

PRINCELY POWER AND THE OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZED CONFESSIONS IN TRANSYLVANIA DURING THE REIGN OF MICHAEL I APAFI

Abstract: Few studies in recent Romanian historiography have addressed the problem of Transylvania's confessional history during the reign of Michael I Apafi. The growing interest in this subject of scholarly research is justified by the evolution of the 17th-century society, in which religion was present at all hours of the day (morning service, prayers before the lunch and evening meals, vespers) and among all walks of life. This study aims to reveal the role played by prince in the life of the officially recognized confessions in Transylvania.

Keywords: Michael I Apafi, the Reformed, Catholic, Lutheran and Unitarian confessions

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In the second half of the 17th century, Transylvania boasted a remarkable confessional diversity. It was the only country in Europe that gave constitutional recognition to the free practice of four religions across its territory: Calvinist, Lutheran, Unitarian and Catholic. The politicians of that time were extremely proud of the aforementioned legislative provision, enshrined in the very first chapter of the Constitution, and of the country's democratic statehood, in which the Diet prevailed over the elected prince. The Central and West European States were perceived by the Transylvanian ruling elite as kingdoms in which emperors had acquired unlimited powers, which had allowed them to impose an autocratic system encompassing not only political life, but also spiritual life, directly subordinated to them.

The writings of the Transylvanian authors from that period who approached general issues of state governance laid particular emphasis on certain semantic aspects: the word *regnum* was commonly used for the type of state described above and, in their vision, it differed radically from the model created and imposed by them in Transylvania's Constitution, a model designated through the term *respublica*. The guiding principle upheld by politicians was the following: the lesser the sovereign's power, the greater the subjects' force: in theory, this desideratum was correct, but the princes of the period, including Michael I Apafi, sometimes undermined it by exploiting the legal lacunae or the loopholes and ambiguities of the law in force. The legislators did not take into consideration aspects such as: the possibility of interpreting or rebutting decisions that were already enforced; the real authority of the prince in office; and, last but not least, the volatile cohesion of the Dietal nobility in

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the process of approving the decisions that were subjected to debate in the estate assemblies. Moreover, another aspect of the problem that was neglected was the sacred character of the relation between the ruler and the subjects: the elected prince was invested with God's mandate on Earth (*elector Deus est*).² Any resistance to the decisions adopted by him could be regarded as an opposition to the divine will and could incur capital punishment.³ The divine aspect of princely power was not disputed either by the nobiliary elite⁴ or by the rest of the country's population.⁵ For all of these, the holder of the supreme function in the state became, from the moment of his investiture, the father of the entire people⁶ and he was to be obeyed unconditionally. In this capacity as representative of the divine authority on earth, the prince had a series of obligations towards the entire population of Transylvania, which included, of course, overseeing spiritual matters, watching over the Church and the celebration of divine service, ensuring the dissemination, among the population, of a sentiment of profound esteem and consideration towards God, aiming to stamp out any other forms of worship than those accepted by the confessional synods and the state, protecting schools and pupils, punishing those Christians who did not live according to the biblical teachings, etc. In the exercise of their religious duties, princes had the freedom to resort even to measures that were prohibited by the letter of the Scripture, such as: granting amnesty to lewd reprobates, tacitly accepting some idols in the Church, applying fines for certain serious offenses, all of these on condition that they served a firmly established supreme goal, which could not have been achieved by any other means.

The quality of God's vicar on earth gave the prince a series of advantages in exercising control over ecclesiastical activity. This led eventually to the Church's almost complete submission to State power, an objective that was attained by Apafi during the first two decades of his reign. In achieving that goal, he took considerable advantage of his constitutional obligation of confirming the bishops elected in the ecclesiastical synods, not only as regards the bishops of the confessions officially accepted by the state, but also those of the other, unrecognized religions in

² *Erdélyi országgyűlési emlékek* (hereinafter, *EOE*), VI, Budapest, 1880, p. 347; *Török-magyarkori Állam-okmánytár*, III, Pest, 1870, p. 502: "It is the Glorious Lord that ordains princes and kings; the will of Allmighty God will be done."

³ In the Dietal session for the election of the new prince, the nobility paid homage to him, submitting an oath of allegiance that began with the invocation of God and ended with the words "So help me God and may He grant salvation to my soul" (see *Magyar törvénytár. 1540-1848. Évi erdélyi törvények*, Budapest, 1900, p. 276). In their turn, the priests did the same, albeit in a different setting (see *EOE*, XII, pp. 505-506).

⁴ Kornis Gáspár, "Erdély és családja viszontagságairól," in *Magyar emlékirók 16-18 század*, Budapest, 1982, p. 337; *Teleki Mihály levelezése* (hereinafter *TML*), II, Budapest, 1906, p. 86.

⁵ Serfs paid their verbal homage to the prince in the presence of the village judge and jurors; the rest of the population - before the county administrative officials, the Szekler and Saxon seats or the city seats, by respecting a predetermined formula. In 1691, the oath of allegiance was submitted in writing, with the assistance of the Hungarian or Romanian priests in the respective communities (see *EOE*, XX, p. 448).

⁶ This is how Nicolae Bethlen described Princess Ana Bornemisza: "intelligent, virtuous, a genuine mother of the homeland," see "Bethlen Miklós élete leírása magától," in *Kemény János és Bethlen Miklós művei*, Budapest, 1980, p. 737.

Transylvania at the end of the 17th century, such as the leader of the Orthodox Church and – probably – the Mosaic Rabbi.⁷ Although the prince could not get involved directly in the selection process, he could influence, most of the times, the election mechanism by opting for synodal priests who were compliant with the political power. Thus the individuals who were elected to office were either persons from the entourage of the princely court or certain protégés of the prince. Another advantage the prince had consisted in his possibility to appoint, over the head of the bishop, the priests he preferred in various parishes.⁸ What also contributed to the prince's primacy over the Church was a practice introduced by Gabriel Bethlen and continued by the two Rákóczi Princes, according to which the canonical visitations of the bishops and the archpriests belonging to the accepted confessions (except for the Calvinist faith) could be undertaken only at the proposal and with the approval of Michael Apafi.

As a representative of divine authority on earth, the prince had the firm mission of preserving the traditional form of the liturgy, accepted by the canons of each individual religion, without innovations or additions from the clergyman who delivered the service. All the innovations that were intended to be introduced into the divine ritual had to be first submitted to a joint committee consisting of priests and professors from some of the important colleges in Transylvania, who would analyse the correctness of the doctrine. If the new doctrine was approved, it could be introduced as part of the daily religious service. If the doctrine was rejected, the sacerdote was first admonished, then demoted and removed from office by the ecclesiastical authority, while the secular power confiscated his wealth. The whole process could even lead to the decision of sentencing the culprit. The only confession that was exempted from this provision was that of the Orthodox Romanians. This measure was targeted, in particular, against the supporters of the Puritan, Cartesian and Cocceian movements, highly active within the Calvinist Church during the second half of the 17th century.

As regards the rapport between the princely power and the four official religions, seen through the lenses of the Approbates and Compilates, as well as of the Dietal decisions adopted during the reign of Michael I Apafi, we can make the following considerations.

The Evangelical Church

The Evangelical confession was widespread among the German-speaking population in the south of Transylvania, where it almost represented “a state religion” that overlapped with the institution of the Saxon University. The Calvinist communities were established with difficulty, in only two centres of the territory

⁷ In 1658 the Jews in Alba Iulia already had a synagogue and the Mosaic community's good relations with Prince Apafi were well known everywhere (see Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger, *A zsidóság története Erdélyben (1623-1944)*, Budapest, 1995, pp. 164, 75-76. A certain Pap Izrael (rabbi ?) had a correspondence with Mihail Teleki who, subsequently, dispatched the information he received to the princely court (see *TML*, VII, p. 300). To this day, there is little, if any, information about the spiritual life of the Jewish community in Alba Iulia.

⁸ *TML*, IV, p. 277.

controlled by the authorities of Sibiu and, respectively, Orăștie and Brașov. The first dates back to the beginnings of Transylvanian Reformism,⁹ while the second was linked to the name Prince Apafi, who granted the Reformed believers, through a Dietal decree, a land plot for the building of a church on Bolonya Street,¹⁰ much to the grievance and outrage of the city officials. What remained in force, however, was the prohibition passed against the Saxon authorities allowing Catholic or Unitarian services to be delivered on the territories under their administrative control.

The seat of the Lutheran denomination was located in Sibiu. It was here that all the Lutherans' problems were managed, the ecclesiastical canons were conceived, and their specific internal laws and regulations were passed. As a structure of ecclesiastical organization, the territory of southern Transylvania was divided into the deaneries and chapters.¹¹ This form of organization was reminiscent of the old order of the medieval Catholic world, perpetuated here during the period of the principality. The governance was based on the synodal-presbyterial principle; the assembly of high prelates decided on specific matters related to worship practices, while matters related to the organization and functioning of the church were approached on the grounds of the principle of parity with the representatives of the *presbyterium*.¹² The priests were freely elected by the members of each community, by open vote. The archpriest was elected by the chapter, while the superintendent (the Saxons' bishop) was elected by a priestly assembly which included the wide participation of the laity. The deaneries controlled the accuracy of the divine service and its compliance with the canons, the Christian teachings that the priest imparted to and disseminated among the community, the wealth of the Church, etc. Permanent moral and material supervision was required, since during this period the Saxons' spiritual shepherds had become laicized to such an extent that they could be distinguished from the members of their community only by the specific garments they wore. In all other matters they were partakers of all the human vices present in Transylvania at that time.

The relations between the political community, represented by the city magistrates, and the ecclesiastical establishment worked extremely well throughout the territory of the Saxon University during the reign of Prince Apafi. Everywhere, any inconveniences and legal disputes were settled by the administrative officials in collaboration with the local priests, without resorting to the ruling of the Transylvanian princely authority. In any case, no documentary traces are known in this respect. In the case of disputes that also involved the magistrate's secular sphere of competence, the settlement consisted in formulating a simple request addressed to the University, from which the final decision was expected; a joint consultation commission was never established.

⁹ Dósa Dénes, *A szászvárosi ev. ref. Kún- kollegium története*, Orăștie, 1897, p. 5.

¹⁰ *EOE*, XII, pp. 94-95.

¹¹ G.D. Teutsch, *Geschichte der Siebenbürger Sachsen für das sächsische Volk*, I, Sibiu, 1925, p. 555.

¹² *Ibidem*.

The Calvinist confession

After Stephen Bocskai, princely power was permanently in the hands of princes who were followers of the Calvinist confession. This gradually imposed the hegemony of this Church, even though the legislative system did not include articles that openly supported such a claim. In many respects, this religion resembled, in terms of organization and dogma, the Lutheran confession, with which it coexisted for a long period of time, the separation being made by the Synod of Aiud in as late as 1564, not so much because of some differences related to religious practices of its denomination, but because of ethnic considerations. Whereas the majority of the Lutherans were Saxons, the followers of Calvinism were members of the Hungarian population in Transylvania. In essence, this faith is based on the interpretations of the New Testament in the form set out by John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli, both of them Swiss theologians; hence, the name given to the Reformed religion, *confessio helvetica* (the Helvetic Confession), to be distinguished from Martin Luther's teachings, to which Saxon Transylvanians had adhered, under the name of *confessio augustana* (the Augsburg Confession).

Originally, the Calvinist current started from the lower layers of the population, but it was gradually adhered to by the nobiliary elites, in the form that also prevailed at the end of the 17th century. The synod played the leading role, but in the case of important issues, those who could have a say involved people from outside the clerical assembly, the lay protectors who financed the church from their own resources. It is from this vantage that we should understand Michael I Apafi's summoning of the Synod that was held at Alba Iulia in 1671,¹³ as well as the subsequent meeting, at the princely court, of all the professors of the Calvinist schools in Transylvania,¹⁴ or the participation of the prince in the clerical assembly held in Făgăraș on 17 May 1689.¹⁵ The prince claimed total primacy over the leading clerical authorities not as the elected sovereign of the country, but as the "most important defender of the Reformed faith."¹⁶ Being placed at the forefront of Church structures was an older desire of Apafi's, but it was not endorsed by Chancellor Nicholas Bethlen, who believed this subordination entailed the dangerous intrusion of the political power holders into the ecclesiastical sphere. The old politician's arguments made an enormous impact in favour of preserving the autonomy of the Reformed confession.¹⁷ The synodal-presbyterial form of organization, composed of ten individuals, of whom five were synodal priests and five noble curators, was maintained until the end of the principality.¹⁸

Of all the sovereigns of Transylvania, Michael Apafi had the clearest leanings towards an intense spiritual life. He was not only a devout practitioner, but also as an

¹³ Rétyi Péter *naploja*, București, 1983, p. 85.

¹⁴ *TML*, V, p. 597 in the notes.

¹⁵ *EOE*, XX, pp. 239-240.

¹⁶ Bethlen János, *Erdély története 1629-1673*, Budapest, 1993, p. 538.

¹⁷ Pokoly József, *Az erdélyi református egyház története*, II, Budapest, p. 255.

¹⁸ Halmay István, *I. Apafi Mihály erdélyi fejedelemsége (1661-1690)*, Szeged, 1934, p. 22.

ideologue with preoccupations in the field.¹⁹ Even on his rare official voyages to Hungary, he never missed the opportunity to attend religious service every day, to visit the famous Calvinist churches on his way²⁰ or to spend a few hours in the company of old religious books and manuscripts, of great Transylvanian interest, such as those in the famous library of Matthias Corvinus in Buda.²¹

A primordial task of the prince was that of defending all the faiths recognized by the laws of the country, in general, and the one he practised, in particular. His zealous attachment to the Calvinists and his generosity towards them was well known. He made lavish donations of various kinds to the priests²² and increased their wages. In addition to this, he provided material assistance, from his personal or from state funds, to the communities of Partium and Hungary, especially after the outbreak of their armed uprising against the Habsburgs.²³ He supported the demands of the clergy in the Diet.²⁴ He enhanced the actions for the ennoblement of priests and kept track of their numbers in Transylvania.²⁵ The reconstruction of several churches occupied a central place in his confessional policy: in Alba Iulia he restored the towers that had been in ruins since the Tatar invasion,²⁶ while in Braşov he compelled the city magistrate to give a land plot for building a parish and a place of worship²⁷ for the Reformed, to whom he also promised a financial support of 10,000 forints.²⁸ He exempted the inhabitants of the city of Haşeg from a burdensome postal service, provided they maintained the local Calvinist priest, school and church.²⁹ He sent commissaries to investigate the damage reported by the clergy in Abrud³⁰ or to analyse the causes of the frequent disputes between the city and the Church in Târgu-Mureş.³¹ In Rimetea he absolved the inhabitants from the tax value for two house plots where the inhabitants here were to build a church and a parish.³² The princess completed the prince's actions: she donated a bell to the community of Făgăraş,³³ brought new priests into Transylvania,³⁴ contributed with specialists, building

¹⁹ For the works written by Prince Michael Apafi, see Szinnyei József, *Magyar írók élete és munkái* (mek.oszk.hu/03600/03630/hTML), entry: Apafi Mihály I.

²⁰ Tóth Ernő, *I. és II. Apafi Mihály erdélyi fejedelmek naplója az 1632-1694. évekről*, in *Erdélyi Múzeum*, XVII, Cluj, 1900, p. 272; "Czegei Vass György és Vass László naploi 1659-1739," in *Magyar történelmi évkönyvek és naplók a XVI-XVIII. századokból*, Budapest, 1896, p. 18.

²¹ Cserei Mihály, "História," in *Magyar emlékirók. 16-18 század*, Budapest, 1982, p. 479.

²² Topheus, the priest of the princely court, received 8 house lots in Bogata, which were to be populated with serfs colonized from the Land of Făgăraş (*TML*, IV, p. 626); Topheus's house in Aiud was exempted from taxes (*EOE*, XVIII, pp. 88-89).

²³ *EOE*, XVII, pp. 179-180.

²⁴ *EOE*, XV, pp. 193-195.

²⁵ *EOE*, XV, pp. 319.

²⁶ *EOE*, XIV, p. 355.

²⁷ *EOE*, XVII, pp. 94-95.

²⁸ *EOE*, XX, p. 237.

²⁹ *EOE*, XIV, p. 110.

³⁰ *EOE*, XX, pp. 236, 326.

³¹ *EOE*, XX, p. 326.

³² *EOE*, XIX, p. 114.

³³ *Rétyi Péter naploja*, p. 54.

³⁴ *TML*, IV, p. 277.

materials and money to the reconstruction of the place of worship in Sárospatak (Hungary), burnt down by the Jesuits,³⁵ was involved in the process of electing the Orthodox Bishop,³⁶ supported the activity of publishing books on religious subjects³⁷ and waged a fierce anti-Catholic policy.³⁸

There are also documentary testimonies about some of the prince's aggressive tendencies for the expansion of the Reformed confession in localities where these communities did not represent the majority. An example that has already been presented was that of Braşov. Another example occurred in Ernea, also situated on the territory of the Saxon University. It was here that an action was taken for confiscating the church, which had belonged to the Saxons since the beginnings, and for attributing it to the followers of Calvinism. The pressure exerted on the local German population was so strong that several decades later there was no Saxon inhabitant left in the village, except for the Evangelical priest.³⁹ A similar gesture happened at Tirimia, where the decision was reached to bestow the Unitarian place of worship and parish to the Reformed, by virtue of the *maior pars* law.⁴⁰ At Făgăraş, the Lutheran priest of the community was driven out by force and the church was subordinated to the Calvinist diocese.⁴¹ It is worth mentioning that the Transylvanian legislation already included a law debated and approved by the Diet which regulated the concrete means of settling lawsuits related to the forceful occupation of some religious edifices in Transylvania, a law that was not taken into account, however, by the legislator.⁴²

The prince also oversaw the individual conversions to Calvinism of the other ethnicities or of the priests of other confessions. An interesting case was that of the Jesuit Ormándi, who converted himself to Calvinism. Without insisting too much, Apafi persuaded him to move from Ung County to the princely court, where he took over the position of carpenter.⁴³ He agreed to do so, but on condition that he was accepted together with his wife.⁴⁴ Bringing the wife into the country appears to have been a pretext, for during this voyage, with his family by his side, he was much more interested in the defence system of the regions through which he passed than in his duties as a member of the court. Hearing about Ormándi's curious movements throughout his journey, the sovereign reacted violently.⁴⁵ Although it was obvious for the majority that Ormándi acted as an envoy of the Habsburgs in Transylvania, on a mission to gather information, the prince overlooked his deed, and he carried on with his activity at the court. The preoccupations of the former Jesuit Ormándi were

³⁵ *TML*, IV, p. 282.

³⁶ *TML*, VI, p. 248.

³⁷ *TML*, IV, pp. 329, 519-520.

³⁸ *TML*, V, p. 148.

³⁹ Benkő József, *Transsilvania specialis. Erdély földje és népe*, I, Bucureşti-Cluj, [no year], p.263.

⁴⁰ *EOE*, XV, p. 276.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, I, p. 593.

⁴² *EOE*, XIII, p. 372.

⁴³ *TML*, IV, p. 439.

⁴⁴ *TML*, IV, p.403.

⁴⁵ *TML*, IV, pp. 439-440.

unchanged, however, over a decade. Unlike in the case of the previous episode, he could now feel more and more the imminent danger he was in and, fearing that his secret might be revealed, he secretly prepared a plan to leave the country very hastily. An intimate princely advisor⁴⁶ found out about this ruse and brought to the attention of the princely council the hostile activities carried out by the imperial emissaries in Transylvania. The immediate measure adopted by the counsellors was to expel the Habsburg diplomats, including Martin Kászoni, the Canon of Esztergom.⁴⁷ Perhaps at that time Ormándi had already fled, resorting to the method of transvestism, just like pater Jósa had also done not too long ago,⁴⁸ since his name did not appear among the persons mentioned in the decree of expulsion.

In a religious context, one of the essential duties of the prince was the patronage of denominational schools. In the first year of his governance, he tried to find solutions for the fate of the children from the Reformed College Alba Iulia who had sought refuge in Cluj in 1661. Since the return into the old location was impossible due to the building's state of ruin, his Chancellor Ioan Bethlen suggested to Apafi the solution of temporarily relocating the educational institution in Aiud, where the school had extensive properties. The proposal was accepted by the sovereign. The material basis for the functioning of the college was soon solved through the organization – during the Diet of May 1665 – of a fund subscription action for the benefit of the students and the teachers.⁴⁹ Gradually, the college regained the fame it once had.

More than once, the prince convened consultations with the nobiliary elite on educational or ecclesiastical themes.⁵⁰ His rapports with young scholars were quite close; he encouraged many of them to learn and to become priests or teachers even if they had serfish origins.⁵¹ He sent the best of them to study abroad. They, in turn, confirmed the trust invested in them by sending back to Transylvania some of their academic intellectual achievements – their works in manuscript form – for review and opinions from both the sovereign and other interested courtiers.⁵² Upon their return to Transylvania, the prince assigned them to various posts at court or in the administration. He employed other adolescent scholars like David Rozsnyai in diplomacy, as a translator into Turkish or Nicholas Bethlen – in the chancellery secretariat. However, he appointed most of them to the nobiliary estates, where they were to serve as priests: due to the political situation in the country, there was an acute lack of clergy.⁵³

At the initiative of the prince, ecclesiastical matters were tabled for debate in the Diatal sessions, but they were not always passed into laws. Those unanimously accepted by the nobiliary assembly related to strict compliance with religious

⁴⁶ *TML*, VII, p. 392

⁴⁷ *TML*, VIII, p. 172; *EOE*, XVI, p. 499.

⁴⁸ *TML*, VII, p. 218.

⁴⁹ *EOE*, XIV, pp. 98-106.

⁵⁰ Tóth Ernő, op. cit., pp. 151, 152, 153.

⁵¹ *EOE*, XIII, p. 372.

⁵² *TML*, IV, p. 616.

⁵³ *EOE*, XX, p. 263.

holidays,⁵⁴ the Sunday service,⁵⁵ the fasting days,⁵⁶ the eradication of debauchery in society,⁵⁷ sodomy⁵⁸ or blasphemy.⁵⁹

During the reign of Michael I Apafi, the Calvinist confession was weakened by the proliferation of European reformist ideas among the youth in the Reformed colleges, the priests or the professors in Transylvania. The new influences came from the Netherlands and England, via the Transylvanian students who attended universities in these countries. These new orientations were Puritanism, Cartesianism and Cocceianism. Puritanism was a declared opponent of the absolutist regime and demanded the replacement of the ecclesiastical leadership with a secular form of power. The followers of this trend were divided into Presbyterians (who adopted a more moderate position) and Independents (who advocated a more radical attitude). The ideas in René Descartes's writings were accepted by the anti-feudal thinkers, who recognized in them a way of fighting against the antiquated political system. Finally, Cocceianism was close to the Cartesian doctrine and called for the alignment of faith with the requirements of reason. It was to this direction that most of the young Transylvanians had become attached.

In the confessional mayhem, the prince wanted to intervene in force and to restore peace in the Calvinist church. In 1671, he informed Bishop Petru Kovásznai of his intention to send his representative to the future synod, even though this contravened the existing canons.⁶⁰ Having been cautioned about this irregularity, the prince chose another form of involvement, aiming for the same results: as the syndic of the presbyterial council, he convened a clerical-secular assembly with the participation of all those responsible for schools and colleges, along with members of the city's magistracy and the patrons of educational institutions and churches.⁶¹ The lack of a concrete result led to the convening of a similar assembly⁶² two years later, with an identical outcome. The situation persisted until the end of the princely epoch, even though Apafi made further attempts to restore the old Calvinist doctrine.

The Catholic confession

Among the denominations listed so far, Catholics appear to have had a more unfavourable position during Apafi's reign. They had lost their churches and ecclesiastical possessions in the 16th century and had no bishop in office; hence, they had no ordained priests in the communities, their religious orders had been disbanded, and the Jesuits monks had been outlawed. The old form of organization in the parishes was preserved. The vicar held the highest office in the Catholic Church. The only movable or immovable assets he could benefit from were those previously

⁵⁴ *EOE*, XIII, p. 372.

⁵⁵ *EOE*, XVI, p. 222, XV, p. 182.

⁵⁶ *EOE*, XV, p. 278.

⁵⁷ *EOE*, XV, p. 148.

⁵⁸ *EOE*, XVIII, p. 550; *EOE*, XIX, p. 116.

⁵⁹ *EOE*, XV, p. 204.

⁶⁰ Pokoly József, *op. cit.*, II, p. 286.

⁶¹ Tóth Ernő, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

⁶² Bethlen Miklós *élete leírása magától*, p. 665.

inherited. The only activities permitted to the priests under the law were visiting the sick and celebrating baptisms, communion and funerals.

Given the Habsburg offensive against the Reformed in eastern Hungary, under incitement from Vienna, the Catholic offensive was reborn in Transylvania. A prominent role in this resurgence was played, during the first phase, by the high ranking prelates sent by Emperor Leopold I to Prince Apafi for diplomatic talks and by the Habsburg military commanders stationed at the north-western borders of the country. At the beginning, the method adopted by the Catholic Dietal political elite was petitionary. Subsequently, towards the end of the 1670s, the movement was radicalized and reached even open armed confrontations. The series of petitions addressed to the nobiliary congregation opened in 1665, when the Catholic representatives submitted a memorandum to the state leadership, showing all the deprivations the practitioners of this religious confession had to endure from the majority population,⁶³ which they regarded as a blatant violation of the laws in force relating to the equality of rights among the four denominations. To be more convincing, they attached a set of concrete personal insults suffered by the Catholic priests, monks, deacons or teachers.⁶⁴ The Diet analysed each point of the complaint and came to the conclusion that the facts presented were indeed real.⁶⁵ The eight-point resolution issued to the applicants gave specific answers only to the general issues presented to the legislature; the inquiry commission was unable to solve the other aspects, on the grounds that the constitutional provisions in the *Approbates* and *Compilates* were violated, but gave hope that these would be settled in the future, when the laws against the Catholic practitioners were reviewed.⁶⁶ At the Dietal assembly held in Făgăraș in February 1666, the petitioners returned with a request they had advanced the autumn before,⁶⁷ when it was not subjected to the debate: allowing divine service to be held in the city of Cluj and not in the church from Mănăștur. The reasons invoked concerned the lack of safety for the city students attending the ceremony, especially the services held at night.⁶⁸ The list of complaints was complemented, at that time, with new, more recent grievances.⁶⁹ The sessions of the congregation were attended by the Provost of Leles, Martin Kászoni, as the envoy of Vienna, who, in his cleverly constructed speech, brought unexpected praise to the Dietals and the leadership of Transylvania, but also included in his speech a passage asking for support in improving the situation of the “persecuted Catholics” and solving the request of the prelates from Cluj.⁷⁰ However the aforementioned document was not included on the agenda.

⁶³ *EOE*, XIX, pp. 498-500.

⁶⁴ *EOE*, XIX, pp. 499-500.

⁶⁵ *EOE*, XIX, pp. 498-500.

⁶⁶ *EOE*, XIX, pp. 501-503.

⁶⁷ *EOE*, XIX, pp. 503-504.

⁶⁸ *EOE*, XIV, p. 107.

⁶⁹ *EOE*, XIX, pp. 504-506.

⁷⁰ *EOE*, XIV, pp. 168-169.

In the Diet held at Târgu Mureş in January 1667, the Catholics reiterated the demands they had formulated earlier,⁷¹ giving an acerbic reply to the allegations brought by the Calvinists against their confession,⁷² a dispute that would last throughout the year 1667.⁷³ In the General Transylvanian Congregation held in Bistriţa in 1668, the Catholic clergy requested the prince's mediation in the problem concerning the church from the centre of Cluj.⁷⁴ The same subject was resubmitted to the legislature in 1669⁷⁵, 1670⁷⁶, 1671⁷⁷ and 1675.⁷⁸ In the case of the latter complaint, we know the reply of the Dietal commission, which dismantled, point by point, the grievances invoked and concluded that "we honestly wish our Christian belief were blasphemed in other countries as much as your religion is blasphemed among us."⁷⁹ The petitioners' reply did not take too long to come.⁸⁰

Repeated failures radicalized the methods of the Catholic nobility. Since the main opponent of their requests was the Prince of Transylvania, a secret group formed around the aristocrat Paul Béldi, to which political figures of the time, such as Count Ladislau Csáky, Lazăr Apor, Ştefan Kornis or Nicholas Bethlen, were also rallied subsequently, together with the entire Szekler elite, plotted the assassination of Apafi. With a strong external support of Habsburg origin, the plan was to be carried out by 30 conspirators in the Comana forest near Braşov.⁸¹ Frightened by the news he had received, the prince ordered the arrest of Béldi and Nicholas Bethlen.⁸² Immediately after the detention and imprisonment of the two in the fortress of Făgăraş, a genuine guerrilla warfare broke out across Transylvania, a form of psychological battle hitherto unencountered in the Carpathian area. Unknown individuals hidden in the forests and mountains attacked and set fire to whole villages and towns, some even five to six times in a row.⁸³ They acted at all times of the day, even during the holy Pentecost holidays, creating great panic among the population. They targeted, in particular, the fiscal domains of the state, buildings and assets of Michael Teleki's or Prince Apafi's followers. Ştefan Baló, butler to the princess's court, complained that on one of his estates, Băţarii Mari, his house had been burnt down to the ground, and that the family that lived there had been left only with the clothes they had on.⁸⁴ In Făgăraş, the detention place of the heads of the league, 10

⁷¹ *EOE*, XIV, pp. 506-507.

⁷² *EOE*, XIV, pp. 507-508.

⁷³ *EOE*, XIV, pp. 508-509.

⁷⁴ *EOE*, XIV, pp. 509-511.

⁷⁵ *EOE*, XV, pp. 381.

⁷⁶ *EOE*, XV, pp. 94-96, 100, 108, 166.

⁷⁷ *EOE*, XV, p. 245.

⁷⁸ *EOE*, XV, pp. 215-217.

⁷⁹ *EOE*, XV, p. 219.

⁸⁰ *EOE*, XV, p. 220-221.

⁸¹ *Bethlen Miklós élete leirása magától*, p. 665.

⁸² *EOE*, XVI, pp. 276-277. The order was that once caught, they should both be executed on their way to prison. Matei Madarász, captain of the princely court, was to be the executioner (see *Bethlen Miklós élete leirása magától*, p. 689).

⁸³ *TML*, VII, p. 261.

⁸⁴ *TML*, VII, p. 253.

houses were set fire to, using a pyrotechnic material that was unknown locally and produced some impressive flames.⁸⁵ The actions were extended to the Three Seats and Braşov; in the latter settlement, in the attics of the houses, under the roofs, firesetting tools had been discovered.⁸⁶ An entire street had been set on fire at Târgu Secuiesc.⁸⁷ The phenomenon did not elude the prince's native realm, Dumbrăveni.⁸⁸ The population managed to retain a pyromaniac who confessed that influential figures from Gheorgheni and Cluj were behind the entire action.⁸⁹ The princess spoke directly of the Papists;⁹⁰ hence, her order that all the Catholics should be removed from the country's military structures and replaced with trusted persons of other confessions⁹¹ and that the priests belonging to this denomination should be arrested immediately. Detained, Pater Jóna barely escaped by disguising himself and getting the people who had arrested him drunk.⁹² Martin Kászoni was expelled from Transylvania by Dietal decision.⁹³ A part of the Szekler noble elite, headed by Paul Béldi, fled the country, the others being remanded to custody, most of them dying in prison.

The Calvinist confession

The Unitarian religion is a more radical form of Protestantism, having been founded in the 16th century and propagated by David Francisc (1519-1579). The fundamental thesis the denomination is based on is the belief in a single Almighty God, Jesus being considered a man and not a deity; therefore, the dogma of the Holy Trinity is not accepted. As a form of organization, it resembles the Lutherans and the Calvinists. At its base are the same in synodal-presbyterial principles according to which the lay devotees play an important role. Leadership is collective, too, and churches are autonomous. The Consistory has operative command. In terms of their appearance, the places of worship are characterized by their simplicity, both outdoors and indoors, where there are no icons, paintings, statues or altars.

The fact that the Diet of Turda recognized the activity of this denomination in 1568, in the context of religious freedom in Transylvania, did not implicitly entail its acceptance among the official religions. The situation changed upon the death of David Francisc, when in another congregation, under the pressure of the political elite, the Unitarian spiritual leaders accepted the dogma of the Holy Trinity, which meant, implicitly, the inclusion of this confession among the country's privileged denominations. Although the priests had given their assent, the new agreement went against the beliefs of the members of the local communities, dividing the believers into two big groups. One group practised the newly adopted form, while another

⁸⁵ *TML*, VII, p. 235.

⁸⁶ *TML*, VII, p. 253.

⁸⁷ *TML*, VII, p. 263.

⁸⁸ *TML*, VII, p. 235.

⁸⁹ *TML*, VII, p. 261.

⁹⁰ *TML*, VII, p. 235.

⁹¹ *TML*, VII, p. 192.

⁹² *TML*, VII, p. 218.

⁹³ *TML*, VIII, p. 251.

group continued, in secret, the old form of belief, becoming later the Sabbatarianist community. The vast numbers of the latter faith prompted Prince George I Rákóczi to prohibit Sabbatarianism by law (1638). With their decline, the decline of the Unitarians also started, as they gradually lost, by the end of the 17th century, their popularity and wide appeal, to the Calvinists' advantage.

The fact that a religious belief cannot be eradicated by a decree political was demonstrated by the subsequent events, from the time of Michael Apafi. In the proposals of themes that the prince subjected for debate in the 1668 Diet from Bistrița, several points considered the problem of the Sabbatarianists, who "not only have not ceased to exist in the country, but, secretly, increase daily, which is an affront against both God and the Christian faith."⁹⁴ In the presentation he made before the estates, Apafi invoked the causes for the spread of this sect, including George I Rákóczi's delayed enforcement of the legislation relating to them and his granting of pardons to many of the Sabbatarianists. Although they had converted to the Unitarian belief accepted by the state and vowed that they would raise their children in this spirit, the Sabbatarianists had relapsed into their old religion within two or three years.⁹⁵ The prince demanded that a court session should be convened, comprising members of the four official confessions, who should judge the case of the Sabbatarianists. Moreover, he demanded that the descendants of those who had converted to Calvinism should be denied adherence to any of the official religions.⁹⁶ The matter was debated on 21 January,⁹⁷ without any decision on the princely proposal being reached. The reason was simple: many of those present in the room were either direct descendants of a Sabbatarianist family or had relatives (wife, cousins, brothers-in-law) or acquaintances who were former or current practitioners of this faith. The subject was not tabled for discussions during other Dietal assemblies in the second half of the 17th century.

The Calvinist offensive against the Unitarians continued throughout Apafi's reign. The disputes revolved around the appropriation of churches under the *maior pars* law⁹⁸ or the formation of Reformed communities in settlements that had previously been inhabited solely by the followers of David Francisc.⁹⁹

In conclusion, we can say that while confessional freedom existed in Transylvania at the end of the princely epoch, not all the religions had equal opportunities of manifestation. State power was strongly committed to favouring the Calvinist creed at the expense of the other official confessions. At the level of human cohabitation, however, I would quote the Catholic Petru Apor, who lived in those times: "as I have stated above, there were no differences between the Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran and Unitarian people; they all got on well with one another."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ *EOE*, XIV, p. 291.

⁹⁵ *EOE*, XIV, p. 292.

⁹⁶ Pokoly, op. cit., p. 273.

⁹⁷ *EOE*, XIV, pp. 303-304.

⁹⁸ *EOE*, XV, p. 276.

⁹⁹ Pokoly, op. cit., p. 275.

¹⁰⁰ Kornis, op. cit., p. 675.