained by

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, I, p. 105.

<sup>15</sup> According to a statistic from 1767, compiled by Uniate bishop, most of the priests who were active in the archdeanery of Ilia had been consecrated in Arad, Vidin, Timișoara, Bucharest and

Orthodox bishops, continued to officiate in parishes with the permission of the Uniate archpriests. This seemed to be a world that had been shaped by its own rules and had some degree of autonomy from the diocesan authorities. This impression is reinforced by the request that “a sum of priests” from the archdeanery of Hunedoara submitted to the new Bishop Petru Pavel Aaron in March 1755, demanding the preservation of the *status quo*, of the *de facto* situation, so as to enable those ordained outside the diocese to be active without having to go to Blaj to receive the bishop’s blessing.<sup>16</sup> They showed that after “the removal from the hierarchical see of His Excellency Bishop Baro Clain,” the diocese was left without a bishop for so long that they had lost hope of ever having another one; they had been conferred holy orders by foreign bishops, and then they pastored their communities, some having acquired “permission” to do so either from the archbishops, or from P. P. Aaron himself, when he was a vicar, yet others “remaining on standby, awaiting patiently until His Excellency occupied the see”<sup>17</sup>. The problem was that, after the appointment as bishop of P. P. Aaron, the archpriest - “who was somewhat well-disposed until the arrival of Your Excellency,” in other words, who had been lenient towards them - “stopped” them, because he had been pressured by the high prelate, and sent them, repeatedly, to receive the Uniate blessing. But it was difficult, they said, for them to go all the way to Blaj, as they lacked the necessary means, so the solution they proposed was to be allowed to operate until the bishop came to them or until he issued another ordinance (where they hoping that he would change his mind?).<sup>18</sup> The impression is that the bishop was at their disposal, and not the other way around. He replied with some degree of irony, showing that all he did was comply with the canons, and those who had been able to go away, to foreign countries, to become ordained “would now find it more easy to travel to the bishop, in their own country, towards the end of the harsh winter...”<sup>19</sup> This episode reveals a world of Orthodox priests who were rather reluctant to accept a change in the routine that suited them and were determined to protect their comfort against any interference of the Uniate bishop. And yet, some answered the bishop’s call. Thus, in 1755-1756, 36 priests from the county, who had been ordained in Wallachia, set off for Blaj to receive

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Râmnic, Greta-Monica Miron, “...scoale-te, du-te, propoveduește...” *Biserica greco-catolică din Transilvania. Cler și enoriași (1697-1782)*, (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2004) [“...rise, go, and preach...” *The Greek-Catholic Church from Transylvania. Clergy and Parishioners. 1697-1780*], p. 206, note 205.

<sup>16</sup> The Romanian Academy Library, Cluj-Napoca Branch (B.A.F.C.N.), Ms. lat. 278, f. 26r.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 27r.

the blessing of P. P. Aaron.<sup>20</sup> The bishop proved to be very lenient towards them, probably out of a desire to draw them closer to him and to ensure that they would stay loyal to him. The blessing, whereby the priests ordained in the other dioceses placed themselves under the jurisdiction of the Uniate bishop was, therefore, a means of assisting the priests to definitively cross the border from Orthodoxy to Union.

The sources known to us so far do not detail the ways in which the Uniate priests sought to secure the allegiance of the parishioners who had been persuaded by Visarion Sarai's speech to leave the union, to declare themselves Orthodox, or the attempts to forge a dialogue between the Uniate and the Orthodox priests. What we do know is that the movement of the monk Sofronie from Cioara took place, in some parishes, amidst fragile relations between the Uniate priests and their parishioners, but also that Uniate and Orthodox priests alike could continue to live and serve God in the same village, being therefore accustomed with one another's presence. By the time the movement led by the monk Sofronie started, denominational difference had been a reality for several decades, albeit one that was not recognized in institutional and legal terms. The Court in Vienna paid ever greater attention to this reality in the fifth and sixth decades of the century, when Orthodox agitations had become the order of the day in the south of the Uniate diocese. The discussions occasioned by the ministerial conferences with reference to the religious situation of the Romanians and the possible measures to stop the Uniates' conversion to Orthodoxy revealed the concern of the Viennese circles about the state of Greek-Catholicism in the principality and about the emergence of a new attitude towards the Orthodox. Minister Bartenstein and Chancellor Kaunitz advocated the commencement of a peaceful cohabitation between the Uniates and the Orthodox through the granting of fair treatment to both parties and the relinquishment of any constraints in attracting the Orthodox to the Greek-Catholic Church. The solution was not to be one of coercion, but one of providing the faithful with religious training so that they would maintain their Uniate faith.<sup>21</sup> Such positions strongly anticipated the decree of tolerance. Issued on 13 July 1759,<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 1-14.

<sup>21</sup> Mihai Săsăujan, "Conceptul de unire bisericească în dezbaterile conferințelor ministeriale din Viena la mijlocul secolului al XVIII-lea," [The Concept of Ecclesiastical Union in the Debates of the Ministerial Conferences from Vienna in the Mid-18th Century] in *Annales Universitatis Apulensis. Series Historica*, 9/II, (2005): 63-74.

<sup>22</sup> Augustin Bunea, *Episcopii Petru Pavel Aaron și Dionisie Novacovici sau istoria românilor transilvăneni de la 1751 până la 1764* [The Bishops Petru Pavel Aaron and Dionisie Novacovici or the History of the Transylvanian Romanians from 1751 to 1764], (Blaș: Tipografia seminarului arhidieceșan, 1902), pp. 162-164.



in order to put an end to the tensions between the Uniate and the Orthodox and to strengthen the Union with the Roman Church by stopping further conversions and annihilating the Orthodox propagators, who were to be arrested, this document was far from reaching its goal. While the alarm signal sent by Maria Theresa in the parishes was that of accepting the Orthodox (who were granted the free exercise of their religion and the right to have a bishop) and of protecting the Uniates, the propagators of Orthodoxy had a different interpretation of the decree. They used it as a legal argument in their actions against the Greek-Catholic Church and that is why it fell short of bringing forth the desired peace. The anti-Union movements gained in intensity and were better coordinated over the following months thanks to the propaganda waged by the monk Sofronie and his followers.

A native of this area who made an appearance in the parishes of the county, Sofronie delivered his speech directly, not through intermediaries (unlike in the northern parts of the diocese), and the solidarity created around him was visible and, therefore, more difficult to break down. Sofronie entered the county in 1759, on his way back from Karlowitz, from where he had brought antidoron that had been blessed by the Serbian metropolitan and that he distributed to the believers as a holy object, without hesitating to denigrate the Uniate priests, whose sacraments, in particular marriage and baptism, which marked such important moments in the life of the faithful, were not valid, he said.<sup>23</sup> These accusations were not new, but had been levied throughout the county, more than ten years before, by the monk Visarion Sarai. It was supposed to remind people of their fears and distrust of the Uniate faith and priests from that time. To discredit the Uniate priests even further, a rumour was spread that they prepared the Holy Communion with eggs and butter. This rumour had several possible implications: non-compliance with the canons, seduction by offering the parishioners the pleasure of taste, so that the antidoron was invested with a worldly, mundane gustatory satisfaction. The same rumour had circulated in the diocese in the immediate aftermath of Visarion Sarai's movement, a sign that part of the Sofronian discourse of accusations against the Uniates included ideas and themes from the discourse of Visarion Sarai.<sup>24</sup>

In his arguments, Sofronie showed that in order to attract new followers to Orthodoxy, it was necessary to establish a very clear distinction

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<sup>23</sup> Bunea, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-173.

<sup>24</sup> Greta-Monica Miron, *Viață parohială și diversitate confesională în Transilvania secolului al XVIII-lea. Studiu de caz: uniți și ortodocși din comitatul Dăbâca* [Parish Life and Confessional Diversity in 18th-Century Transylvania. A Case Study: Uniates and Orthodox in Dăbâca County], (Cluj-Napoca, Ed. Mega, 2015), p. 110.

between the Uniates and the Orthodox. His example was taken up by his followers, by local leaders such as those who convened the synod of Rapoltu Mare, on 22 August 1759.<sup>25</sup> In one of the invitations to the synod, the line was drawn between being on the side of God and being on the side of the devil.<sup>26</sup> The villagers of Homorod, Văleni, Mermezeni and Bulbuc were called to the synod together with all their neighbours if they wanted to take care of their wretched souls and if their goal was to be on God's side ("...si finem habetis in Deum"), maintaining their Orthodox faith forever. A similar message was addressed to the inhabitants of Mada, Geoagiu, and the surrounding areas. Those who wanted to take care of their souls and knew not what they ought to do for this were called to the assembly in Rapoltu Mare to be taught how. They were warned that if they did not show up, they would be removed from the Orthodox faith and would be doomed to live in the proximity of the Uniate priests; although presented in a rather veiled form, the distinction between Orthodoxy and Union was the possibility of breaking out of darkness into light, gaining the kingdom of heaven versus being doomed to eternal death.<sup>27</sup>

The distinction between Union and Orthodoxy became stronger as the pro-Orthodox actions gained momentum. Sofronie's presence in the county ensured the loyalty of the believers. He was a charismatic presence, which is attested by the fact that after he was put into custody by the officials of Hunedoara County and incarcerated at Bobâlna, he was released by a few hundreds of people, led by a Orthodox archpriest from Săliște. Having been freed from prison by the power of the masses in February 1760, he fled to Zarand.<sup>28</sup> The laity who helped him must have considered him a victim of the secular authorities, and this probably increased his popularity among the faithful in the county. This was, moreover, a very active county during the Sofronian movement, gathering together and coordinating the Orthodox believers from several counties. The meeting held in Deva in the spring of 1760, during Lent, rallied the presence of the Orthodox from Alba, Zarand and the Saxon seats, who protested against the restoration to the Uniates of the churches that had been taken over by the priests who had switched to Orthodoxy.<sup>29</sup>

The effects of the Sofronian movement were quantified by the Uniate archpriests in the statistics compiled during the confessional conflict: for instance, in the statistics drawn up by the archpriest of Bobâlna, Anghel Pop,

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<sup>25</sup> Silviu Dragomir, *Istoria desrobirei religioase*, Anexe, p. 189.

<sup>26</sup> "*quia Deus reliquit duas partes, unam Deo, alteram diabolo, siquis serviet Deo ad Deum perveniet, qui autem serviet diabolo ad diabololum ibit*", *Ibidem*.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 190.

<sup>28</sup> Bunea, *op. cit.*, p. 172; Dragomir, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 155-156.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 178.

on 23 May 1761 and 28 June 1762. The archpriest concealed most of the tumult of those years and the inter-faith conflicts. He limited himself to recording the number of the Uniates and the Orthodox, their ownership over the churches and the parish lands, without highlighting the disruptive people or actions. His surveys reveal that the first conversions in the archdeanery occurred in January 1759 and the last in the autumn of next year,<sup>30</sup> many of them happening on religious holidays (the Epiphany, the Dormition, the Beheading of St. John the Baptist, or the feast of St. Dumitru). The time of religious feasts was also the time of confessional delimitations, simply because, perhaps, the parishioners went to church in greater numbers at those times and seized the opportunity to dissociate themselves from the Uniate priests. They did that by taking by force (“violenter”) the churches that had “always peacefully” belonged to the Uniates until then. Unlike in other areas of the diocese, in the upper parts of the counties Dăbâca and Cluj, for example, there were no communal conversions of the villagers and the priests alike. Uniate priests had remained in every parish, either alone, or together with a few parishioners. Sometimes the Uniate priests witnessed the apostasy of those who had officiated with them in the same village: in Homorod, the priest who served in the church at one end of the village remained Uniate, while the one who officiated in the church from the other end had committed religious apostasy; by contrast, in Bulbuc, a village with three churches, all the five priests remained Uniate, but were left without believers. Sometimes those who stood by the Uniate priests included members of the auxiliary personnel (cantors, janitors, deacons), former priests, who no longer served at the altar, certain families in the villages (the repetition of the same family names suggests that it was the members of the same family – fathers, sons and brothers – that remained Uniate).<sup>31</sup> The fact is that most of the priests here refused to let themselves be pressured or “seduced” by the parishioners, as it had happened, as shown above, in other parts of the diocese. Returning to the figures, in 1761 18 of the 27 parishes in the archdeanery (69%) had no Uniate parishioner; in all of them, however, Uniate priests were active (46 Uniate priests and 8

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<sup>30</sup> According to the information provided by the Uniate archpriest, the calendar of defections from Union in the archdeanery of Bobâlna was the following: 6 January 1759-Almaşu Mic de Munte, 11 January 1759-Techereu, Almaşu Mare, Nădăştia; 4 April 1759-Bobâlna, Rapoltu Mare, Rapolţel, 23 April 1759-Homorod; 15 August -Mada, 18 August 1759-Ardeu, 29 August 1759-Băcăinţi; 26 October 1759-Balsa; 6 December 1759-Voia, Almaşu de Mijloc; 10 August 1760-Geoagiu, 7 September 1760-Cigmău, M.O.L, *F71. Commissio Aulica*, reel no. 30381, pp. 295-304. (The census is dated Cigmău, 23 May 1761 and is signed by Anghel Pop, archpriest of Bobâlna).

<sup>31</sup> In Balşa, for example, those who stood by the three Uniate priests in the village were the family of the sacristan (*aedituus*) and that of his son, along with two others, while in Bozes, there was the family of the priest Constandin, who was a bigamist, *Ibidem*, p. 296, 301.

apostates). The parishes with the largest number of Uniate families were: Geoagiu (16 families) (a parish in which the church was occupied only in the summer of 1760), Cigmău (13 families) and Mada (11 families). The census administered by the archpriest one year later recorded an almost similar situation, with one or two more (or less) families in some of the parishes; the biggest difference was recorded in the parish of Balșa (where the number of Uniate families increased from 4 to 11).<sup>32</sup>

While in the archdeanery of Bobâlna, there were no major defections among the Uniate clergy, in the archdeanery of Hunedoara, the Uniate archpriest had committed apostasy in the summer of 1761. Because his behaviour raised doubts among the officials of the Aulic Commission, they entrusted the bishop with clarifying the issue. Therefore, the bishop summoned the archpriest before him, on 18 August, at eight o'clock in the morning, to "answer and give full assurances as to the Rt. Rev. Fr.'s faith."<sup>33</sup> We do not know whether this measure worked or not. The fact is, however, that the archpriest had apostatized, sending a worrisome signal for the Uniate Church in the parishes of his archdeanery. The bishop tried to defuse the "squabble" in the archdeanery, as he called it, as quickly as possible, by sending the vicar general, Gherontie Cotore, into the area, by ensuring the interim management of the archdeanery through the notary (of the archdeanery's synod), the priest Nicolae from Leles, and, finally, by appointing a new archpriest in the summer of the following year, namely Iosif from Hunedoara. One of the reasons why the latter proved to be an eligible candidate was his perseverance in the union, which was far from negligible in those troubled years. The bishop highlighted this in the appointment document: "... you have done your utmost to reverently manage clerical affairs, and even in these times of temptations you have unwaveringly kept the faith and endeavoured to draw others to it as well..."<sup>34</sup>

In 1762, according to the Buccowian census, the number of Orthodox priests throughout the county came to represent 20%. The increase in their number in the communities was not as spectacular as was the decrease in the number of Uniate believers, who represented, according to the same assessments, only 20% of the total population.<sup>35</sup> There was a proportionate

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<sup>32</sup> National Archives, Cluj County Directorate (A.N.D.J.C.), *Fond Colecția de documente Blaj* [The Blaj Collection of Documents Fund], no. 382.

<sup>33</sup> B.A.F.C.N., Ms. Lat. 279, f. 28-29.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 127, 131.

<sup>35</sup> In the county there were registered 233 Uniate priests, with 3,973 families of believers, and 58 non-Uniate priests, with 14,895 families of believers, according to Virgil Ciobanu, "Statistica românilor ardeleni din anii 1760-1762", [The Statistic of Transylvanian Romanians from 1761-1762] in *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie Națională*, Cluj, III(1924-1925): 699.

decrease in the number of churches belonging to the Uniate believers: 71 (25%) compared to 213 churches in the non-Uniates' possession. Summing up, the situation of the Uniate Church in the county looked like this in 1762: 80% of the priests in the county shepherded 20% of the believers, owning 25% of the churches. This was the statistical outcome of the Sofronian movement.

How and why this situation was reached, how the new majorities gained shape in the villages, what were the inner motivations that prompted the priests and the parishioners to choose one denomination over the other – these are the questions that arise from the statistics and that must largely remain unanswered. The voice of the priests who had left the union does not come through directly from the documents, nor do their personal motivations. Much less so, do the voices of the parishioners. The known sources are the declarations of return to greek-catholicism drawn up by the Uniate higher clergy, expressing their point of view on religious conversion. Their structure indicates their purpose, as they lay emphasis on two stages: the moment of “straying” or falling into “schism” and the moment of returning to the union, of awakening, of finding the right path again. Some of the priests in the county subscribed to this declaration in the autumn of 1761, having been persuaded by the vicar general of the Uniate diocese, who had been sent in the area by Bishop P. P. Aaron, worried, as seen above, about the effects that the defection of the archpriest of Hunedoara might have.<sup>36</sup> Those present at the synod of the archdeanery of Hunedoara, organized in the presence of the vicar, showed in the statement they sent the Uniate bishop that, much like children who did not know what they needed, they had trusted that “their mercenary” (hinting at Sofronie) had good intentions, but now they had woken up and were asking that the bishop, like a sweet and merciful father, should forgive their error and take them back among the Uniate clergy, whose ranks they had never truly wanted to leave, and that he should absolve them from the heresy into which they had fallen and allow them to continue to be loyal and good Uniates; they also stated that they would willingly receive and comply, until death, with the four points of Union presented by the vicar, and that they would strive to preach them to others, too. What they also requested, in fact, was to retain all their ecclesiastical prerogatives, to be protected from all the “invasions” and “calumnies” of the schismatic priests, who had been ceaselessly travelling from village to village and deceiving the people with their slanders. The tone of this confession betrayed a stance of self-victimization, for those who had left the Union described themselves as victims of the Orthodox offensive, of the Orthodox priests' power of persuasion and of the pressure they had exerted. On

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<sup>36</sup> The letter the bishop sent to General Buccow, in Sibiu, on 18 October 1761, B.A.F.C.N., *Ms. Lat.* 279, f. 37v.

the other hand, the signatories appear to have negotiated their return, making it conditional on the preservation of their prerogatives and on their protection. Did the text (which was probably composed according to the vicar's suggestions) express the reality in the parishes of those years and the sincere regret of those who had been "seduced" by the monk Sofronie? The atmosphere in the parishes must have been oppressive, considering that the Uniate archpriests had repeatedly alluded to the confusion and tensions sparked in the villages by the speeches delivered by the propagators of Orthodoxy. At the same time, however, remembering the experience of Visarion's movement, the Uniate Bishop Petru Pavel Aaron was sceptical about the sincerity with which these priests claimed to be returning to Union. He thought that submitting a collective confession was insufficient and demanded that "for reinforcing the truth each and every one should sign their name in the confession of faith, stating that they believe in and confess to the legitimacy of the four points of the Holy Union, on more than one occasion, in printed form, with our approval..."<sup>37</sup> These priests' individual acknowledgment, reinforced by their signature, of the confession of allegiance to Union was, in the bishop's view, a condition and a guarantee of the sincerity of their return to this faith, as well as a clear sign, as he insisted repeatedly in this text, that they were renouncing "hypocrisy" and false, disingenuous statements. He honestly wanted the return to Union to be made in such a way as to "avoid the hypocrisy that many are still enmeshed in to this day."<sup>38</sup> Thus, he sought to avoid casting into derision this decision of the priests, made in a troubled time, in which conversions from one denomination to the other, from Union to Orthodoxy and vice versa, were not exceptional or scarce occurrences. Whereas the episcopal vicar adapted himself to the situation that prevailed at the time of his presence in the archdeanery and tried to bring back to the Union, through a collective confession, at least some of the priests who had defected, what the bishop wanted was to determine the priests to assume responsibility for their gestures.

A collective confession in which the personal will was diluted was not, therefore, sufficient, according to the bishop. In his opinion, the return to Union was to be the result of an individual decision. What does an individual declaration of return to the Union tell us? On 1 February 1762, in Blaj, the priest Ion from Deva submitted an oath of allegiance to the Union, with his hand on the Gospel, before the vicar general and three consistorial monks.<sup>39</sup> His conversion was all the more significant since, unlike the priests who had

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<sup>37</sup> The letter of 19 September 1761, addressed to the vicar general, following the visit he had undertaken in Hunedoara, *Ibidem*, f. 33-34.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>39</sup> A.N.D.J.C., *Fond Colecția de documente Blaj*, no. 364.

signed the confession mentioned above and who considered themselves to have been the “seduced” ones, Fr. Ion admitted to having been the seducer, an active and successful propagator of Orthodoxy, as he stated. A few days before taking this oath, on 25 January 1762, he had been “investigated” and questioned by the bishop himself. He had acknowledged before the high prelate “the truth of the Holy Union” and confessed his adherence to Union through a profession of faith.<sup>40</sup> The conversion was carried out, thus, in two stages: an examination and a confession of faith before the hierarch and an oath of allegiance to the Union before some representatives of the consistory.

Fr. Ion showed in his confession of allegiance to Union that he had been ordained as a priest “in the past years” at Karlowitz, by Bishop Partenie and that, as “an ignorant man, without knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, driven solely by worldly temptations, I started chasing away the Church of God and the people from the villages around Deva, at first, together with Sofronie, diverting and alienating them from the truth of faith and of the Holy Union...”<sup>41</sup> He was repenting now, “from the bottom of my heart,” and swore that he would fix what he had broken, resisting any other temptations or threats, even the one of imprisonment. He was now confessing, “with boldness and without fear,” his adherence to the four points of Union, pledged to defend them against anyone who would blaspheme them and recognized that he was the “son of the mother Church of the east” and an obedient subject of the episcopal see in Blaj.<sup>42</sup> He was therefore committed to changing himself radically, to becoming a different person: from a blasphemer of the Union into its brave and steadfast defender and propagator.

The analysis of these confessions shows the recurrence of common themes. This indicates, I think, a scheme for the conversion of the priests proposed by the Uniate Church on the basis of the experiences encountered up to that point. This scheme comprised the following stages: the fall into “schism,” as a result of ignorance (“*tamquam infantes qui non sciunt sua necessaria*” or as “an ignorant man, without knowledge of the Holy Scriptures”), with the purpose of obtaining mundane advantages (“driven solely by worldly temptations”), and the return to Union as a voluntary act, of free will, outside any pressures, based on the recognition of the four Florentine points and the promise to further disseminate them. Like in other models of conversion, the goal was polemical, predicated on the construction of barriers

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<sup>40</sup> “...idem ante meum adhuc adventu, iuxta praevia mea directionem huc advenerat, libros scrutatus est, veritatem S. Unionis agnovit, fidem susceptit et professionem desuper solemniter fecit,” B.A.F.C.N., Ms. lat. 279, f. 42r, 79v., the letter the bishop sent to General Diettrich.

<sup>41</sup> A.N.D.J.C., *Fond Colectia de documente Blaj*, nr. 364.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*.

and lines of demarcation such as the one between the camp that was the sole preserver of the truth and the one that was in the wrong.<sup>43</sup> The return to Union meant overcoming error, giving up heresy and returning to the true faith. The reference to the fact that this return was a consensual act and not a coerced one was required by the conflictual context of that time, a time of pressures and intimidations (various Uniate priests had been constrained by the parishioners to leave the Union and Orthodox agitators had been imprisoned as disturbers of the public order, this experience leading some of them to declare that they wished to reconvert to the Uniate denomination). What was established thus, in certain cases, was yet another line of demarcation between the moment of straying – a gesture made under pressure – and the moment of returning – a gesture made willingly. The core of the confession of allegiance to Union and the dogmatic foundation of the faith confessed by those reconverted priests consisted in the four Florentine points. Yet again, it was not enough for the priests who had been brought back into the folds of Union to recognise those points: they were supposed to propagate, as well, to make them public, to defend and to uphold them. Given that the subjects who made those confessions were priests, their return to Union also entailed their commitment to spread the faith among their parishioners and, therefore, to become involved in the confessional polemics.

The time of the Sofronian conflict was a time of harsher delineations between the Orthodox and the Uniates, primarily as an effect of Sofronie's anti-Union discourse, which took over some of the themes of the Orthodox propaganda from the past, more precisely, from the time of Visarion, and resumed the allegations that had been made against the Uniate priests, reactivating or strengthening thus some older fears instilled in the faithful. Moreover, the Uniate bishop was facing now a new crisis of Union with the Church of Rome after that triggered by Visarion. This time he found himself in a more delicate position: on the one hand, he established lines of demarcation between the Uniates and the Orthodox through the confessions of allegiance to the Union that he elaborated; on the other hand, he needed to fluidize the denominational borders and to encourage a comeback to the Union in order to recover the lost territory. The apostate priests' return to the Uniate Church was a negotiated phenomenon, which had to take into account the local context and the local resistances.

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<sup>43</sup> Luria, *op. cit.*, p. 251.