Between Rome and Constantinople: The Religious Structure of Medieval Hungary (13th-14th Centuries)

IOAN-AUREL POP

1. Introduction

At least in the first two centuries of its existence (approx. 1000-1200), on the territory of the Hungarian Kingdom the Western and the Eastern tradition peacefully intermingled. The first bishop attested around a Hungarian political chieftain came at approx. 950 from Byzantium, before the mass Christianization of the Hungarians and the organisation along Western lines of the Hungarian Church[1]. But the Byzantine Church continued to exist and develop in the new kingdom. Many inhabitants of pre-Hungarian Pannonia (Slavs, Romanians, Bulgarians, Byzantine, "Latins" etc.) were Christian[2]. Those who remained after the Hungarian arrival lived in relative peace with the newly Christened[3], tolerating among them Jews, Muslims, "heretics" as well as members of the

Dr. IOAN-AUREL POP

"Babeş-Bolyai" University Cluj

so-called "heathen" cults. As new territories were conquered and annexed and new populations were colonised and settled, the ethnic and denominational mosaic of the Hungarian Kingdom diversified, according to the legendary formula (seemingly successful) of the founding king: "The kingdom with one language and one custom is weak and fragile"[4].

This harmony was abruptly put an end to by the Fourth Crusade (1204) which led to one of the most serious fractures at a continental level, influencing the entire evolution of the Hungarian medieval state. At this moment, according to the papal demands, the policy of the Hungarian rulers became intransigent with the non-Catholics[5]. The stages of this policy, the analysis of which can give estimations on the proportion occupied by the various denominations and religions in the Hungary of the 13th-14th centuries, are the following: 1) from the fall of Constantinople in "Latin" hands until the Mongolian invasion (1204-1241); 2) from the end of Bela IV's reign to the death of Ladislas IV the Cumanian (approx. 1260-1290); 3) the Angevin era in Hungary (1308-1382), focusing on the last two decades of Louis I's reign, when the most important effort to draw entire nations from Hungary and the neighbouring areas into a "Catholic unity" took place.

2. The Policy of Innocent III and Its Consequences

Pope Innocent III (1198-1216)[6] saw the conquest of Constantinople and the creation of the Eastern Roman Empire as an end of the Byzantine "usurpation" of the Roman Empire and to the "Greek schism". Consequently, "schismatics" everywere had to adopt the Roman faith. Those who would refuse were to share the fate of the Greeks who, because of their "disobedience" and "rebellion" against Rome, "had been given in prey and pillage" (*dati fuerint in direptionem et praedam*)[7]. But the confiscation of assets or their "giving in prey" was one of the punishments which, as noted in the canons, were to strike the heretics[8]. Thus, after 1204, the Holy See gradually began to identify schism with heresy and apply to the "schismatic" the rule of confiscation[9]. The theoretical basis of this identification between schism and heresy was the issue of the coming of the Holy Spirit from the Son as well (*filioque*). Innocent III suggested and his followers confirmed that the Orthodox, by rejecting *filioque*, thus making a dogmatic "error", surpassed the smaller fault of the schism (= hierarchic break with Rome) and came under the major fault of heresy[10]. Therefore, the "schismatic" men of property who would persist in their mistake were to be considered *iniusti*

possessores and subjected to expropriation, with the methods of the crusade if necessary[11].

Apostolic kingdoms, like the Hungarian one have undertaken, from the arsenal of the papacy, with the help of the monastic orders, if not the carefully developed theoretical background, then at least the practical manner of punishing the disobedient "schismatic", now unfit for land ownership and for the privileges thereby derived. The attention was mainly focused on the "Greek" (= Eastern rite) bishoprics and monasteries, which were to pass into the hands of the "Latin" (or "Latinized") prelates, respectively into those of the Western orders. Until the Tartar invasion, approximately 600 Orthodox monasteries[12] are attested in Hungary, as compared to less than 200 Catholic ones[13], evidence of the great number of Byzantine rite followers. The Orthodox monasteries could only function in the midst of a population sharing the same faith. We must admit that several of the Orthodox monasteries were situated in the east of the kingdom, namely in Transylvania and the surrounding areas, home of the Orthodox Romanians. They are difficult to fully locate (of the 600 monasteries the location of about one third has remained unknown), as many of them passed after 1204 in the hands of the Western orders and because a large part of Transylvania was not yet in the attention of the written document. Even if we were to accept that only 60 of the 600 Orthodox monasteries in the kingdom were to be found in Transylvania, Banat and Partium (a very small proportion, then) – as compared to the 25-30 Catholic monasteries still mentioned before 1241 – the fact would illustrate the massive Orthodox presence in the area. For instance, of the 20 monasteries attested before 1250 in the Banat valley of the Mureş and Crişana, more than half became Catholic in the 13th century[14]. After 1204, papal and royal documents frequently mention Eastern bishoprics and monasteries which were to pass into the hands of the Roman Church, lands, countries, districts etc. of the "schismatic" Romanians confiscated by force and taken by the Catholics[15].

In the fourth decade of the 13th century the denominational situation in Hungary had become threatening, because of the many faiths and religions. In 1231-1235, the Hungarian crown, pushed by the pope and in the framework of the opposition between Andrew II and his son Bela, had to take harsh measures persecuting and even annihilating the Jews, the Saracens and Ishmaelites (Moslem), the "false Christians" (Orthodox) and the heretics. The measures did not reach their goal and weakened the kingdom. Italian friar Rogerius, resident in Oradea for a while, has mentioned among the causes destroying the country's capability to oppose the Tartars, king Bela's

attempt to level the country: "As due to the many differences and various rites the Hungarian Kingdom had been tarnished and the king was trying hard to reform it..."[16] This adhesion to other religions and denominations than the Catholic one of a great part of the population, as well as the inefficiency of the actions meant to consolidate the Roman faith led to an interdict being laid over the Hungarian Kingdom (in 1232)[17].

3. Catholics and Non-Catholics in the Time of Ladislas IV the Cumanian

After the great Mongolian invasion, for practical reasons, the crusader spirit often came to be replaced in Hungary by negotiations and agreements with the Tartars (abroad) and by an increased tolerance towards the "schismatics" and the "heathen" (home). At the council of Lyon (1274), the Hungarian Kingdom was denounced as a place in which the Cumanians (colonised in the centre of the country in 1238-1239 and finally settled here after the Mongolian invasion) dominated the state policy and were drawing the inhabitants to the "foulness of their rite" and in which "schismatic and heretics are openly protected"[18]. The king himself was born of a Cumanian mother, had adopted Cumanian customs and, according to a narrative source, had secretly received the Orthodox baptism[19]. Consequently, the pope sent his legate Philip, bishop of Fermo, to Hungary with orders to reinstate the Catholic faith, shape the unity of Catholic faith (in 1274 the council of Lyon had once again decided upon the "union" of the two Churches) and bring the Arpadian state to the front of the crusade. These goals were to be reached by means of the Buda synod (1279), summoned by the aforementioned papal legate and which took firm measures meant to discourage and even annihilate the "Jews, Saracens, Ishmaelites and other heathen" and especially the "schismatic", with the help of the "secular arm"[20]. Shortly after the synod, pope Nicholas III asked king Ladislas to chase the "schismatic" and the "heretics" out of the kingdom[21]. At that time these measures had no practical result, as the king chose to ignore them (in spite of the repeated excommunication and of the interdiction laid on the country). Thus, the Roman faith remained for a while of secondary importance in Hungary, and at the death of the king the pope began an investigation in order to find whether Ladislas had died as "heretic", "schismatic" or Catholic[22].

4. Denominations in Angevin Hungary (1308-1382)

The Angevins initiated in Hungary a huge effort meant to level the so various structures, to impose respect and to strengthen the Western feudal system, to consolidate the Catholic faith. Religious and secular authorities kept complaining about the multitude of "false Christians", of "heretics", of "heathen" etc. in the kingdom. Even if the number of Catholics is impossible to assess, the record of papal taxes for 1332-1337[23], combined with other sources, can offer an idea on their presence in Transylvania, Banat and Partium. This document mentions 954 localities with Catholic parishes. Until the 1331-1340 decade, approximately 2,100-2,200 localities were attested in this area (some of these had disappeared in time, but this is not especially relevant for my conclusion as many villages in the region had not been mentioned in the written documents). Thus, the villages with Catholic parishes represented 43-45% of all Transylvanian localities, and the Catholic population ranged between 35-40% of the entire population (it is known that many villages with Catholic parishes also hosted Orthodox population). In other words, in the 30s of the 14th century in Transylvania the non-Catholics represented almost two thirds of the population.

Obviously, king Louis I (1342-1382) could not be satisfied with such a situation. In his time as well, documents frequently mentioned "the multitude of schismatic, Philistines (= heretics), Cumanians, Tartars, pagans and heathen" in and around the kingdom[24]. For them, the king obtained from the pope the right to found churches and the means to force them to accept conversion or chase them away. After 1360, Louis I initiated, with the help of the Franciscan order, the most important effort ever meant to accomplish the Catholic "unity of faith" in medieval Hungary. The target were, among others, the Romanians, the Serbs, the Bosnians and the Bulgarians, accused of religious errors (refusal of *filioque*, baptism, Eucharist etc.) and of secular ones: their insubordination in front of the kings, forceful recovery of the confiscated assets, "evil deeds" against the "Christians" (Catholics), "together with those outside the kingdom who share their language and sect"[25]. The solutions were conversion (putting an end to the ethnic-religious solidarity with the rest of their nations who had free states on the Hungarian border), their expulsion or even extermination. All these alternatives were recommended and applied at the time, especially after 1366. In order to convert the elite, the king stated that no one could be a real nobleman unless Catholic[26]. The same sovereign allowed the Transylvanian noblemen (at their request) to annihilate the Romanian "malefactors"[27]. In parallel, some of the

Romanians, led by their knezes and voivodes, fled this pressure and crossed the mountains in the south and east, just like Bogdan and his followers had done in 1363-1364[28].

Thus, we see the gradual emergence of the principle of the officially acknowledged religion (*religio recepta*), to become state policy after the Reformation. Starting with the 13th century the Orthodox are no longer called Christians (their denomination is a "sect"), are unfit for land ownership and are denied access to positions of power. Thus, after the measures of Louis I, the Romanian elite became unable to form an estate.

Humanist Antonio Bonfini, praising king Louis I for his great accomplishments in the field of religion, presents his measures, taken for the strengthening of the "real faith": the proposition for the Jews to "become Hungarian" by receiving the Catholic faith and their banishment from Hungary after their refusal; the support given to monastic orders; the foundation of Churches and monasteries; guidance of the "corrupted" Cumanians, of the "patarens" (heretics) of Bosnia and of other "bent peoples", of which many returned to their error etc. As result of this effort – notes Bonfini – "according to everybody in Hungary faith was so much developed and increased that more than one third of the kingdom belongs to the holy custom"[29]. Bonfini makes this estimation about one century after the events, based on reliable sources. He has no interest in diminishing the number of Catholics in the kingdom – on the contrary – and the expression "according to everybody" proves that the ratio of over one third Catholics in the Hungary of 1380 seemed natural, albeit after a proselytising effort like the one carried out by Louis the Great.

5. Conclusions

It is known that the medieval society was one of peculiarities and that the states were far from being homogeneous from an ethnical and religious point of view. This was also the situation of Hungary, a state formed through conquest, marriage alliances, agreements, vassal subordinations etc. and partly inhabited by colonists brought from both east and west. The Eastern Christians were scattered over large areas even before the arrival of the Hungarians. Then, in the second half of the 10th century, some of the Hungarians themselves adopted the Christian faith in the Byzantine form. In the 11th-14th centuries, new "schismatic" and "heretics" were included in the Hungarian Kingdom: Romanians from Transylvania, Banat, Crişana, Mara-

mureş and even from some extra-Carpathic areas, a lot of Serbs, Bulgarians, Ruthenians, Bogomil Bosnians and other "lost peoples". From the east there continued to arrive and settle in the kingdom Jews, Petchenegs, North-Iranians, Horezmians, Caucasian Alanians, Iasians ("Iazyges"), Bashkirs, Udae, Cumanians etc., all of them Mosaic, Moslem or followers of other non-Christian cults. For them the action of Catholic conversion only had formal results, since an "apostolic king" took up Cumanian customs, in 1270-1290, while another, one century later, observed that the Cumanians were still "corrupt". The conversion attempts of the 13th-14th centuries, the most important of which being the one of Louis I, strengthened the Roman Church, making more than a third of the population Catholic. Otherwise, medieval Hungary was a multiethnic and pluriconfessional state, with a non-Catholic majority, situated in an area of contacts between civilizations.

Notes

[1] N. Oikomenides, *À propos des relations ecclésiastiques entre Byzance et la Hongrie au XIe siècle: le métropolite de Turquie*, in *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes* (Bucarest), 9, 1971, no. 3, passim; Alexandru Madgearu, *Misiunea episcopului Hierotheus. Contribuţii la istoria Transilvaniei şi Ungariei în secolul al X-lea*, in *Revista istorică*, vol. V, 1994, no. 1-2, passim.

[2] Gyula Moravcsik, *Byzantium and the Magyars*, Budapest, 1970, p. 104; Ioan-Aurel Pop, *Romanians and Hungarians from the 9th to the 14th Century. The Genesis of the Transylvanian Medieval State*, Cluj-Napoca, 1996, pp. 80-90.

[3] György Györffy, *La Christianisation de la Hongrie*, in *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, XII-XIII, 1988-1989, pp. 61-73.

[4] Jenő Szűcs, *The Peoples of Medieval Hungary*, in vol. *Ethnicity and Society in Hungary*, ed. by F. Glatz, Budapest, 1990, passim; Ioan-Aurel Pop, *The Ethno-Confessional Structure of Medieval Transylvania and Hungary*, Cluj-Napoca, 1994, passim.

[5] V. Iorgulescu, *L'Église byzantine nord-danubienne au début du XIIIe siècle. Quelques témoignages documentaires aux alentours de la quatrième Croisade*, in *Byzantinische Forschungen. Internationale Zeitschrift für Byzantinistik* (Amsterdam), XXII, 1996, pp. 53-77.

[6] Marcel Pacaut, *La théocratie. L'Église et le pouvoir au Moyen-Âge*, Paris, 1989, pp. 107-120; Yves Congar, *L'Église. De Saint Augustin à l'époque moderne*, Paris, 1970, pp. 193-195.

[7] *Acta Innocentii PP. III (1198-1216)*, ed. Th. Haluscynskyi, Vaticano, 1944, pp. 277-278, apud Şerban Papacostea, *Românii în secolul al XIII-lea. Între Cruciată şi Imperiul Mongol*, Bucureşti, 1993, p. 50. See also W. de Vries, *Innozenz III. und der christliche Osten*, in *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae*, 3, 1965, pp. 87-126.

[8] H. Maisonneuve, *Études sur les origines de l'Inquisition*, Paris, 1942, pp. 170-171.

[9] Ş. Papacostea, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

[10] *Ibidem*, p. 51.

[11] *Ibidem*, p. 54.

[12] Gy. Moravcsik, *op. cit.*, p. 114. The names "Greek" and "Latin" are not used here in an ethnical sense, but in a denominational-geographical one, meaning "Eastern" (Orthodox) and respectively "Roman" (Catholic). Consequently, when we speak of "Greek monasteries" we mean monasteries of Byzantine rite.

[13] Csoka J.L., *Geschichte des benediktinischen Mönchtums in Ungarn*, Budapest, 1980; Török J., *Szerzetes- és lovagrendek Magyarországon*, Budapest, 1990.

[14] Mircea Rusu, *Biserici, mănăstiri și episcopii ortodoxe*, in *Istoria României. Transilvania*, vol. I, coord. by Anton Drăgoescu, Cluj-Napoca, 1997, pp. 300-310; Suzana Heitel, *Monumente de artă din secolele IX-XIII din Banat*, paper presented on 8 April 1997, at the Romanian Academy. See also Paul Niedermaier, *Der mittelalterliche Stadtebau in Siebenbürgen, im Banat und im Kreischgebiet*, vol. I, Heidelberg, 1996, p. 51.

[15] Ș. Papacostea, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-83; Ioan-Aurel Pop, *Romanians...*, pp. 182-187; Aloisie L. Tăutu, *Litterae Gregorii papae XI in causa Valachorum de Megesalla (Medieș in Transilvania septemtrionali) destinatae*, Romae, 1966, passim; Francisc Pall, *Romanians of Transylvania in the Middle Ages*, Cluj-Napoca, 1993, passim.

[16] Ș. Papacostea, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

[17] A. Theiner, *Vetera monumenta historica Hungariam sacram illustrantia*, vol. I, Roma, 1859, pp. 107-111.

[18] Ș. Papacostea, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

[19] Ovidiu Pecican, *Roman și Vlahata. O gestă slavo-română scrisă în Bihor (sec. XIV)*, in *Familia* (Oradea), series V, year 28, 1992, no. 5, passim.

[20] *Antiquissimae constitutiones synodales Provinciae Gneznensis maxima ex parte nunc primum e codicibus manu scriptis typis mandatae*, ed. by Romualdus Hube, Petropoli (Petersburg), 1856, pp. 159-162.

[21] Ș. Papacostea, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

[22] *Ibidem*.

[23] *Documente privind istoria României*, C. Transilvania, veac XIV, vol. III, București, 1954, pp. 41-253; Ștefan Pascu, *Voievodatul Transilvaniei*, vol. I-II, Cluj, 1971-1979, pp. 231-232, 442-457.

[24] Ioan-Aurel Pop, *The Ethno-Confessional Structure...*, pp. 28-32.

[25] Dionysius Lasic, O.F.M., *Fr. Bartholomaei de Alverna, Vicarii Bosnae, 1367-1407, quaedam scripta hucusque inedita*, in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*, 1, year 55, 1962, no. 1-2, pp. 72-76; Ș. Papacostea, *Geneza statului în evul mediu românesc. Studii critice*, Cluj-Napoca, 1988, pp. 94-95.

[26] Ș. Papacostea, *Geneza statului...*, pp. 85-88.

[27] *Documenta Romaniae Historica*, C. Transilvania, vol. XIII, București, 1994, pp. 159-165.

[28] Victor Spinei, *Moldavia in the 11th-14th Centuries*, Bucharest, 1986, pp. 204-209.

[29] Antonii Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum decades quatuour cum dimidia*, Basileae (Basel), 1568, dacadis II, liber X, p. 377.