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*Abbeys and convents in Transylvania,
between the XII and XIV centuries*

THESYS SUMMARY

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The choosing of medieval Transylvania as a research topic comes from the desire to acknowledge the importance of the voivodship in connection and its confessional ties, both with the West and East. The status of intra Carpathian Christianity in the Middle Ages is still fiery debated with consequences in the present day, reason for which this topic is often approached with other goals in mind, beyond pure historicity and love for the era.

How strong are the links with either Rome or Constantinople and how old are they, how were they born and what path did they take to reach the proto Romanians? These questions are beginning to find some answers but they deserve to be focused on some more, in order to clarify aspects regarding the medieval mentality, which was guided by theology, Law and Politics connected to their time.

In regards to the centuries chosen for study, we can only state the importance of this interval for the confessional construction and later stately construction of the region. Because of the insertion, in this interval, of the western monasticism in Transylvania, a powerful connection is created with the Occident, which can be also seen today, by comparing this land with the outer Carpathian Romanian regions. From the exceptional Cistercian mechanism to the mendicant preaching, between the XII-th and the XIV-th centuries here flourished institutions and mentalities which connect even the indigenous population with the intellectual network of the west, on top of which sits the Holly Father. The subsequent evolution of the Christian branches, be they the classical or the reformed ones, which find a place, flourish or even are born in this corner of the world, all draw roots fundamentally from the way in which the Latin and Byzantine confessional apparatuses act now. From the experience of these centuries draws breath both culture and spirituality that characterize the Transylvanian, Banat, Crişana and Maramureş regions, up to this day.

This careful observation demands an interdisciplinary effort in which history, theology and law are intermingled, like the wires of an intricate tapestry with images from a long time ago.

With regards to the chapter structure of the paper, it is composed from 7 chapters, followed by a lengthy annex. Through them we will try to go deeper into the topic, from the

general introduction, through terminology, canonical and medieval law, the historical context of the XII-XIV th centuries, down to the monastic roman orders found in the Carpathian region, analyzing their individual identity in the context of both medieval Christianity and Hungarian proximity. After this incursion, we will close the circle by describing elements of both architecture and communities of both abbeys and convents.

Taken one by one, shortly after the introduction we steer into the terminology problem, presenting the difficulties one faces from a linguistic perspective and offering our view on the concepts that we use or prefer. The discussion about the lack of proper terms in Romanian to accommodate scientific realities that are much more settled and pinpointed in other languages, is a long and arduous one and most historians are aware of it, so we will not delve in it for long. In short, there are topics that our science has long left behind and that is obvious both from the lack of progress and works in those fields and by the missing proper terms.

Going forth we will approach the judicial incorporation of the Hungarian Kingdom and Transylvania in the Roman Church. This chapter is rich in law and theology and tries to explain, to the best of our knowledge, the inner workings of the Church in our specific centuries. In our opinion, understanding this is one of the keys to understand the whole thesis. This being said, we decline our competence in both law and theology, and we state that our interpretation of both is dictated by the research in the specific circumstances of our subject. We draw information regarding Romanian territory, in the Middle Ages, that suffers influences from both internal and external forces, with more then one belief and under two empires. This context defines how Transylvania interacts thorough law and theology with both Rome and Constantinople.

In order to better see this, we reserve a place for the ecumenical councils that take place during the XII-XIV centuries, and afterwards we talk about the synods of the Hungarian Kingdoms that implement locally the decisions taken globally. Out of these, for the purpose of being brief, we will analyze only those decisions that concern the life of monks and brothers.

In the next, and third chapter, we will try to present, from a birds-eye view, the evolution of coenobitic and eremitic life, from their incipient moments and up until their introduction to Romanian space. There will be a succinct analysis of their forms of organization, and the theological and social drives behind their accelerated success. It is only logical that we go from this to the place and role of abbeys and convents, who impact society in both daily and monumental ways.

Further pursuing monks and brothers, we extract the orders that have impacted Transylvania in the Middle Ages and take a look at them individually, by pointing out their

characteristics and how they succeeded or failed in approaching the indigenous population. For many of them, archeology has identified the remains of abbeys and convents and historians have researched their documents kept in different archives. From monarchs to peasants, the sources preserve the opinions of eyewitnesses that have experience firsthand the impact of the Church through these specific instruments of Propaganda Fide. Every place and every document concerning it are listed in chronological order and a short history of that community is offered in order to make it a more complete image.

We create a link between all these points and present a list of places that talk about the life of the orders in Transylvania and the neighboring realms and take us to a much more personal, down to earth, experience of life. From gifts and donations to trials and scandals, from helping villagers to robbing them, from donating land to stealing it, the communities of monks and brothers have been an integral part of the medieval society and they acted and interacted like every other group of people, pursuing frequently self interest and personal goals, fighting for their rights and contaminating their sainthood with other worldly concerns. All this gives us the opportunity to inquire deeply in the human psyche and to analyze what's specific about these groups of individuals in particular, given their condition and place in the world.

In the next chapter, we tried our best to present the millennial connection that exists between the Hungarians and the Romanians, and which was formed during this phase of kingdom building, political strategy and spiritual mobility. Many things united these two populations during their history, but in order to better understand them we need to see also what makes them different and where are the breaches that made them two distinct civilisations, that were often at each other's throats.

History defining moments like the life of Gerrad of Cenad, the Great Mongol Invasion, or the birth of the mendicant orders and later, the Reformation played a key role in the relationship between Transylvanian populace and the Pannonian kingdom. When we speak of Transylvania during our work, we are always keeping in mind the other territories with Romanian populace majority, from the inner Carpathians. Banatul, Crişana and Maramureşul are never out of sight, for they share a common story and destiny with Transylvania, for most of the time.

Of course, interference from many other places and states are known during this time, with most members of the monastic institutions, at least in the beginning, being of Frankish, Italian or German origins. In the same way, the colonists that were brought inside the Carpathian arc in the middle ages have also played a very big role in creating the multi ethnical cauldron. Last but not least, the rise and fall of the monastic and mendicant systems are both happening in

this context, and their presence in our territory reflects that. And so, everything adds more and more complexity to an already highly complex story.

In the sixth chapter we will present, starting from the basic functions of the community in an abbey or convent, the occupations of the monks and present laity. From abbot to worker, everyone plays a role in the prosperity of the community and this role is well structured and understood by all, either from written rules or strong traditions and practices.

Also, from the beginning of the devoted life until the death of the physical body, we will present the evolution of the consecrated individual during his years in service of God. Again, this serves both as a source of information for the history lover in all of us, and also brings these people from a far away time closer to us today.

Once the place of the person is clarified, in the seventh chapter we approach the role of the buildings that make a monastery or a convent. Architecture, placing, theology and environment, all play a role in birthing these places. From their initial form, in the deserts of Egypt and Syria, to their highly complex manifestations in the Middle Ages, places of worship kept the attention of people who felt a connection to them, both from the inside and the outside.

As much as our knowledge permits it, we will take the reader through the basics of monastic architecture and construction, pointing out both the differences and the similarities between orders, first within the monastic group and second within the mendicant one.

This beautiful story of the orders of the Roman Church takes place between the XIIth and the XIVth centuries, and it develops on two different plains, one as important as the other. The first provides a wide view and it presents the Christian Europe evolving under the influence of strong players like The Holy See, The Byzantine Empire and The German Empire. In their term, these parties all suffer the pressure of the Mongol Empire, a force that appears and grows fast on the eastern horizon and affects everything for a couple of centuries, without differentiation. The second but not secondary plan, is much smaller, but at a much higher resolution. It represents the inner Carpathian arc where Transylvania and her sister regions are situated.

Focusing more on this second stage, from the analysis of the prime sources, we have found a number of 252 documents that are relevant to our topic and they can be placed in one of four categories: gifts received by the abbeys and convents, trials of the same institutions with either secular entities or other ecclesiastical ones, secular owners of abbeys and convents, or correspondence with the Holy Father regarding abbeys and convents from Transylvania. These big themes have organically organized our research, and drove us to keep this format, because

they speak of all the steps, from the birthday of a monastery, to its growth, its struggles and its inevitable decay and collapse. During their lives, they act as receptors of information from all over Europe, especially from Rome, and diffusers of said message in their corresponding territory, in a specific and individual manner. Their most basic destiny is to work towards the salvation of the people, but in order to attain it each community finds its own way.

Concerning the founding of monastic complexes, in our chosen space, from kings to minor nobles all who could afford it tried to do it. Their reasons can be either for prestige, true Christian devotion, the desire to have a family bank, to place an administrator on faraway lands, to serve as a resting place for the family or even as a defensive structure, a loophole when a castle wasn't allowed. In this way, in Hungary appear the places called "familial monasteries" (lat. *monasterium proprium*), which will trouble the Church for a long time, staying their efforts to be rid of outside and secular control and influence. The status of said monasteries is debated at length in councils in order to establish a way for them to still be the instrument of the Church and not of their patrons, especially in the case of faraway regions, like Transylvania from Rome, where the Church was struggling to keep its foothold and control over the newly conquered and converted peoples. But once this way of founding abbeys by the royal person of Stephen the Saint, it will not stop for the rest of the Middle Ages, and it will only truly slow down when the role and utility of abbeys in the eyes of laity is changed and altered.

This being said, it's understandable why a big portion of kept written sources concern gifts and offers from the laity to the abbeys and convents, over whom they try to extend their influence. The generosity of kings will be mimicked by nobles, either from pride or interest, for desire to have the ear of the Holy Father if not for the divine favor alone. As such, the very first document that we use concerns a monastery near the fortress of Bihar, a place under the protection of St. Benedict, to which King Geza the I-st donated a village with 120 houses, accompanied by an island nearby. The big number of houses is remarkable and specific to this early period of donations when the Benedictins were the first to arrive and as such had no competition in their patron's attention.

The competition will be made, but by the Benedictins to the Secular Church, because this new way of approaching the world is different and enticing, and presents an alternative towards the relativisation of moral virtues as offered by the secular clergy. The conflicts between these seemingly similar classes took many forms, and for many years the dispute took place on different grounds, be it legal ones, in courts of law, or in the fields of the country, where armed men fought for the will of their masters, both abbots and bishops.

While all this took place, the mendicants appeared and the scene changed again. These new reformist movement took consecrated life to a whole other level, trying to mimic the life of the apostles, surviving from charity alone (hence the name) and living in the moment, offering all they have and all they are to God. Compared to this view, the secluded monks in their big monasteries with great landholdings seemed shallow and greedy. But just like their predecessors, the mendicants soon assimilated to societies values and desires, which got them in courts and conflicts of all kind.

Many of these trials are recorded in a number of documents, making it easier to understand the reasoning behind their actions and also to see who were the default legal enemies and why. A great example of a legal dispute, manifested in ongoing trials from 1341 to 1385, is concerning the Abbey of Cluj-Mănăştur, which is present no less then 55 times in front of the judges.

All the aspects mentioned before are also reflected in the rich correspondence between local authorities and the Papal Chancery. The diplomatic ties are deep and highly complex, and they vary from one pope to another, being obvious that each side tries to benefit, but in different scopes and with a different vision in mind. While most of the letters sent to Rome plead for help, advice, a fair trial, confirmation of rights, or general directions, as expected from subject to a sovereign, the Holy Father often indulges, but does not abstain from pointing fingers when necessary and appealing to threats when advice and strong diplomacy fails.

One thing that is obvious after reading a lot of the documents, is that the pontiff always keeps in mind the macro political environment, based on theological thinking and goes for the long play. This strategy places Transylvania in his concern as a possibly pivotal region on the eastern European front, which comes at costs in the relationship with the Kingdom of Hungary who tries time and time again to subdue any resistance and integrate the Carpathian lands in their state. An ideological conflict of this size is bound to remain in the consciousness of peoples and have repercussions over centuries, as we now observe.

In closing of this short presentation, we affirm that our efforts have gone, to the maximum of our ability, to bring forth a work of historical synthesis regarding abbeys and convents in Transylvania, with their inner workings and goals, aspects that come both from above and below and are applied in a fractured and always vibrant world.