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**RELIGIONES AND NATIONES IN TRANSYLVANIA DURING  
THE 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY: BETWEEN ACCEPTANCE AND EXCLUSION**

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**Abstract:** At the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Transylvania had been an officially Catholic land belonging to the Kingdom of Hungary and led by an elite consisting of three nations, the Hungarian nobles (increasingly referred to as the Hungarian nation), the Saxons and the Szeklers. However, the general population, deprived of any political power, consisted of Orthodox Romanians. In other words, in Transylvania the Latin West met the Byzantine Orient. The old Hungary fell apart between 1526 and 1541, its central regions taken by the Ottoman Empire, the west and the north by the Habsburgs, while the eastern part, Transylvania, became an autonomous principality under Ottoman suzerainty. At the same time, various Protestant trends made their presence felt among the leading nations, eventually crystallizing in the form of Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Unitarianism. In the space of three decades (1540-1570) these rival denominations gained legal status and joined Catholicism as the official religions of the country. Catholicism became a marginal denomination, deprived of assets and of its hierarchy. Under Protestant pressure, the Orthodox Romanians were still kept away from power. The last three decades of the century saw some attempts at Counterreformation and at a Catholic Reformation, at a time when the principality was once again led by a Catholic dynasty. In this context, new Catholic cultural (educational) models, supported by the Jesuits, were implemented in the existing Protestant and Orthodox context, in an often desperate attempt to reverse or at least balance the situation. In this respect, the Jesuit College of Cluj (today Cluj-Napoca, Romania), established in 1581, remains a most memorable episode, whose consequences can still be seen today. By resorting to education and learning, the college was meant to influence and alter the surrounding Protestant and Orthodox world. In fact, it became an interesting facet of the multicultural, multiethnic and multiconfessional character of Transylvania, a miniature Europe inhabited by Latin, Germanic, Finno-Ugrian, Slavic peoples etc., by Byzantines, Catholics and Protestants, by rightful citizens and “tolerated” inhabitants, by masters and servants, by privileged categories and by groups merely “allowed to exist”. The troubled events of those years have left us with a model of cohabitation based on both cooperation and rivalry that truly deserves consideration.

**Key Words:** Romania, Hungary, Transylvania, Reformation, Catholic, Orthodox, tolerance, acceptance, exclusion, minorities.

## Introduction: the meanings of a place

The present study concerns a border region between Western and Eastern Europe, generically referred to as Transylvania.<sup>1</sup> Far from being a dividing line, this border was in fact an area of comprehensive contacts—encompassing several countries, among them the two neighbouring principalities (Wallachia or “Wallachia near Hungary” = Ungrovlahia, and Moldova or “Wallachia near Russia” = Rusovlahia)—that led to a combination between Western and Eastern elements of culture and civilization. The name Transylvania (initially *Ultrasilvana*) may seem rather exotic and old. In fact, despite its Latin form, it does not date back to antiquity, appearing instead at the threshold between the first and the second millennium of the Christian era and meaning “across the forests” or “beyond the forests”.<sup>2</sup> Nowadays, the name is commonly given to a vast area (nearly 100,000 square kilometres) located north of the Southern Carpathians (the Transylvanian Alps) and west of the Eastern Carpathians, accounting for approximately 40% of the surface area of Romania. The current population of Transylvania is approximately 7.5 million (more than a third of Romania’s population), of which almost 80% are Romanians, approximately 17% are Hungarians, and the rest are Roma (Gypsies), Slavs, Germans, etc.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this Transylvania, (*Erdély* in Hungarian, *Siebenbürgen* in German) still bears the marks of a troubled past considerably different from anything experienced by other regions of Europe. At a first glance, quite striking in both rural and urban areas is the close proximity of various churches, from the Byzantine and Neo-Byzantine cupolas of the Orthodox churches to the Gothic towers that pierce the urban skyline, from the round arches of the Romanesque churches to the Baroque façades of other places of worship. In some regions, in an area measuring barely a few hundred square meters, one can see Orthodox and Greek-Catholic churches standing beside Roman-Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran or Unitarian ones, all not very far from a synagogue. For instance, in the city of Cluj-Napoca (Clus, Kolozsvár, Klausenburg, Claudiopolis), the traditional capital of the province, we find today five Christian prelates of episcopal rank or higher (an Orthodox metropolitan bishop, a Greek-Catholic bishop, a Calvinist bishop, a Lutheran bishop, and a Unitarian one), as well as an episcopal vicar (Roman-Catholic), while the local Babeş-Bolyai University (with more than 50,000 undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral students and faculty members) has four faculties of theology, two having Romanian as the language of instruction and two where the teaching is done in Hungarian. Transylvania is the only place in Europe to have such a complex cultural and religious structure, the only place where Romanesque and Gothic

monuments stand beside Renaissance, Byzantine, Baroque or even Secession (Modern Style, Jugendstil, Art Nouveau) ones. East of the Transylvanian border the Romanesque style is completely absent and the Gothic blends into the Moldavian style devised in an old Romanian environment that spiritually vacillated between Constantinople (the New Rome) and Moscow (the Third Rome), following the path of “Byzantium after Byzantium” (to quote Nicolae Iorga) or of the Byzantine Commonwealth, as Dmitri Obolenski put it.<sup>3</sup> In a certain way, Transylvania is a miniature Europe, including both the main ethnic groups (Latin, Germanic, Slavic, and also Finno-Ugrian) and the main religions and denominations (Orthodox, Catholic, Mosaic, Protestant and Neo-Protestant denominations, etc.) that define our continent.

During the Middle Ages, Transylvania brought together the models of Eastern (Orthodox) and Western (Catholic) spiritual life, while the modern era further diversified the landscape by adding Protestant, Hebrew, and Neo-Protestant components. For longer or shorter periods of time, all of these models were endangered, competed with and fought one another, threatened one another's existence, but eventually coexisted and exercised mutual influences, shaping this unique Transylvanian world that, for this very reason, came to be known in some circles as a world of *tolerance*. This book is meant to show how such a thing became possible, focusing on the events that affected the spiritual life of this province in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in a general European context.

### **An outline of ancient and medieval Transylvanian history**

In ancient times, the region was mainly inhabited by the Geto-Dacians, the northern branch of the Thracians, but also by other tribes and populations, such as Scythians, Sarmatians, Celts, Illyrians, etc. Between the first century B.C. and the first century A.D., this territory belonged to the kingdoms led by Burebista and Deceballus, and then most of it was conquered by the Romans (in 101–106 A.D.) and turned into a Roman province. Because of its riches (gold, silver, etc.), Roman Dacia soon became the ancient equivalent of California, settled by countless colonists (Latin-speaking) coming from “all over the Roman world”. After the withdrawal of the Roman authorities and of a part of the population (around 271–275 A.D.), the country was ravaged by a succession of migratory populations (Goths, Huns, Gepids, Avars). Most important among the coming “barbarians” were the Slavs (which began to arrive here in the 6<sup>th</sup> century), who lived alongside the old inhabitants for several centuries before being assimilated. In the first half of the first Christian millennium, when the Romanian people was taking final shape on the Lower Danube (on both banks of the river) and around the Carpathians, these lands were reached by additional migratory populations, such as the Bulgarians (Proto-Bulgarians), the Hungarians, and—after the year 1000—

by the Pechenegs, the Cumans, and others. Around the year 900, the Hungarians who had recently settled in Pannonia began to mount raiding expeditions in various directions. They also struck east, towards Crișana (Byhar), which is the western part of today's Transylvania. After subduing the various local ethnic groups (*nationes*), they built earth, wood, and stone fortifications (*indagine*s) and sent scouting expeditions further to the east, "beyond the forest". After crossing the woods, the Hungarian bands came to the land of Duke Gelou and of his subjects, *Blachi et Sclavi* ("Wallachians and Slavs"). Not having a name for that land rich in gold, salt, and produce before which they paused for a while, they called it "the land beyond the forest" (in Hungarian, *Erdew elw*, leading to *Erdély*). In the course of time, the local inhabitants adopted into their own languages the place names given by the dominant privileged groups. The Saxons, who settled in Transylvania in the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries, called the region by a completely different name: *Siebenbürgen*, or *Septem Castra* in Latin, meaning "seven fortresses". It seems that the Romanian name, *Ardeal*, derives from the Hungarian one, while the German name led to a number of Slavic variants,<sup>4</sup> such as *Sedmogradsko*. In the modern and contemporary eras, the name used throughout Europe was the Latin one of *Transilvania*, also adopted into the Romanian literary language and used by the Romanian political and intellectual elites starting with the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The geographic boundaries of what was called Transylvania changed in the course of time: at first, the name referred to an ambiguously defined area, east of the Western Carpathians, along the Someș rivers and north of the Mureș river, ruled by the aforementioned Duke Gelou. From the year 1200 onwards, it came to designate the whole area surrounded by the Carpathians and which made up the Voivodate of Transylvania, with its seven noble counties and with the lands given to the Szeklers (*Terra Siculorum*) and the Saxons (*Terra Saxonum*, *Fundus Regius* or *Königsboden*). This was the meaning of the name Transylvania until the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when medieval Hungary fell apart. The Principality of Transylvania came into being in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, expanding the previous territory with the addition of the old Voivodate of Banat and of the "Hungarian Parts" (*Partium*), which Transylvanians also referred to as the "Western Parts" (Crișana, Sătmar, Maramureș, Middle Solnoc, Outer Solnoc, Ung, Bereg etc.). Practically, Transylvania doubled its territory, although a part of Banat was soon occupied by the Ottomans (1551-1552), and the same happened to Crișana (which had its capital at Oradea, or *Varadinum*, Groswardein, Nagyvárad) for approximately three decades, in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Besides, the Habsburgs also exerted their temporary rule over some northern territories before completely taking over the country in 1688-1699 and putting an end to the Ottoman sovereignty. Thus, in the modern and contemporary eras, Transylvania is the generic name given to a vast area that includes several provinces: Transylvania proper, Banat, Crișana, Maramureș, etc.

Just like the other Romanians living south and east of the Carpathian Mountains, the Romanians living in Transylvania are a Romance people speaking a Neo-Latin language, related to the Italians, the French, the Spaniards, the Portuguese, the Catalans, etc. They are Christians of Eastern or Byzantine Rite, gradually evangelized in the Latin language since the time of their Daco-Roman ancestors, but canonically organized from an ecclesiastical point of view only around the end of the first millennium, under the influence of the First Bulgarian Empire, which temporarily extended its rule north of the Danube and even north of the Carpathian Mountains. Thus, the Romanians are the only Romance people of Orthodox faith, with a Byzantine Church, and who used Slavonic as the language of religion, chancellery, and culture during the Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup> Their western neighbours, regardless of their origin, were Catholic and used Latin in church and as the language of culture.

The Hungarians, a Finno-Ugrian people arrived here from the east, were evangelized in the Western rite around the year 1000, when their Duke Vajk (997-1000) was baptized and became King Stephen (1000-1038). Christian Hungary gradually extended its domination over vast neighbouring territories, Transylvania among them, which were conquered and organized in keeping with the Western model between the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. After having initially hesitated between Rome and Constantinople, the Kingdom of Hungary finally embraced the Roman faith. During its conquest of the surrounding territories, Hungary also presented itself as an “apostolic kingdom” established as part of the “heritage of St. Peter”, claiming that its forceful eastward advance was part of the struggle against the “pagans, the heretics, and the schismatics”.<sup>6</sup>

In the 11<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries, the demographic and ethnic landscape of Transylvania diversified even further. The Hungarians came in from the west, chiefly along the valleys of the Mureş and Someş, during the actual conquest of Transylvania and also later on. Other ethnic groups to arrive here were the Szeklers and the Saxons, bearing no relation to one another. The Szeklers, a people of controversial origin (probably Turkic) but who spoke the Hungarian language, came from the northwest and went southeast, advancing in gradual stages together with the Hungarian conquest: initially they are mentioned in Crişana (Byhar), then on the Târnava rivers (around 1150), and then in 1190-1200 they reached the eastern and south-eastern part of Transylvania, where they still live today.<sup>7</sup> The Saxons (Germans, for the most part) came here as “royal guests” (*hospites*) from Central and Western Europe, mostly from the German areas, in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Their first colonies are mentioned in the year 1148, in the region of Alba (Fehér, Weiss). During the following decades they settled in southern Transylvania, between Orăştie and Baraolt (pushing some of the Szeklers further to the east), in the Land of Bârsa (Bürzenland) and in the region of Bistriţa (Nösen, in

north-eastern Transylvania).<sup>8</sup> Besides, it must be said that, like elsewhere in Hungary, until around the year 1350 all Transylvanian cities had a dominantly German population.<sup>9</sup> The Germans (Saxons) were those who bought here the Western urban civilization and founded the Transylvanian boroughs. The Szeklers and the Saxons, Christians of the Western rite, settled in Transylvania in an organized manner in keeping with the policy of the Hungarian central authorities, and were granted relatively compact territories and a number of privileges. Throughout the entire Middle Ages Transylvania remained a distinct country (*regnum Transilvaniae*) within the Kingdom of Hungary (*regnum Hungariae*), led by its own voivode (just like the neighbouring Wallachia and Moldova) appointed by the king of Hungary and considered to be one of the highest officials in the realm.

Between 1250 and 1550, the population of Transylvania consisted largely of Romanians, Hungarians, Saxons and Szeklers. The Romanians were Christian of the Eastern rite (Orthodox), while the Hungarians, the Saxons and the Szeklers observed the Western rite (Catholic). After the country was conquered and annexed by the Kingdom of Hungary, these different religious and ethnic groups lived together in relative peace. Under the Arpad dynasty (1000–1301), Christian Hungary was confronted with two major challenges: 1) the relatively small number of Hungarian conquerors as compared to the subjected peoples and ethnic groups; 2) the hostility of the subjected peoples towards the new rulers. In order to overcome these difficulties, ensure the proper defence of the territory and exploit its resources, the central authorities, starting with the very first king, promoted and encouraged the settlement of foreign populations, Christian as well as pagan and coming both from the East and from the West. The founding king, Stephen I, is traditionally ascribed the adage *Regnum unius linguae fragile et imbecile est* (“A country that has just one language is weak and frail”).<sup>10</sup>

Generally speaking, this policy proved advantageous for the country as a whole, even if the conquered peoples and populations had to face a number of deprivations. Eventually, they adapted or tried to adapt to the new circumstances. The Western Christian Church (Catholic)—presently the official Church—was fairly tolerant towards the Eastern Christian (Byzantines) and even towards the non-Christian groups. For instance, the Romanian elites in Transylvania, of the Byzantine rite, were recognized as an estate, just like the nobles, the Saxons, and the Szeklers, and participated in the administration of the country as a part of the estates regime. Evidence in this respect are, among other things, the country assemblies (*universitates* or *congregationes*) of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, which were periodically convened, separately from the Diets of Hungary, and which brought together nobles, Saxons, Szeklers, and Romanians.<sup>11</sup>

However, after the Fourth Crusade (1203–1204), when Constantinople and a part of the Byzantine Empire fell (for approximately five and a half

decades) into “Latin” hands (Western-Venetian), things began to gradually change (even if the Hungarian dynasty had previously shown a strong penchant towards Byzantium).<sup>12</sup> The kings were increasingly keener to play their parts as “apostolic” sovereigns and took the first measures against the “Jews, Saracens, heretics and schismatics”.<sup>13</sup> Still, these measures were applied only partially and unevenly, remaining largely inefficient, as at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century Hungary even came to be ruled by a king (Ladislaus IV) who followed the “pagan” (Cuman) customs. Additional evidence in this respect are the interdicts and excommunications passed by the Holy See against some sovereigns and against the whole kingdom, prior to the year 1300.<sup>14</sup> Starting with the 14<sup>th</sup> century, under the new Angevin dynasty, things began to change. Charles Robert (1308–1342), the first king from the House of Anjou, brought with him a new Western and Catholic spirit, and his son, Louis I (1342–1382) was even more intransigent in this respect. Consequently, Catholicism began to be seen in Hungary as the official religion (*religio recepta*), and around the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century the king embarked on a major campaign meant to bring about (also with the help of the “secular arm”) a “unity of faith” (Catholic) among the various non-Catholic peoples and populations living in the kingdom and in the vicinity of its borders.<sup>15</sup> Under these circumstances, in Transylvania, in order to recognize one’s status as a nobleman, as a member of the recognized elite, in 1366 the king requested a written deed and membership in the Catholic Church. Thus, the Romanian elite (consisting of knezes) was reduced to the status of rural magistrates (*villici*). The act in question—a solemn royal decree—was issued at the request of the estate of the Transylvanian nobles, who complained to the king about the “evildoers of any nation, more precisely, the Romanians”. Even if this policy was only partially implemented, in the space of several decades (until 1437), the Romanians ceased to be an estate (an officially recognized group) in Transylvania and were excluded as a community from the exercise of power. Of course, they continued to live according to their customs, but the leadership positions were open only to those who individually gained nobility status and converted to Catholicism.<sup>16</sup> This is how, for instance, John Hunyadi, Ștefan Mailat or Nicolaus Olahus—all three of Romanian extraction—came to be appointed to some of the highest offices in Transylvania and Hungary.

The removal of the Romanians from the “collegiate” administration of Transylvania was done for religious and not for ethnic-national reasons: the king and the Catholic estates could not conceive or accept—fully in keeping with the mentality of that time—an Orthodox official group in a position of power in an “apostolic kingdom” meant to fight precisely the Orthodox. The Catholic model was the dominant one, and all hierarchies and priorities were set accordingly. During this period of religious and denominational discrimination that followed the year 1200 and intensified in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the non-Christians began to be collectively referred to

as “pagans”, those who strayed from the “true faith” by way of dogmatic fallacies were dubbed “heretics”, while the name “schismatic” was applied to those whose hierarchy did not respect the authority of Rome. All these labels had a pejorative meaning, and they sometimes overlapped. For instance, after the Fourth Crusade, the term “heretics” was sometimes used for the “schismatics”, who were deemed to have erred from a dogmatic point of view, and not just from a formal one (the separation from Rome).<sup>17</sup> The same Byzantines were sometimes generically referred to as “Greeks” and, in their turn, the latter contemptuously called the Westerners “Latins” or “papists”.

Despite all this, the Orthodox Romanians (condemned to backwardness and living a “pitiful life”, according to some sources) often gave their support to the privileged groups of the nobles, the Saxons and the Szeklers, while the latter, in both war and peace, relied on the help of the Romanians. There were many situations of this kind, ranging from the payment of taxes and the consultations concerning certain important decisions to the defence of the realm against the Ottoman attacks. The joint anti-Ottoman struggle and, in this context, the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438–1439)—which decided on a union of the Churches—even created a sort of communion among the Christians in the region, on behalf of the common ideal and regardless of their Eastern or Western rite. The defence of Europe against the Islamic onslaught had become more important than anything else.

Transylvania ceased to exist as a voivodate within the Kingdom of Hungary in the year 1541, when this medieval kingdom fell apart under the Ottoman attacks.<sup>18</sup> Its central part (with the capital city of Buda) was directly occupied by the Ottomans and turned into a pashalik, the northwest (the future territories of Croatia and Slovakia) went to the Habsburgs, while the east (Transylvania) became an autonomous principality under Ottoman suzerainty. Each of the new rulers of these entities, with their different political status (the Habsburg emperor, the Ottoman sultan and the Transylvanian prince), claimed to be the heir to old Hungary and even assumed, concomitantly, the title of king of Hungary.

Of all the territories of medieval Hungary, Transylvania (with the western parts it had annexed) enjoyed the greatest freedom, becoming a nearly independent principality, led by its own institutions, still Christian and free to decide in matters of domestic policy. The payment of an annual tribute to the Porte, the need to have the princes confirmed by the sultan, a foreign policy subordinated to Ottoman interests and the loss of some fringe territories (in 1551–1552 a part of the Timișoara Banat became a vilayet) were almost the only conditions imposed by Istanbul likely to limit the independence of the country. The territory controlled by the prince of Transylvania nearly doubled in size (as compared to the times of the voivodate), and the country was led with the help of a Diet

(parliament) which brought together the representatives of the Hungarian nobility, of the Saxons and of the Szeklers, groups increasingly referred to as “the three nations”. However, towards the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the religious landscape of Transylvania became more complicated, in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation. Thus, in a fairly short time, nearly the entire Catholic population of the country embraced the Reformation, in the form of three denominations: Lutheranism, Calvinism and Unitarianism (Anti-Trinitarianism). Following these developments, the political and religious system of Transylvania came to be structured as a regime of “three official nations and four recognized religions”.

### **Medieval ethnic groups and estates, or the land of diversity**

In the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, Transylvania found itself between medievalism and modernity, or between tradition and renewal, also when it came to its ethnic, political, and religious structures.

The ethnic and religious diversity had been a permanent feature of this historical region since its emergence as a distinct political-geographic entity, a feature shared, from many points of view, with the whole of Hungary. For instance, the humanist Nicolaus Olahus (1493–1568), archbishop and Primate of Strigonium and then regent of Habsburg Hungary, spoke about the many nations (13 in all) living in Hungary: “In this day and age, the Kingdom of Hungary is home to a variety of nations—Hungarians, Germans, Bohemians, Slavs, Croats, Saxons, Szeklers, Romanians, Serbs, Cumans, Iazyges, Ruthenians and, finally, Turks—that all speak different languages”.<sup>19</sup> In connection to his native Transylvania, the same Olahus wrote that “It is home to four different nations: Hungarians, Szeklers, Saxons, Romanians [...]. The Hungarians and the Szeklers speak the same language, but the Szeklers have some words of their own [...]. The Saxons are said to be Saxon colonists from Germany [...]; the truth [of this statement] could be confirmed by the similarity between the languages spoken by these peoples. Tradition says that the Romanians were colonists of the Romans. Proof of this is the fact that they have many things in common with the language of the Romans, a people whose coins are found in quantities in these parts; undoubtedly, this is strong evidence of the old Roman presence in this area”.<sup>20</sup> Olahus, a humanist of Romanian extraction (as indicated by his name, which means “the Romanian”), speaks of nations in the modern Renaissance ethno-linguistic sense of the term, and not in the political sense still employed in Transylvania at that time. Relevant to him are not only the political nations—which held the power in the principality—but also the ethnic nations, organically created, which gave substance to his country and were defined by a common origin, faith, and traditions.

At the beginning, in the Middle Ages, the nations of Transylvania had been privileged groups or estates, defined mainly in political terms (in the

sense of their participation in the exercise of power) but also with a certain ethnic substratum, which gradually gained importance during the transition to the modern era.<sup>21</sup> The traditional Transylvanian estates were the nobility (*Nobiles*), the Saxons (*Saxones*), the Szeklers (*Siculi*) and the Romanians (*Valachi*). The latter, conquered and subdued by the force of arms (between the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries) and constantly the last on the list, were gradually excluded from among the estates between 1366 and 1437, mostly on account of their Eastern (Byzantine) faith. Official recognition was granted only to the Catholic estates, *recte* the nobles, the Saxons and the Szeklers. This political and religious exclusivism—absolutely normal and morally justified at that time—was gradually accompanied by an ethnic one, which emerged together with the modern nations. This process can be easily seen in the case of Transylvania. Starting with the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the national component of the local estates system gradually increased in importance and eventually became dominant. It seems that in 1463, during the reign of Matthias Corvinus (1458–1490), for the first time the word nation (*natio*) was used instead of estate (*status*), in the phrase “gathering of the three Transylvanian nations, that is, the nobles, the Szeklers and the Saxons” (*universitas trium nationum Transylvanicarum, Nobilium videlicet Siculorum atque Saxonum*).<sup>22</sup> After 1500, the estates were commonly referred to as “nations”. For instance, in 1506, the general assembly (*congregatio generalis*) of the country, gathered at Sighișoara (Scheesburg, Segesvár), made important decisions on behalf of the “three nations, that is, the nobles, the Szeklers and the Saxons” (*tres nationes, Nobiles videlicet Siculi et Saxones*)<sup>23</sup>.

### ***Universitas trium nationum* or the transformation of the estates into political-ethnic nations**

In 1541, Transylvania and the Western Parts (*Partium*) separated from Hungary (occupied by the Ottomans and the Habsburgs) and became an autonomous (semi-independent) principality under the suzerainty of the sultan.<sup>24</sup> This was the moment that consecrated new humanist terminology of the Transylvanian estates. In the decisions of the country assemblies, also known as gatherings of the counties (and later as Diets), held at Turda and Cluj between 1542 and 1548, the nobles, the Saxons and the Szeklers are referred to as “citizens” or rightful inhabitants (*domini regnicolae*) belonging to the “three nations of Transylvania” (*trium nationum Regni Transilvaniae*).

Consequently, starting with the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the regime of the Transylvanian estates became the *de facto* regime of “three nations” and was referred to as such. The word “nation” is used here in both a socio-political and an ethno-territorial sense. The nations are the elite that governed Transylvania, in the sense that it held the political power in the

state: between 1540 and 1690 (when Transylvania was a quasi-independent state) the representatives of the three nations attended 430 country assemblies (on average, nearly three a year) and had complete monopoly over the leading central and local positions in the state administration.

At the beginning, the ethnic component was less defining in the case of the nobility. In theoretical terms, the Kingdom of Hungary had a single nobility (*una eademque nobilitas*), as indicated in its basic privilege of 1222 (the Golden Bull of the nobility), but in the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries manifest distinctions began to appear among the Transylvanian nobility. In principle, a nobleman was any person of illustrious origin who served the king, fulfilled a precise military function (as knights or *milites*), and had lands and serfs—with a written donation diploma signed by the king—, regardless of their ethnic origin and (for a while) even of their religious denomination. Thus, *nobilis Hungarus* basically meant “nobleman from the Kingdom of Hungary”; still, after the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the designation was increasingly used for the Hungarian nobles, for those people of Hungarian ethnic origin who embodied the Hungarian community. This development was favoured by a natural circumstance: in a country named Hungary the nobility was or presented itself as Hungarian from an ethnic point of view (in order to enjoy the privileges granted to this group). As time went by, most of the “true nobles” of Transylvania came to be or were forced to become Hungarian and Catholic. Thus, starting with the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in official circles and in the eyes of the public, *natio Nobilium* became synonymous to *natio Hungarica*. Besides, when the Kingdom of Hungary fell apart in 1541, a part of the Hungarian elite from the central region of the country, occupied by the Ottomans, sought refuge to the east, in the Principality of Transylvania, seen by many as a continuator of Hungary and heir to the Hungarian national tradition. This perspective—albeit contradicted by an equally strong and legitimate one whereby the Principality of Transylvania continued the autonomist tradition of the homonymous medieval voivodate—was often invoked by some members of the local Hungarian elite.

From the very beginning, the nations of the Saxons and of the Szeklers were defined by a certain ethnic component, but for a considerable period of time it remained secondary to the political one. After 1541, however, the Saxons and the Szeklers increasingly highlighted their own traditions, customs, and differences from “the other”, laying more stress on their ethnic specificity.

Governing the country under the authority of the prince, the three nations theoretically held an equal share in the exercise of power (in the Diet, the vote of the three entities, nobles, Saxons, and Szeklers, carried the same weight), although in practice the Hungarian nobility had the greater influence. A country assembly of 1551 asked Emperor Ferdinand of Habsburg (who was holding temporary authority over Transylvania at that time) to agree that the “voivode” of the country should always come *ex*

*natione Hungarica*. Similarly, after the year 1600—when Transylvania had come to be officially ruled, on behalf of the Holy Roman Emperor, by a Romanian governor (prince)—the same institution (Diet) once again demanded from the Habsburg sovereign that the country be led only by officials of Hungarian origin, that the provincial army should include only members of the Hungarian nation, that local public offices should be given only to the Hungarians and to the Transylvanian patricians (Saxons), and that the assembly (Diet) be allowed to elect the president only from among the Hungarian nation.<sup>25</sup> In fact, during the principality era (1541–1691) all of the princes elected by the Diet (without any external interference) were great nobles of Hungarian ethnic origin, usually belonging to the Calvinist faith.

Especially after 1541, the estates and then the nations of Transylvania were also defined along territorial lines, although these distinctions had emerged early in the Middle Ages, during the 13<sup>th</sup> century: the nobles or the Hungarians lived and ruled in the counties, in the so-called *terra comitatense* (later referred to by some as the “Hungarian Land”), the Szeklers had their territory in south-eastern Transylvania, known as the “Land of the Szeklers” (*Terra Siculorum*, *Székelyföld*), while the Saxons inhabited the “Royal Land” or the “Saxon Land”, called in Latin *Fundus Regius*<sup>26</sup> and *Terra Saxonum*. While these territorial distinctions were not absolute, they did appear in written official documents and actually came to divide the territory of Transylvania along ethnic lines. Both the ethnic-territorial divisions and the ethnic-religious ones must be considered with due caution, as the reality was considerably more complex. Still, these divisions gradually made their way into the public conscience. The Romanians, present almost everywhere (except for the walled towns), had no official “land” or region of their own, as they were not a recognized estate (nation). This was the situation at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when three political nations, increasingly defined along ethnic and linguistic lines and still Catholic, divided Transylvania among themselves. The large Orthodox Romanian group, however, was denied any participation in the exercise of power and was not recognized as a “nation”.

#### *Scandala in ecclesia Dei*: the causes behind the religious Reformation

The already complex situation of Transylvania became even more complicated in the wake of the Protestant Reformation.<sup>27</sup> Triumphant in certain areas of Central, Western, and Northern Europe, the Reformation naturally brought about a number of such changes in Transylvania as well. However, it could not be said that the Protestant Reformation in Germany and Switzerland directly brought about religious change in Transylvania. If anything, it provided an opportunity. The actual causes behind the religious change experienced by the nations of Transylvania were the same as the ones recorded in other parts of Europe, sometimes with a local touch: the crisis of local Catholicism; the conflict that opposed the

Transylvanian Saxons (organized into an old chapter at Sibiu/Hermannstadt/Nagy Szeben and then into two deaneries at Sibiu and Braşov/Kronstadt/Brassò) to the Bishopric of Transylvania with the seat at Alba-Iulia/Gyulafehérvár/Weissenburg and to the Archbishopric of Hungary with the seat at Strigonium/Esztergom/Gran; the frequent appointment at the head of the Catholic bishoprics of Alba-Iulia and Oradea/Nagyvárad/Grossvardein of prelates of modest vocation and deprived of the necessary qualities, interested only in securing the income of the bishoprics, and sometimes even of underage children; the internal power struggle in Hungary and Transylvania after King Louis II was killed in battle at Mohács in 1526; the little confidence of the people in a clergy increasingly interested in secular matters and in temporal power; the “scandals in the Church of Our Lord” (*scandala in ecclesia Dei*).<sup>28</sup> The Transylvanian estates wanted freedom from the central royal authority and also from the authority of the Church, dominated by the powerful Catholic hierarchy.

The secular authorities and the Catholic Church took firm action in order to prevent the dissemination of Protestant ideas: persecutions, the burning of “heretics” at the stake between 1525 and 1545, the pursuit and punishment of those who circulated the new ideas, the recourse to the military might of the Habsburgs, etc. The response was the creation of the Principality of Transylvania, separate from Hungary, and the local armed resistance, supported by the two Romanian principalities situated beyond the Carpathians and by the Ottoman sultans.

The most receptive group was that of the Saxons who, for centuries, had harboured considerable discontent with a Catholic Bishopric of Transylvania always eager to infringe upon their ecclesiastical autonomy. Besides, to a much greater extent than the Hungarians or the Szeklers, the Saxons would send their sons to study at Western universities, especially German ones. These students returned home with new ideas and concepts, and often continued to exchange letters with their friends abroad. Thus, the ideas of humanism and of a reformation of the Catholic Church found a fertile ground in Transylvania, in an initial stage mostly among the local Saxons. Also, many Hungarian nobles and burghers were unhappy with Catholicism and especially with the Catholic clergy.

### **The emergence and rise of Protestant denominations in Transylvania**

In the existing context, the Reformation enjoyed rapid success in Transylvania, being embraced almost instantly by two of the three estates or political nations—the Saxons and the Hungarian nobles—and even by the Prince (“King”) John Sigismund, who in his lifetime belonged to four denominations: Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist and Unitarian (Anti-Trinitarian). The Saxons, who, as we have seen, had close contacts with

Germany and were unhappy with the Catholic hierarchy, were the first to accept the Lutheran Reformation, especially through the endeavours of learned pastors such as Johannes Honterus and Valentin Wagner. The first centre of the (Lutheran) Reformation was Braşov, especially because of the dominant role played by Honterus. Then, the centre of Lutheranism moved to Sibiu, the capital of the “Saxon Land”. At the same time, the Hungarian nobles, mainly those from Banat and the Western Parts, also embraced Lutheranism and set up their own hierarchy, different from the Saxon one. Shortly afterwards, however, Calvinism spread all over Transylvania, especially among the Lutheran nobles and the Hungarian commoners. The city of Cluj, the most important nobiliary city in the country, became the stronghold of Calvinism. Soon, nearly all the nobles in the principality (the nobiliary nation) were Calvinist. An important role in the dissemination of Calvinism and in the organization of the Calvinist Church in Transylvania was played by two local Germans, Kaspar Helth (Heltai Gáspár in Hungarian) and Francis David (both initially Lutheran). The latter, Francis David, after becoming the very leader of the Calvinist Church, converted to Unitarianism (Anti-Trinitarianism), just like the prince himself, and organized the new Unitarian Church, which *de plano* refuted the Holy Trinity.<sup>29</sup> The doctrine was far from new (it had started with the teachings of Arius, a priest living in Egyptian Alexandria in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D.) and had not emerged in Transylvania (but rather in Venice and then in Poland, in the 1540s, through the agency of Giorgio Blandrata, Laelio Socinus, Faustus Socinus, Francesco Stancarus, Mathias Vehe Glirius etc.), but it was here that it rose to prominence and gained a solid foothold. The mostly radical Unitarian ideas (forming several trends, among which the Judeo-Christian one of the Sabbatarians) enjoyed initial success but then lost some of their supporters, especially among the less wealthy Hungarian-speaking communities of Cluj, Turda/Torda/Thorenburg and Arieş/Aranyos. Between 1566 and 1570, the city of Cluj became the world centre of Anti-Trinitarianism.

Between 1542 and 1572, the new denominations became better organized and were officially recognized by the Transylvanian assemblies. In 1564, the “Cluj religion” (Calvinism) and the older one “from Sibiu” (Lutheranism) were declared “free or official religions” by the country assembly. In 1572, the Diet granted similar status to the new Unitarian denomination, forbidding any future religious “innovation”. The Reformation, chiefly in the form of Calvinism and Unitarianism, enjoyed only modest success among the Szeklers, who remained largely Catholic.

The denominations established in the wake of the Reformation were not specific to certain nations and initially had little to do with ethnic distinctions. On the contrary, they were open to all “languages”. This was also the case in Transylvania, where Lutheranism spread initially among the Saxons, the Hungarians, and even the Szeklers, and Unitarianism was embraced by both Hungarians and Szeklers. However, the Lutheran

“religion” or the “religion of Sibiu” gradually became associated with the German inhabitants of Transylvania and came to be known as “the Saxon religion”, while the Calvinist “religion” or the “religion of Cluj” was called by some “the Hungarian religion”. For instance, the June 1654 Diet of Turda issued a document stating that “As the superintendents and the priests of the Church of Cluj, or indeed the Hungarian one, and those belonging to the Church of Sibiu, or the Saxon one, have had a lot of arguments, debates, conflicts, and differences of opinion on religious matters and especially in what concerns the Eucharist, in order to put an end to differences, appease the conscience of both parties and bring peace to the inhabitants of the country, it has been decided that in future both sides would be allowed to profess and practice the religion and the faith of both Sibiu and Cluj, but no priest from a royal town or from a town in the plains shall be allowed to preach the religion and the faith of the Church of Cluj and forcefully try and persuade the people”.<sup>30</sup> We see that in the country assembly the Calvinist faith was dubbed “Hungarian” and the Lutheran one “Saxon”. In the same spirit, starting with the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the word “Wallachian” became synonymous to Orthodox. Thus, in the Transylvania of that time, ethnic identities gained sharper contour, as the old medieval elitist outlook acquired a modern dimension by incorporating the idea of a common origin, language, denomination, etc.

### **The acceptance of the Reformation and the system of “tolerance”—between universalism and nationhood**

Starting with the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the political and religious system of Transylvania was based on three recognized nations (the Hungarian nobles, the Saxons and the Szeklers) and four “official religions” (Calvinist, Lutheran, Unitarian, and Catholic). Of course, the acceptance of the new Protestant denominations stemmed from the evolution of the idea of freedom during the Late Middle Ages. However, this “acceptance” did not rule out a number of conflicts and a certain rivalry between the new faiths and the previously dominant Catholic Church, and especially among the new denominations themselves.

In 1556, the old leading Catholic bishoprics of Alba-Iulia and Oradea were “secularized”—that is, they were closed down and their assets expropriated—and the Catholic clergy became the target of persecution. The Catholic priests were banned from many towns and boroughs. Generally speaking, however, despite some serious tensions,<sup>31</sup> in Transylvania the Reformation was adopted without the armed conflicts that ravaged other parts of Europe. This procedure, whereby the new denominations found it relatively easy to gain legal recognition and coexist, was later referred to as the “system of tolerance”, became the basis of Transylvania’s “constitutionalism” and was admired by some contemporaries and especially by some historians from the more recent

periods. The most prominent expression of this “tolerance” was the decision made by the Diet of Turda in 1568 (and confirmed in 1571), whereby each community was given the right to decide what faith it wanted to follow. Of course, in many cases this freedom of choice remained purely theoretical (for instance, after 1572, by princely ruling the Lutheran Church became mandatory in the Royal Land), but its mere presence in a legally binding document can be seen as a triumph of the modern spirit.

Still, upon closer examination, we see that this freedom of the three nations and four denominations was rather exclusive in nature. It was a freedom of the privileged groups, because it did not apply to the majority of the country’s population, namely the Romanians (it also excluded the Jews, the Armenians, and the Roma, with their specific religions and denominations). Basically, what happened in Transylvania at the dawn of the modern era was that nearly all of the old Catholic masters, gathered into three estates later dubbed nations, embraced the Protestant denominations, which they themselves accepted and recognized. Any other development would have been strange and illogical, since we are talking about the very same people, who left the Catholic Church and accepted the Reformation. These people had ruled the country before the Reformation and they remained in power, with a few adjustments, in the period that followed. As a matter of fact, it would have been impossible to see at that time the kind of modern religious freedom enacted in the constitutions of the democratic states only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Precisely for these reasons we have to be realistic when it comes to the limits of the so-called “tolerance” system. As opposed to other parts of Europe, Transylvania did not experience major religious wars between the Catholics and the Protestants, but this happened because most of the local Catholics fairly quickly converted to Protestantism. Specific to Transylvania, however, were the serious disputes and the stiff competition between the new Protestant denominations,<sup>32</sup> all eager to expand as much as possible, at the expense of the others, and even among the Romanians. It could be argued that the Reformation, although it managed to rapidly defeat Catholicism at nearly all levels, stabilized with considerable difficulty because of the disputes among the Protestant denominations and even among the various factions within the denominations in question.

### ***Inter hos sunt dispersi per totam provinciam Valachi*<sup>33</sup>: the situation of the Romanians**

A thorny issue was that of the Romanians and of their Byzantine faith, as these Romanians and their denomination, long excluded as a group from the “constitutional system” of the Voivodate of Transylvania, now saw themselves just as marginalized in the new political-religious

context of the Principality. The new statutes of the country, passed in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, only confirmed the exclusion of the Orthodox Romanians, at a time when the theoretical possibility of a renewal had presented itself. Some attempts were made to convert the Romanians to the Protestant faiths, especially to Calvinism, starting with the 16<sup>th</sup> century. While such actions did not lack in determination, they enjoyed only extremely limited success, for a variety of reasons. Essentially, the Reformation had been meant for the Catholics, and not of the Orthodox. On the one hand, the Romanians were mistrustful of any change and, on the other, the same Romanians found it impossible to understand the teachings of the Reformation, because their level of education was extremely low. Furthermore, the estates themselves opposed the “reformation” of the Romanians, because such action was likely to radically alter the political balance in the country (once converted to Calvinism, the Romanians would have automatically seized the power). However, in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a temporary Calvinist hierarchy was set up for the Romanians, but it failed to gain a sizable following. From the very outset, Eastern Christianity was seen with relatively favourable eyes by the Protestants, also because some innovations of the Reformation were actually old Orthodox tenets. Secondly, starting with Luther, the Byzantine faith was ranked among the legitimate Christian denominations (alongside the others that did not recognize the primacy of the Holy See) and not as a schism from Catholicism.<sup>34</sup> Finally, the first Saxon cities to embrace the Reformation—Braşov and Sibiu—were located in areas inhabited by many Orthodox Romanians, where the issue had nothing to do with the sympathy or dogmatic similarity between the Protestants and the Orthodox, but rather with the Protestant “mission” among the Eastern Christians. In an early attempt to disseminate the ideas of the Reformation among the Romanians, the Romanian translations of some catechisms and of other religious books were printed in Sibiu and Braşov. After the adoption of the Protestant legislation (1557), the reformation of the Romanians became the task of the central authorities, which set up a “missionary church” for the Romanians. The latter operated until 1582 and had four bishops. With a few exceptions, the great mass of the Romanians showed little penchant for the Reformation. As far as the Romanians were concerned, Orthodoxy was incompatible with the Protestant rationalization of the faith. On the other hand, the privileged estates (nations) refused to elevate the Romanians among the officially recognized groups.

At any rate, the Protestant Reformation accelerated the transformation of Transylvania’s nations-estates into modern nations. Their ethnic, denominational and territorial components gradually gained in importance, starting from a number of typically medieval distinctive elements and completing them with others that foreshadowed the modern world. The Hungarians were Calvinists and lived in the counties, the

Szeklers were partly Catholic and lived in the “Szekler Land”, while the Saxons were Lutherans and lived almost exclusively on the “Royal Land”, proud to be part of the community known as *Universitas Saxonum*. Less manifest in the beginning, these distinctions gradually made their way into the public conscience, in a somewhat schematic fashion that highlighted the ethnic differences. The Orthodox Romanians, found nearly everywhere in the country (*dispersi per totam provinciam*), were not officially recognized as a political nation, but were increasingly referred to as a “nation” in the ethnic sense of the term. Thus, the Transylvanian Romanians could not call themselves a nation because they were denied access to the power structures, but some private texts nevertheless began to refer to them using this designation. One example in this respect are the works of the aforementioned humanist Nicolaus Olahus who, as we have seen, speaks about the nations living in the Kingdom of Hungary regardless of whether they had official recognition or not. Speaking about the religion of the Romanians, the same humanist indicated that they “are Christians but, following the Greeks in the procession of the Holy Spirit, they also differ from our Church [Catholic] in a number of less important aspects”.<sup>35</sup> Born in Transylvania, this humanist and Catholic clergyman of Romanian extraction was very familiar with the official nations of his country, defined in keeping with the medieval privileges. Still, as a Renaissance man, he preferred to refer to nations as modern ethnic groups, defining them on the basis of their origin, language and denomination, and not according to the privileges they enjoyed. Consequently, for him the Romanians were one nation among others, and a prestigious one, too, as it was descended from the Romans that the humanists admired so much. Olahus did not call the Romanians “schismatics”, as it was commonly done at that time, but “Christians”, a designation usually reserved to the Catholics. The same can be seen in the case of the Italian Giovanandrea Gromo (1518–after 1567), who commanded the guard of Prince John Sigismund and who wrote a *Description of Transylvania* dedicated to Cosimo de Medici, grand duke of Tuscany. In the Western fashion, Gromo spoke of the nations of Transylvania strictly in the ethnic sense of the term. According to him, the country was inhabited by five nations: Hungarians, Saxons, Romanians, Poles, and Gypsies, all defined according to their language, origin, customs, faith, way of life, inhabited territory etc. He included the Szeklers into the Hungarian nation because they spoke the same language as the Hungarians, and presented the Romanians as descended from the Romans, with a language similar to Latin (called *Romanza o romanescha*) and of Orthodox faith.<sup>36</sup>

However, those familiar with the concrete situation, namely, the members of the privileged nations of Transylvania, did not commit such “fallacies” and used the word “nation” only in its ethnic-political sense. Thus, the Saxon Georg Reichersdorffer (born before 1500 and died after

1550), a native of the Sibiu region, wrote that Transylvania was inhabited by three nations, the Saxons, the Szeklers and the Hungarians. The Transylvanian Romanians were the last to be mentioned, and were not listed among the nations; the Romanians from Wallachia, however, who wielded political power south of the Carpathians, were nevertheless referred to as a nation.<sup>37</sup> Another humanist, the Croato-Hungarian Antonius Verancius or Verancsics (1504–1573), wrote about the rightful inhabitants of Transylvania and about the Romanians: the country “is inhabited by three nations, Szeklers, Hungarians, Saxons; still, I would also include the Romanians, who are easily equal in number [to the others] but have no liberties, no nobility, no rights of their own, with the exception of a small number who live in the district of Hațeg, where Deceballus is believed to have had his capital, and who were ennobled during the reign of John Hunyadi, a native of those parts, because they relentlessly fought against the Turks. The others [the Romanians] are all villains, serfs of the Hungarians with no lands of their own, found everywhere in the country and seldom living in open spaces, more often than not preferring to dwell in the woods; with their cattle, they live a miserable life”.<sup>38</sup> Here as well the Romanians are included simply because they were there and could not be overlooked: they were not a “nation” participating in the exercise of power, but merely a people (*gens*).

Starting from the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the inferior position of the Romanians is increasingly manifest in the (legally binding) decisions of the Transylvanian Diet made by the three nations. Some such decisions made between 1542 and 1555 are illustrating in this respect: a Hungarian (*Hungarus*) accused of theft can be exonerated if the village mayor (*iudex*) and three honest men take an oath in his favour, but a Romanian (*Valachus*) needs the oath of the village knez,<sup>39</sup> of four Romanians and of three Hungarian “Christians” (1542); a Romanian could not take a Hungarian or a Saxon to court, but a Hungarian or a Saxon could sue a Romanian (1552); three witnesses were not enough to indict a Hungarian peasant: seven trustworthy witnesses were required for a verdict, but a Romanian could be sentenced based on the testimony of only three trustworthy men (1554); a Christian (Catholic) peasant could be imprisoned based on the oath (testimony) of seven “Christians”, but for a Romanian the oath of three “Christians” or of seven Romanians sufficed.<sup>40</sup> Thus, in Transylvania even the justice system resorted to discriminatory practices, based on political and ethnic-confessional criteria, depending on whether one did or did not belong to an official nation and denomination. On the basis of such criteria, in legal terms a Romanian was worth less than half a *regnicolarus* (rightful inhabitant, citizen) or a “Christian”.

Some attempts were made to remedy the situation, as the Romanians accounted for much of Transylvania’s population and could have become a factor of instability. Besides, the modern era brought with it certain ideas

of freedom and saw a number attempts at putting an end to medieval exclusivism. After the Reformation, a first attempt at creating some sort of balance was made by the Báthory princes (especially Stephen and Christopher Báthory) starting with the year 1571. Supporting the Counterreformation and willing to strike a blow against the Protestants, these Catholic princes recognized some traditional rights of the Romanian clergy and Church (which faced the threat of Calvinization).<sup>41</sup> A second significant attempt was made by the Romanian prince Michael the Brave (who had taken control of Transylvania by force of arms, on behalf of Emperor Rudolph II) in 1599–1601, when for the first time public offices were offered to Romanians and when the country assembly of Transylvania was forced to grant some rights to the Romanian priests and to the Romanian villages. Besides, he asked the Habsburg emperor to include Orthodoxy among the “official religions” (alongside Catholicism and Lutheranism).<sup>42</sup> Finally, a third attempt at “elevating” the Romanians (the last one before the initiatives of the Habsburgs) took place at the end of the reign of the Calvinist Prince Gabriel Bethlen (1613–1629), who consulted with Ecumenical Patriarch Kirillos Lukaris in connection to his desire to make the country more “homogeneous” and draw the Romanians to Calvinism. In 1629, the reasons likely to prevent the Romanians from becoming Calvinist were the “kinship and the emotional bond” they shared with the inhabitants of Wallachia and Moldavia and the fact that the princes of these neighbouring Romanian principalities “might intervene, if not with military force, then at least with covert exhortations”.<sup>43</sup> These attempts, sometimes completely lacking in realism, failed completely, but they did serve to highlight the issue of discrimination in a Transylvania that had proven “tolerant” from other points of view.

In actual fact, for certain periods during the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Orthodox (Romanians) and the Catholics (those who spoke Hungarian) were equally affected by discriminatory measures concerning their religious practices, hierarchy, ecclesiastical assets, access to the cities etc. The main difference was that the Orthodox/Romanians were excluded from power and denied citizenship by legally binding official decisions, while the Catholics were temporarily and *de facto* discriminated against, but from a legal point of view they remained an officially recognized group. This difference proved to be of major importance, however, because after the imposition of Austrian rule (1688–1699) the Catholics were also *de facto* restored to the privileged position they held *de jure*, while the Romanians remained in a subservient position.

## The country of four (five) “religions”, or the diversity of spiritual models in Transylvania

In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, located at the point of contact between the Eastern Byzantine and the Western Latin civilizations, Transylvania provided the example of a European country that was home to a diversity of ethnic groups, religious denominations, cultures, and models of civilization. During this period the political nations (estates) gradually turned into modern nations, in the ethnic sense of the term, and the original two denominations (Orthodox and Catholic) were joined by several new ones (Lutheran, Calvinist, Unitarian, Greek-Catholic etc.). These changes were both peaceful and violent, quiet and agitated, innovative and retrograde, open to modernity but preserving much of the medieval rigidity. During the modern era, the three political nations (the Hungarian nobles, the Saxons, and the Szeklers) turned into two distinct national groups: the Hungarians (who presently also included the Szeklers) and the Germans. Without having been an officially recognized medieval nation, the Romanians nevertheless turned into a modern nation, aware of its role despite the discrimination it faced. The official religion—Roman-Catholic—gave birth to the four legally accepted denominations: Roman-Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, Unitarian. The religion of the Romanians—Orthodox—was denied official recognition both before and after the Protestant Reformation. A largely failed attempt at granting them global recognition occurred a bit later, involving the union with the Church of Rome and the creation of the Greek-Catholic Church (around the year 1700). This extremely diverse landscape saw a constant vacillation between acceptance and exclusion, between peaceful integration and ethnic-religious revolt, between privileges and the absence thereof, between tolerance and intolerance. For centuries on end, this was the normal and natural state of affairs, in the sense that a “Catholic and apostolic” kingdom like Hungary had the mission and the obligation to protect and favour the Catholics and to take discriminatory measures against the others.

In conclusion, it could be stated that in Transylvania the Reformation had to struggle less against the Catholic Church (as nearly all Catholics quickly turned Protestant) and more against itself, in the sense that the new Protestant denominations competed against each other in a rivalry that generated contradictions and even violent confrontations. Equally manifest was the contrast and the clash between Protestantism and Orthodoxy. Although the new movement had been initially meant to bring about a reformation within the Catholic Church, in the course of time its ideologists devised a strategy likely to win the Eastern believers to their side. In this respect, the stakes were particularly high in Transylvania,

where the Orthodox (Romanian) population was quite numerous and therefore important for the whole political balance of the country.

The advance and consolidation of the Reformation in Transylvania was checked or rather altered by an unexpected factor: the rise to the supreme position of power of a Catholic nobleman, Stephen Báthory (1571–1586). Still, the prince did not upset the apple cart in any way, aware of the importance of social peace and of the strength of the personal beliefs of his subjects. On the other hand, he did assume a number of initiatives meant to restore, even if only in part, the old glory of Catholicism: in 1576 he invited the Jesuits into the country, he set up and financed the activity of Catholic schools, encouraged the printing of books and the creation of libraries etc.<sup>44</sup> His policy towards the Protestants was rather flexible, as the prince sought to support the trends that were closer to Catholicism and to limit the manifestations of Unitarianism. The measures taken by the prince against the Unitarian faith were supported by the Lutherans and the Calvinists, who even came up with a number of initiatives in this respect. Bishop Francis David—who even refuted the role of Jesus as intercessor between the believers and God the Father—was indicted and tried as an innovator and a Judaist. Even if the restoration of the Catholic faith intended by Prince Stephen Báthory never actually materialized, his notable attempt led to some temporary successes, such as the founding of Cluj University<sup>45</sup>, the creation of the circumstances needed for the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy (the episcopate of Naprágyi Demeter, between 1598 and 1601), and the consolidation of Catholicism in some Szekler seats. The Romanians were removed from under the jurisdiction of the Calvinist Church (in 1582) and left in the charge of their traditional Orthodox hierarchy, with bishops consecrated in Moldavia or actually coming from that country. Under these circumstances, the policies of this prince (who also became king of Poland) pertain to the Catholic Reformation rather than to the Counterreformation, although some specialists have included them into this latter category, understood in a very broad sense. We could be dealing, in fact, with a *sui generis* Counterreformation, often done with the agreement of the Protestant estates.

Consequently, towards the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Transylvanian estates (the ruling elite) had become largely Protestant (Calvinist, Lutheran, Unitarian), while the large Romanian population, denied official recognition (at the level of the other groups), remained Orthodox, like in the past.

## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> See the most recent synthesis in this respect Ioan-Aurel Pop, Thomas Nögler and András Magyari (eds.), *History of Transylvania*, 3 vols. (Cluj-Napoca: Center for Transylvanian Studies, 2009-2010).

<sup>2</sup> See Ioan-Aurel Pop, *Romanians and Hungarians from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. The Genesis of the Transylvanian Medieval State* (Cluj-Napoca: Centrul de Studii Transilvane, Fundația Cultrală Română, 1996), 5-11, 140-151.

<sup>3</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Byzance après Byzance* (Bucharest: Association International d'Etudes du Sud-Est Européen, 1971); Dimitri Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth, Eastern Europe 500-1453*. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971); Ioan-Aurel Pop, "Bisanzio dopo Bisanzio: la realtà e l'eredità imperiale nell'Europa centro-orientale", in Andrea Piras (ed.), *Imperia. Esperienze imperiali nella storia d'Europa* (Rimini: il Cerchio, 2008), 29-42.

<sup>4</sup> The old Slavs living on the present-day territory of Romania (which they reached starting with the 6<sup>th</sup> century) were gradually assimilated, until the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries, by the Daco-Romans, proto-Romanians, Romanians, Hungarians, and other populations.

<sup>5</sup> Ioan-Aurel Pop, "Lo slavismo culturale ed i Romeni nel Medioevo", in Cesare Alzati, Marco Grusovin, Sergio Tavano (eds.), *L'eredità di Cirillo e Metodio. Omaggio a Vittorio Peri. Atti del 41° convegno Gorizia, 22-24 novembre 2007* (Gorizia: ICIEM, 2009), 93-100; Ioan-Aurel Pop, "La Roumanie en Europe: entre l'Occident latin et l'Orient byzantin", in *27 leçons d'histoire*, Préface de Jean-Noël Jeanneney (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2009), 273-280.

<sup>6</sup> Pál Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen. A History of Medieval Hungary 895-1526* (London-New York: I. B. Tauris, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Hermann Gusztáv Mihály, *Secuții. Istorie, cultură, identitate* (Miercurea Ciuc: Pro-Print, 2009), 5-29.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Nögler, *Așezarea sașilor în Transilvania* (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> Jenő Szűcs, "The Peoples of Medieval Hungary", in Ferenc Glatz (ed.), *Ethnicity and Society in Hungary* (Budapest: Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1990), 17; Ioan-Aurel Pop, "The Religious Situation of the Hungarian Kingdom in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries", in Celia Hawkesworth, Muriel Heppell, Harry Norris (eds.), *Religious Quest and National Identity in the Balkans* (London: Palgrave, 2001), 78-90.

<sup>10</sup> Nora Berend, *At the Gate of Christendom: Jews, Muslims and 'Pagans' in Medieval Hungary c. 1000-c. 1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Ioan-Aurel Pop, Sorina Paula Bolovan, Ioan Bolovan, "Pursuing Diversity. Demographic Realities and Ethno-Confessional Structures in Transylvania", *Transylvanian Review*, vol. XIX, supplement no. 1, (2010): 9-61.

<sup>11</sup> Th. Nögler, "Transylvania Between 900 and 1300"; Tudor Sălăgean, "Regnum Transilvanum. The Assertion of the Congregational Regime"; Ioan-Aurel Pop, "Transylvania in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century and the First Half of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century (1300-1456)", all three chapters in Ioan-Aurel Pop, Th. Nögler (coords), *The History of Transylvania*, vol. I (until 1541) (Cluj-Napoca: Institutul Cultural Român - Center of Transylvanian Studies, 2005), 204-280.

<sup>12</sup> Ioan-Aurel Pop, "Percezioni orientali delle conseguenze della IV Crociata (1204)". *Studi ecumenici* (Venezia), 23 (2005): 221-240.

<sup>13</sup> The Jews are those of the Mosaic faith, the Saracens are the Muslims, the heretics are those who had strayed from the “true faith” (on example from the region would be the Bogomils), while schismatics are the Byzantines (later called Orthodox).

<sup>14</sup> See Tudor Sălăgean, *Transilvania în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIII-lea. Afirmarea regimului congregațional* (Cluj-Napoca: Institutul Cultural Român – Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2003), 197-346.

<sup>15</sup> Șerban Papacostea, *Geneza statului în Evul Mediu românesc. Studii critice*, revised edition (Bucharest: Corint, 1999), 81-103.

<sup>16</sup> Ioan-Aurel Pop, “Din mâinile românilor schismatici...”. *Românii și puterea în Regatul Ungariei medievale (secolele XIII-XIV)*. (Bucharest: Litera, 2011), 314-361.

<sup>17</sup> Ș. Papacostea, *Between the Crusade and the Mongol Empire. The Romanians in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century*. (Cluj-Napoca: Center for Transylvanian Studies. Romanian Cultural Foundation, 1998), 62-71.

<sup>18</sup> See Călin Felezeu, “The International Background (1541-1699)”, in Ioan-Aurel Pop, Th. Năgler, A. Magyari (coordinators), *History of Transylvania*, vol. II (from 1541 to 1711). (Cluj-Napoca: Romanian Academy – Center for Transylvanian Studies, 2009), pp. 15-24.

<sup>19</sup> Nicolaus Olahus, *Hungaria et Atila sive de originibus gentis regni Hungariae* (Vienna: F. Kollarius, 1763), 90.

<sup>20</sup> Olahus, 61.

<sup>21</sup> Ioan-Aurel Pop, “Le ‘Nationes’ transilvane nei secoli XVI-XVII: tra accettazione ed esclusione”, in *Integrazione, assimilazione, esclusione e reazione etnica*, a cura di Gianfranco Giraudo e Adriano Pavan, Napoli, (2008), 59-81.

<sup>22</sup> Hurmuzaki-Densusianu, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor*, vol. II, 2 (Bucharest: Ed. Academiei Române, 1891), 146-148.

<sup>23</sup> See David Prodan, *Supplex Libellus Valachorum. Din istoria formării națiunii române*, revised edition (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1984), 94-101.

<sup>24</sup> At that moment the Principality of Transylvania enjoyed almost the same international juridical status as Wallachia and Moldova, both of them autonomous Christian states under the suzerainty of the sultan.

<sup>25</sup> Szilágyi Sándor (ed.), *Monumenta Comititalia Regni Transylvaniae*, vol. V (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akademia, 1879), 77-78, 80-82.

<sup>26</sup> The name “Royal Land” indicates that it had been given to the Saxons by the king of Hungary in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, from what was then the “royal estate”, in keeping with the *dominum eminens*.

<sup>27</sup> Péter Katalin, “Il Rinnovamento cattolico e la Riforma protestante”, in Adriano Caprioli and Luciano Vaccaro (eds.) *Storia religiosa dell’Ungheria*. (Milan: La Casa di Matriona, 1992), 185-199.

<sup>28</sup> Zenovie Pâclișanu, “Istoria Bisericii Române Unite”, part I (1697-1751), second edition, in *Perspective* (Rome), XVII, no. 65-68 (July 1994–June 1995): 9-46.

<sup>29</sup> See E. M. Wilbur, *A History of Unitarism in Transylvania, England and America* (Cambridge-Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1952), 1-90.

<sup>30</sup> Sándor, 231-232.

<sup>31</sup> Francisc Pall, “Frământări sociale și religioase în orașul Cluj în jurul anului 1570”, in *Anuarul Institutului de istorie din Cluj*, vol. V (1962): 7-34.

<sup>32</sup> Pall, 7-34.

<sup>33</sup> “Among them, Romanians are to be found all over the country”. The words belong to the humanist Catholic bishop Naprágyi Demeter and dates back to 1602 (Sándor, *Monumenta Comititalia*, 162).

<sup>34</sup> Pop, *Istoria Transilvaniei*, II, 244.

<sup>35</sup> Pop, *Istoria Transilvaniei*, II, 59. For Nicolaus Olahus, with some of his texts, see Maria Holban, *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. I (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1968), 484-500.

<sup>36</sup> Holban, II, 333-338. The reference to Poles as a distinct nation of Transylvania is rather unusual; it can be only explained by the fact that the prince's mother, Isabella, was Polish and had brought with her a sizable retinue from the home country.

<sup>37</sup> *Chorographia Transylvaniae, quae Dacia olim appellata...* (Vienna, 1550), 5; Holban, I, 208-210; Prodan, 104.

<sup>38</sup> Holban, II, 410-411; Ioan-Aurel Pop, *Națiunea română medievală. Solidarități etnice românești în secolele XIII-XVI* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1998), 126.

<sup>39</sup> In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the knezes (*kenezii*) were a sort of mayors (*villici, iudices*) of the Romanian bondsmen villages, but originally they had been small Romanian feudal lords, holders of lands and peasants.

<sup>40</sup> Hurmuzaki-Densușianu, II/5, 206-207, 227; Ioan Lupaș, *Documente istorice transilvane*, vol. I (Cluj: Tipografia “Casa Românească”, 1940), 395; Pop, *Națiunea română*, 61-62.

<sup>41</sup> Avram Andea, Susana Andea, “Principatul Transilvaniei sub suzeranitate otomană (1541-1691)”, in *Istoria României. Transilvania*, Anton Drăgoescu, (coord.) vol. I. (Cluj-Napoca: Ed. George Barițiu, 1997), 544-646.

<sup>42</sup> Ioan-Aurel Pop, *Națiunea română*, 30; Ioan-Aurel Pop, “Il Patriacato di Costantinopoli e la chiesa ortodossa della Transilvania (XIV-XVII sec.)”. *Le Patriarcat oecuménique de Constantinople aux XIV<sup>e</sup> - XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles: rupture et continuité (Actes du colloque international Rome, 5-6-7 décembre 2005)* (Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS, 2007), 103-115.

<sup>43</sup> Ioan-Aurel Pop, “Il patriarca Kiril Lukaris sull'unità etno-confessionale dei Romeni”, in *Etnia e confessione in Transilvania (secoli XVI-XX)*, Francesco Guida (ed.), (Rome: Lithos, 2000), 19-28.

<sup>44</sup> Vencel Biró, “La politique religieuse et scolaire d'Etienne Báthory en Transylvanie”, *Etienne Báthory, roi de Pologne, prince de Transylvanie* (Krakow, 1935), 47-70.

<sup>45</sup> Ioan-Aurel Pop, Liana Lăpădatu, “Les débuts de l'Université moderne à Cluj: le Collège jésuite entre 1579-1581”. *Transylvanian Review*, vol. XVIII, no. 4, (Winter 2009): 3-20.

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