

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS ON HIEROTHEOS' MISSION TO THE MAGYARS

Abstract: The considerations on the date of the mission of bishop Hierotheos and the location of the territory mastered by the Magyar chief Gylas are resumed to examine the significance of the church discovered at Alba Iulia in 2011. The interpretation is the same: Hierotheos was sent in 948. Ending attacks and creating discord among chiefs were the goals of the mission, which must be seen in the context of the Byzantine diplomacy. The bishopric of *Tourkia* became afterwards a metropolitanate. Gylas was ruling between Mureş, Criş and Tisza, where there is a concentration of gold coins issued in that period, and of pectoral crosses dated in the 10th century. If he had been living in Transylvania, it could be difficult to explain the paganism of his descendent defeated by Stephen I in 1003. This Gylas was not the uncle of the one from 1003. The territory of Transylvania is a white spot in the description of *De Administrando Imperio*, and the gold coins of Constantine VII are also missing. The four crosses from the cemetery "Izvorul Împăratului" in Alba Iulia are simple testimonies for the presence of Christians. The rotonda discovered in 1973 could be the chapel of the ruler of the Romanian-Slavic voievodate dominated by Bulgaria. It has analogies in Moravia, dated in the 9th century. The church discovered by D. Marcu Istrate in 2011 is that partially uncovered by R. Heitel, called Ia. Its building at the middle of the 10th century is not supported by the archaeological context, being also possible a date after 1003, as siege of a bishopric included in the metropolitanate of *Tourkia*, replaced then by the church Ib, of Latin rite.

Keywords: Hierotheos, Constantine VII, Gylas, Alba Iulia, *Tourkia*

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In several previous studies² I expressed my opinion about the controversial issue of the location and purpose of the Christianization mission among the Magyars led by the monk Hierotheos. The reason why I resume now this discussion is the discovery, in 2011, of a church at Alba Iulia, which was immediately connected with that mission by the author of the excavations, and by other researchers. It was seen as a remarkable and definitive solution to the problem. However, is it really so? In the following pages I will expose again in a condensed form my interpretation of the literary, archaeological and numismatical sources, and then I will try to find out how this new discovery fits or not into the aforementioned data.

The first problem is the chronological framework of the mission briefly mentioned by Ioannes Skylitzes and Ioannes Zonaras. The monk Hierotheos was appointed bishop of *Tourkia* when the Magyar chief Gylas visited Constantinople, receiving the title of *patrikios*. He was preceded by other two chiefs, Boulosoudes and Termatzous, who were also mentioned by Constantine Porphyrogenitus (the emperor does not remember Gylas or the Christianization mission)³. Gylas (*Djila*) and

² Alexandru Madgearu, *Misiunea episcopului Hierotheos. Contribuții la istoria Transilvaniei și Ungariei în secolul al X-lea*, Revista Istorică, SN, 5, 1994, 1-2, p. 147-154; *Idem*, *Transylvania and the Bulgarian Expansion in the 9th and 10th Centuries*, ActaMN, 39-40, 2002-2003 (2005), II, p. 41-61; *Idem*, *The Romanians in the Anonymous Gesta Hungarorum. Truth and Fiction*, Cluj-Napoca, 2005, p. 97-98; *Idem*, A. Madgearu, *The mission of Hierotheos: location and significance*, ByzSlav, 66, 2008, p. 119-138; *Idem*, *Misiunea episcopului Hierotheos în contextul diplomației bizantine*, in I. A. Pop, J. Nicolae, O. Panaite (eds.), *Sfântul Ierotei, episcop de Alba Iulia (sec. X)*, Alba Iulia, 2010, p. 69-94.

³ Ioannes Scylitzes, *Synopsis historiarum*, recensuit I. Thurn (CFHB. Series Berolinensis, V), Berlin, New York, 1973, p. 239 (Jean Skylitzes, *Histoire des empereurs de Byzance*, traduction française par B. Flusin, notes par J.-C. Cheynet, Paris, 2003, p. 202); Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomae Historiarum*, vol. III, ed. Th. Büttner-Wobst, Bonn, 1897, p. 484 (XVI. 21. 14-19); Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio. Greek text edited by Gy. Moravcsik. English translation by R. J. H. Jenkins. New, Revised Edition* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae, Series Washingtoniensis, I), Washington DC, 1967, p. 178/179 (c. 40).

Boulosoudes (*Vulšudi*) were also mentioned among the seven Magyar chiefs existing in the year 942, in the writing of the Arab historian Ibn Hayyan, who found it out from a prisoner in Spain. With reference to *Djila*, this author stated that it was the name given to the highest rank⁴. The year when Gyula came to Constantinople was usually considered to be 952 or 953, because the event was not recorded in *De Administrando Imperio*, finished in 948-952. This is not a too substantial argument, because that work was mainly based on older pieces of information. The single more recent event recorded in *De Administrando Imperio* is just the visit of Bulcsu and Gylas⁵. For this reason, the analysis of the chronicle of Ioannes Skylitzes remains the most appropriate way to establish the chronological framework. The clue is the new date ascribed to the visit of Olga: 946, not 954 or 957⁶. The visit of Olga is inserted in the chronicle between that of Termatzous and Boulosoudes, and the next one of Gylas. On the other hand, the first visit is mentioned just after the coronation of Romanos II as co-emperor in the spring of 946. The time span between the two visits was not too long, and it could be inferred that the visit of Gylas was related to the expiration of the five years peace agreement established after the invasion of 943⁷. Gylas was willing to continue the alliance with the empire. Therefore, the most suitable date for the mission of Hierotheos is 948.

The second problem is the significance of the visit and of its outcome. We should be aware that such events must be seen in the wider perspective of the Byzantine grand strategy and diplomacy, and that the

⁴ György Györffy, *Dual Kingship and the Seven Chieftains of the Hungarians in the Era of Conquest and the Raids*, *A Orient Hung*, 47, 1994, 1-2, p. 96-97.

⁵ James Douglas Howard-Johnston, *The De Administrando Imperio: a re-examination of the text and a re-evaluation of its evidence about the Rus*, in M. Kazanski, A. Necessian, C. Zuckerman (eds.), *Les Centres proto-urbains russes entre Scandinavie, Byzance et Orient*, Paris, 2000, p. 325.

⁶ Constantin Zuckerman, *Le voyage d'Olga et la première ambassade espagnole à Constantinople en 946*, *Travaux et Mémoires, Centre de Recherche d'Histoire et Civilisation Byzantines*, Paris, 13, 2000, p. 647-672.

⁷ Ioannes Skylitzes, *Synopsis...*, p. 231 (*Romanos Lekapenos*, 37); (Jean Skylitzes, *Histoire...*, p. 195); Panayotis Antonopoulos, *Byzantium, the Magyars Raids and their Consequences*, *ByzSlav*, 54, 1993, 2, p. 260-263; Ferenc Makk, *Ungarische Aussenpolitik (896-1196)* (*Studien zur Geschichte Ungarns*, 3), Herne, 1999, p. 13.

mission of Hierotheos was something out of the ordinary, because such missions usually concerned sedentary peoples who sometimes had even an incipient urban life (Bulgaria, Moravia, Serbia, the Kievan Russian state, or the Alans). The nomadism was usually seen as incompatible with the Christian religion⁸. On the other hand, contrary to other missions directed to the supreme chief of a people, Hierotheos was sent to Gylas, who ruled only over a part of the Magyars, as wrote Zonaras. The purpose was to split the Magyar confederacy of tribes and to find allies, in order to prevent future attacks in the Byzantine Empire, like that of 943, and the conversion to Christianity of at least a part of the enemies could lead to such effect⁹. The same monk Theophanes could have been the person who suggested the idea of conversion, in 943. If two Magyar chiefs came to Constantinople before the end of the five years peace agreement, it could be supposed that they searched for a special treatment in comparison with the supreme ruler Faisz, in order to strengthen their power. The second visit of 948 was the reaction of another chief, who wished similar or even greater advantages. More realistic, Gylas chose Christianity and the alliance with the empire. This alliance was needed by Constantine VII because there were troubled years for the northern policy of the Byzantine Empire, caused by the rising of the Pechenegs. This prompted the Byzantine Empire to conclude the alliance with Olga in 946, and it is known that the Pechenegs were also the enemies of the Magyars. There were thus two parallel actions, both directed to peoples who had a common enemy. In the case of Bulcsu and Gylas, the purpose was twofold: to create discord between the supreme chief (*kende*) and the chiefs who received Byzantine support, and to prevent other Magyar attacks. Hierotheos was appointed bishop of *Tourkia*.

In the work of Constantine Porphyrogenetus, *Tourkia* was the land crossed by the rivers Tisza, Toutis (Bega?), Timiș, Mureș and Criș, which begins at the Iron Gates and which is separated from Bulgaria by

⁸ Jonathan Shepard, *Spreading the Word: Byzantine Missions*, in C. Mango (ed.), *The Oxford History of Byzantium*, Oxford, 2002, p. 243.

⁹ Márta Font, *Missions, Conversions, and Power Legitimization in East Central Europe at the Turn of the First Millenium*, in F. Curta (ed.), *East Central & Eastern Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, Ann Arbor, 2005, p. 283-284.

the Danube¹⁰. This region was of the greatest interest for the empire, because it was connected to the Morava valley, a way to Thessaloniki. Yet, because Constantine VII knew that the Magyars also lived in other regions, it seems that *Tourkia* concerned the entire territory peopled by Magyars by the middle of the 10th century, described with more details in its eastern part¹¹. Therefore, it could be supposed that the title of bishop of *Tourkia* concerned all the regions peopled by Magyars and that his missionary action was theoretically directed to all the tribes. Skylitzes called Gylas *archon ton Tourkon* because he supposed that only a supreme ruler could receive the mission. He ignored that *gylas* was only the second after the *kende*. The attempt to end the Magyar attacks by the alliance with Gylas was successful only for a short time, because new such invasions are again attested between 959 and 970¹². However, few years after the mission to Gylas, in 954, a group of Magyar (*Tourkoi*) warriors fought in the Byzantine forces in northern Syria¹³. They could have been his subjects.

The third problem is the identity of Gylas. György Györffy supposed that *Gylas* was only the title of the person mentioned by Skylitzes and Zonaras, and that his real name was Zombor, the son of Horca¹⁴. The identification with Horca is uncertain, because it was proposed only as a consequence of the alleged location of this Gylas in Transylvania, a point of view which is denied by other historians, and which is also denied in the present study, as it follows. It is otherwise

¹⁰ Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando...*, p. 176/177-178/179 (c. 40).

¹¹ P. Antonopoulos, *Byzantium...*, p. 264-265; Sándor László Tóth, *The Territories of the Hungarian Tribal Federation around 950 (Some Observations on Constantine VII's "Tourkia")*, in G. Prinzing, M. Salamon (eds.), *Byzanz und Ostmitteleuropa 950-1453. Beiträge zu einer Table-Ronde des XIX International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Copenhagen 1996* (Mainzer Veröffentlichungen zur Byzantinistik, 3), Wiesbaden, 1999, p. 31-33; F. Makk, *L'ensemble du pays de Turquie*, *Chronica. Annual of the Institute of History, University of Szeged*, 3, 2003, p. 13-16, 19-20.

¹² Gyula Moravcsik, *Byzantium and the Magyars*, Budapest, 1970, p. 55.

¹³ László Balogh, *The Turks in the Vita Sancti Athanasii Athonitae. Vardariota-Turks or Hungarians ?*, *Chronica. Annual of the Institute of History, University of Szeged*, 9-10, 2009-2010, p. 24.

¹⁴ G. Györffy, *Landnahme, Ansiedlung und Streifzüge der Ungarn*, *AHistHung*, 31, 1985, 3-4, p. 264.

true that the word *gyula/gylas* was then still applied to the dignity of the highest military commander of all the Magyar tribes. This means that the second visit to Constantinople was made by the second person in the ranks of the confederation of tribes, the *archon ton Tourkon*, as it was called by Skylitzes. His name is unknown. The need for alliance means that at least one of the Magyar chiefs was ruling in a region from whence the attacks came. Because the main direction was the Morava valley, it is very probable that the region was somewhere on the Tisza valley, not west of the Danube. The region could be identified by mapping the gold and silver coins issued between 948 and 959 obtained by gifts by the tribe of Gylas. They are concentrated in a small area, in the Csongrád and Békés counties¹⁵. No such coin was discovered in Transylvania. The concentration is in agreement with the distribution of the pectoral crosses discovered in the areas dominated by the Magyars in the 10th century. Most of them are from the same counties¹⁶. Therefore, the archaeological researches are indicating the place of the missionary activity in the region west of the mouths of Mureş and Criş. Since the mission involved contacts with Byzantium and more specifically payments in gold for the allies, their spreading could define the area ruled by Gylas. It is not a mere coincidence that in this area there is a town Gyula, in the county of Békés. The oldest record of the name (in 1313) is *Julamonostora*¹⁷.

¹⁵ László Kovács, *Münzen aus der ungarischen Landnahmezeit. Archäologische Untersuchung der arabischen, byzantinischen, westeuropäischen und römischen Münzen aus der Karpatenbecken des 10. Jahrhunderts*, Budapest, 1989, p. 31, 32, 41, 45-46, 61, 62, 67, 72, 73, 77, 91, 173; Csanád Bálint, *Südungarn im 10. Jahrhundert* (Studia Archaeologica, 11), Budapest, 1991, p. 118-120; Gyula Kristó, *Early Transylvania (895-1324)*, Budapest, 2003, p. 64-65.

¹⁶ See the finds with bibliography in A. Madgearu, *The mission...*, p. 136-138 and *Idem, Misiunea episcopului Hierotheos în contextul ...*, p. 91-93. Updated data and maps at Ádám Bollók, *Byzantine missions among the Magyars during the later 10th century ?*, in M. Salamon, M. Wołoszyn, A. Musin, P. Špehar (eds.), *Rome, Constantinople and Newly converted Europe. Archeological and Historical Evidence*, volume II, Kraków-Leipzig-Rzeszów-Warszawa, 2012, p. 134-136.

¹⁷ Károly Mesterházy, *Die Beziehungen zwischen Byzanz und dem frühmittelalterlichen Ungarn im Lichte der materiellen Kultur*, in *Mitteldonauegebiet und Südosteuropa im frühen Mittelalter. Zbornik referátov z kolloquia*, Bratislava, 1995, p. 76.

After having considered these three controversial problems, one could easily notice that the location of the ruler who received the mission has a simple solution: Hierotheos was sent to baptize the subjects of a Magyar chief who bore the title of *gylas* and who ruled in the region bordered by the rivers Mureș, Criș and Tisza. The purpose of the mission was to prevent new attacks coming from there. This conclusion remains undisputed, because no supplementary evidence appeared against it, from the archaeological researches¹⁸. The bishopric of *Tourkia* survived (three bishops, Theophylaktos, Antonios, and Demetrios are known by their lead seals), and it was even transformed into a metropolitanate after 1018, when Basil II reorganized the eparchies after the destruction of the Bulgarian state (a metropolitan bishop of *Tourkia*, Ioannes, is attested in 1028). This metropolitanate subordinated to the Constantinopolitan church covered the entire area of the Hungarian kingdom, including Transylvania. It was even supposed by István Baán and Șerban Turcuș that Morisena, Biharia and Alba Iulia were its suphragane bishoprics¹⁹.

¹⁸ For other historians who supported this solution, see A. Madgearu, *The mission...*, p. 130. After the publication of this study, Tudor Sălăgean, *Transilvania și părțile vestice în secolul al X-lea și misiunea episcopului Hierotheos*, Altarul Reîntregirii, Universitatea Alba Iulia, Facultatea de Teologie Ortodoxă, serie nouă, 15, 2, 2010, p. 19-23 expressed his agreement, with the observation that the problem is not yet solved. My interpretation did not convince instead Aurel Dragotă (*Graves with ceremonial and worship objects from the King's Spring necropolis in Alba Iulia, Alba County*, Slovenská Archeológia, 65, 2017, 1, p. 163) who continues to maintain that: "As I was faithfully saying in 2006, the Byzantine mission started by Gylas' baptism, took place in Transylvania, more precisely in Alba Iulia. Today this fact is surer, and can also be proven by surrounding archaeological discoveries." See also A. Dragotă, *Aspecte de multiculturalitate spirituală. Rit și ritual funerar în Transilvania și Europa Centrală și de Sud-Est (secolele IX-XI)*, Alba Iulia, 2006, p. 39-44; Idem, *Bălgradul în jurul anului 1000. Repere istorice și arheologice: aspecte funerare în secolele X-XI*, in I. A. Pop, J. Nicolae, O. Panaite (eds.), *Sfântul...*, p. 279-287; Idem, *Dovezi ale misiunii bizantine la Alba Iulia (secolul al X-lea)*, Transilvania, Sibiu, s.n., 47 (123), 2018, 4, p. 89-96. My point of view was discussed by some of the participants at the conference on Hierotheos (Alba Iulia, 20th-21st October 2009), where I could not take part due to personal reasons. The organizers insisted on my submission of the study prepared for the conference. I thank them again for this opportunity.

¹⁹ István Baán, *The Metropolitanate of Tourkia. The Organization of the Byzantine Church in Hungary in the Middle Ages*, in G. Prinzing, M. Salamon (eds.), *Byzanz...*, p. 45-53; Șerban Turcuș, *Sfântul Gerard de Cenad sau despre destinul unui venețian în*

There is, nevertheless, another opinion with respect to the location of Gyula in Transylvania. This theory has had a long tradition in Hungarian and especially in Romanian historiography, being sometimes supported without a critical examination or even mention of the opposite point of view²⁰. According to this theory, the chief mentioned by Skylitzes was the father of princess Sarolt, who in her turn was supposed to be Christian. Gyula (Minor), the son of Zombor, who was defeated in 1003 by Stephen I, was certainly pagan, as results from the accounts about this war. The expression *noluit esse Christianos* cannot concern the Orthodox faith, as some historians have wrongly stated²¹, because

jurul anului O Mie, București, 2004, p. 115-119; Éva Révész, *Die erste byzantinische Oberpriestern Turkias. Hierotheos, Theophylaktos, Antónios, Démétrios, Ióánnés*, in P. Panajotov, V. Panayotov, G. Balazs (eds.), *Studia Hungaro-Bulgarica*, III, Shumen, Szeged, 2014, p. 55-68; László Koszta, *Byzantine Archiepiscopal Ecclesiastical System in Hungary ?*, in *The Carpathian Basin, the Hungarians and Byzantium* (Acta Universitatis Szegediensis, Opuscula Byzantina, 11), Szeged, 2014, p. 128-133.

²⁰ For the bibliography, see A. Madgearu, *Misiunea episcopului Hierotheos. Contribuții...*, p. 148; Idem, *The mission...*, p. 131. Recent works sustaining the Transylvanian location: Gábor Kiss, *Les influences de l'église orthodoxe en Hongrie aux Xè-XIIIè siècle*, Specimina Nova. Pars Prima. Sectio Mediaevalis. Dissertationes Historicae collectae per Cathedram Historiae Medii Aevi Modernorumque Temporum Universitatis Quinqueecclesiensis, Pécs, 4, 2007, p. 61-64; Mihai Blăjan, *Descoperiri paleocreștine în bazinul mijlociu al Mureșului (secolele II-X)*, in I. A. Pop et alii (eds.), *Sfântul...*, p. 276; Vasile Mărculeț, *"Terra Ultrasilvana" în secolul al X-lea*, ActaMP, 31-32, 2009-2010, p. 15-18; É. Révész, *Die Siegel der Bischöfe von Turkia und die Rolle der Orthodoxie um das erste Millennium im Königreich Ungarn*, in M. Bolom-Kotari, J. Zouhar (eds.), *Cogito, scribo, spero. Auxiliary Historical Sciences in Central Europe at the Outset of the 21th Century*, Hradec Králové, 2012, p. 95-96; Gábor Barabás, *The Christianization of Hungary*, in J. Dobosz, J. Strzelczyk, M. Matla (eds.), *Chrystianizacja „Młodszej Europy"*, Poznań, 2016, p. 118; A. Dragotă, *Graves...*, p. 164, 173. See also the history of the Hierotheos problem at Jan Nicolae, *De dignitate memoriae. Sfântul episcop misionar Hierotheos și noimele istorice ale canonizării sale*, in I. A. Pop, J. Nicolae, O. Panaite (eds.), *Sfântul...*, p. 100-157.

²¹ Ștefan Pascu, *Voievodatul Transilvaniei*, vol. I, Cluj, 1971, p. 73; Gheorghe Anghel, *Cetățile medievale de la Alba Iulia*, Apulum, 13, 1975, p. 247-248; Imre Boba, *Transylvania and Hungary. From the Times of Álmos and Árpád to the Times of King Stephen*, in K. Benda et alii (eds.), *Forschungen über Siebenbürgen und seine Nachbarn. Festschrift für Attila T. Szabó und Zsigmond Jakó*, I, München, 1987, p. 31; Horia Ciugudean, *Catalogul expoziției "Anul 1000 la Alba Iulia - între istorie și arheologie"*, Alba Iulia, 1996, p. 11; Ioan Aurel Pop, *România și maghiarii în secolele*

the believers of the Greek rite were never considered so by the Latins, not even after the schism of 1054. It is a major mistake to consider that "schismatic" and "pagan" are equal terms. At that time the distinction between the eastern and western Churches was not yet in operation. Gyula Minor and his sons were heathen, and more specifically unwilling to be converted²². On the other hand, it was supposed that king Stephen I received his name at the baptism in the memory of his christened grandfather Gyula who became Stephen²³, but now it is sure that this name was given because Saint Stephen was the patron of the Passau bishopric, involved in the conversion of duke Vajk and Sarolt by Bruno, the bishop of Mainz, who was sent by the emperor Otto I to duke Géza in 973²⁴.

Tenth century pectoral crosses were found in Transylvania only in two places. One is Dăbâca, where one such piece dated largely in the 10th-11th centuries was found in the area of the fortified settlement, without a certain context, which means that it could also be ascribed to the period following the conquest of Stephen I²⁵. The other place is the 10th century cemetery researched by Mihai Blăjan and next by the team of Aurel Dragotă at Alba Iulia, in the spot *Izvorul Împăratului*.

IX-XIV. *Geneza statului medieval în Transilvania*, Cluj-Napoca, 1996, p. 144; V. Mărculeț, "Terra Ultrasilvana"..., p. 19-20.

²² The same conclusion at Nicolae Dănilă, *Episcopul bizantin Hierotheos la Alba Iulia ?*, in I. A. Pop et alii (eds.), *Sfântul...*, p. 196.

²³ G. Moravcsik, *Byzance et le christianisme hongrois du Moyen Âge*, Corso di cultura sull'arte ravennate e bizantina, 16, 1969, p. 328; Richard Marsina, *Christianization of the Magyars and Hungary between the East and the West*, Studia Historica Slovaca, 19, 1995, p. 44.

²⁴ R. Marsina, *Christianization...*, p. 45-47; Marianne Sághy, , *Aspects de la christianisation des Hongrois aux IXe-Xe siècles*, in P. Urbanczyk (ed.), *Early Christianity in Central and East Europe (Congress of Commission Internationale d'Histoire Ecclésiastique Comparée, Lublin, 2-6 sept. 1996)*, I, Warsaw, 1997, 58; Eadem, *The Making of the Christian Kingdom in Hungary*, in P. Urbanczyk (ed.), *Europe around the year 1000*, Warszawa, 2001, 455-456; M. Font, *Missions...*, p. 287.

²⁵ Nicolae Gudea, Călin Cosma, *Crucea-relicvar descoperită la Dăbâca. Considerații privind tipologia și cronologia crucilor-relicvar bizantine din bronz, cu figuri în relief, descoperite pe teritoriul României*, EphNap, 8, 1998, p. 273, 284 (it was discovered in a pit dug for a pillar, in a point on the opposite bank of the river Lonea which borders the fortification).

According to the most recent report, four crosses were found in the graves 10, 24, 30 and 81. One of them is a local product, simpler than those coming from the Byzantine and Bulgarian workshops, while three are bronze reliquary crosses of Latin type²⁶. This discovery does not mean by itself that the mission of Hierotheos was responsible for the existence of these Christians, if we admit that Bălgrad belonged to the region where Romanians survived after the retreat of the Roman administration, and if we admit that these Romanians were Christians. This is the simplest explanation for the presence of some crosses in a cemetery dated before and after the penetration of the Magyars in that region. Moreover, now it is clear that Bălgrad was the center of a territory dominated by Bulgaria, which was interested in the exploitation of salt and perhaps of gold from the Apuseni Mountains. The domination of a Christian state enabled the survival of the local Christians. Since no proofs concerning relations of this region in Transylvania with the Byzantine Empire by the middle of the 10th century exist, the simple presence of few crosses at Alba Iulia could signify only that the population or a part of it was Christian when the Magyars came there. A Byzantine mission directed to a territory already Christianized makes no sense. This fact should be understood by those who still believe that Hierotheos was sent in Transylvania, because this would imply that no Christians lived there before his mission.

If we put on a map the regions mentioned in *De Administrando Imperio*, we will see that what is now Transylvania was a white spot surrounded by regions where some data, even scarce, are given (Moravia to the north, Patzinakia to the east, Bulgaria to the south, Tourkia to the west). This means that those who compiled the work finished around 952 knew nothing about the area supposed to be the same with that where Hierotheos arrived soon before. Transylvania is a white spot also when we put on the map the Byzantine coins issued around the time when the mission of Hierotheos was sent to the Magyars. The situation presented in my previous studies is still the same: the gold coins of Constantine VII are entirely spread outside Transylvania. Those Magyars who were living in what will be later called *Terra Ultrasilvana*

²⁶ M. Blăjan, *Descoperiri...*, p. 274; A. Dragotă, *Graves...*, p. 165-173.

had no documented connections with the Byzantine Empire after the withdrawal of the Bulgarian domination over the salt mines areas. Geula or Jula, as he is mentioned by Simon of Keza and in the 14th century chronicles, was a Magyar chief who was the holder of the title of *gylas*, the real conqueror of *Terra Ultrasilvana*. According to my interpretation, he first conquered the voievodate centered in Cluj led by Gelou, and then followed the advance to the southern voievodate of Bălgrad. This happened in the 930's²⁷. The Magyar conqueror of Bălgrad ruled over an isolated land peopled by Romanians and Slavs, whose remarkable testimony of existence and survival is the name *Bălgrad* itself²⁸. The placename proves not only the Bulgarian domination, but also the presence of the Romanians in that area in the 9th-10th centuries. Otherwise, they would have borrowed the Hungarian name *Gyulafehérvár*, which appeared in the 11th century, like in other cases of Transylvanian town names. The borrowing of this Bulgarian name in the Romanian language was possible only if Romanians took it before the Magyar conquest, and more precisely before the reign of that Gyula who was defeated by Stephen I and who was the namesake of *Gyulafehérvár*.

The single material proof for the location of the territory where Hierotheos was sent was supposed to be the so-called rotonda discovered by Radu Heitel in 1973 in a place near the western side of the Catholic cathedral of Alba Iulia. The rotonda consists in a circular structure inherited from a Roman tower, modified by the construction of an apse on the eastern side. The interior diameter of the round part is of circa 5

²⁷ A. Madgearu, *The Romanians...*, p. 89-105.

²⁸ Details in A. Madgearu, *Transylvania...*, p. 55-56, with previous bibliography. For later discussions on the Bulgarian domination in Transylvania, see, for instance: Ioan Marian Țiplic, *Transylvania in the Early Middle Ages (7th -13th century)*, Alba Iulia, 2006, p. 44-46; A. Dragotă, *Aspecte...*, p. 29-31; Valeri Yotov, *The Bulgarian control over the Salt way in Transylvania during the 9th century (archaeological evidence)*, in V. Nikolov, K. Bacvarov (eds.), *Salt and gold: The role of salt in prehistoric Europe. Proceedings of the international symposium (Humboldt-Kolleg) in Provadia, Bulgaria, 30 September-4 October 2010*, Provadia-Veliko Tărnovo, 2012, p. 323-331; I. M. Țiplic, *Aspecte de ritual funerar în necropola medievală timpurie de la Orăștie Dealul Pemilor X2*, Banatica, 23, 2013, p. 230-231.

m. The stratigraphy makes it clearly datable before the 11th century²⁹, but does not exclude an earlier date, in the 9th century, as the same R. Heitel has observed in another study³⁰. However, the usual interpretation is that the rotonda was the church of Hierotheos³¹. A somewhat different opinion is that the rotonda was built during the reign of another Gyula, who departed from the Tisza region to Transylvania after 971, the moment when the restoration of the Byzantine administration at the Lower Danube enabled religious contacts with the Magyars. In this variant, Gyula was the father of Sarolta³². If instead it is dated earlier, in the 9th century, the rotonda could be connected with the ruler of that Romanian-Slavic polity which was under Bulgarian domination during the second half of the 9th century and in the first decades of the 10th century. The building of a princely small round chapel in the last third of the 9th century, after the conversion of Bulgaria, is not excluded. The source of influence was in this case Great Moravia, a state that had economic and perhaps religious relations with the Transylvanian space.

²⁹ Radu Robert Heitel, *Contribuții la problema genezei raporturilor feudale în lumina cercetărilor arheologice de la Alba Iulia*, MN, 2, 1975, p. 346-350; Idem, *Die Archäologie der Ersten und Zweiten Phase des Eindringens der Ungarn in das innerkarpatische Transilvanien*, Dacia, NS, 38-39, 1994-1995, p. 417, 427.

³⁰ Idem, *Unele considerații privind civilizația din bazinul carpatic în cursul celei de-a doua jumătăți a secolului al IX-lea în lumina izvoarelor arheologice*, SCIVA, 34, 1983, 2, p. 103. This idea was shared by G. Anghel, *Alba Iulia*, București, 1987, p. 65, 84 and by me.

³¹ Mircea Rusu, *The Autochthonous Population and the Hungarians on the Territory of Transylvania in the 9th-11th Centuries*, in *Relations between the Autochthonous Population and the Migratory Populations on the Territory of Romania*, București, 1975, p. 207; Idem, *Les formations politiques roumaines et leur lutte pour l'autonomie*, RRH, 21, 1982, 3-4, p. 380; G. Anghel, *Alba...*, p. 21; Vasile Moga, *De la Apulum la Alba Iulia. Fortificațiile orașului*, București, 1987, p. 79-80; Gheorghe Petrov, *Considerații asupra unor biserici medievale cu plan central din Transilvania*, ActaMN, 33, 1996, II, p. 38; H. Ciugudean, *Catalogul...*, p. 3.

³² Cs. Bálint, *Südungarn...*, p. 121; K. Mesterházy, *Der byzantinisch-balkanische Handel nach Ungarn im 10.-11. Jahrhundert im Spiegel der Gräberfunden*, in Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila József Nominatae. Opuscula Byzantina, 9 (*Byzance et ses voisins. Mélanges à la mémoire de Gyula Moravcsik à l'occasion du centième anniversaire de sa naissance*), Szeged, 1994, p. 120; G. Kristó, *Early Transylvania...*, p. 66; P. Iambor, *Așezări fortificate din Transilvania (secolele IX-XII)*, Cluj-Napoca, 2005, p. 194.

Several rotundas of Frankish inspiration dated in the last third of the 9th century were discovered in Moravia at Mikulčice, Staré Mesto, Nitrianska Blatnica, Dučové and Pohansko³³. Good analogies for Alba Iulia are the Staré Mesto rotunda under the Saint Michael cathedral, and the one from Dučové; both have the same shape and similar dimensions (6-7 meters the interior diameter)³⁴. Florin Curta observed that these analogies with the Moravian rotundas require a careful analysis of the social and political context of this presumable influence³⁵. Because the building date of the rotunda could also be placed in the last third of the 9th century, this monument cannot be certainly ascribed to Hierotheos. As bishop, Hierotheos needed a real church and not a simple small chapel. The rotunda could not be his residence. It could be supposed instead that this monument was the private chapel of the ruler residing at Bălgrad after the Bulgarian expansion in the area of the salt mines.

This was the situation when Daniela Marcu Istrate resumed the excavations in 2011, one year after the publication of my latest study about Hierotheos in 2010, in the same free space west of the Catholic

³³ Josef Poulík, *The Origins of Christianity in Slavonic Countries North of the Middle Danube Basin*, *World Archaeology*, 10, 1978, 2 (Archaeology and Religion), p. 164-166, fig. 2/2, 3/10; Dušan Čaplovič, *Archaeology and the beginnings of Christianity in the territory of Slovakia*, in P. Urbanczyk (ed.), *Early Christianity*, p. 98; Pavel Kouřil, *Kirche Nr. 7 in Mikulčice*, in L. Poláček, J. Maříková-Kubková (ed.), *Frühmittelalterliche Kirchen als archäologische und historische Quelle. Internationale Tagungen in Mikulčice VIII*, Brno, 2010, p. 57-64; Jiří Macháček, Adéla Balcárková, Pavel Čáp, Petr Dresler, *Velkomoravská rotunda z Pohanska u Břeclavi (The Great Moravian Rotunda at Pohansko near Břeclav)*, *Památki Archeologické*, 105, 2014, p. 87-153.

³⁴ Luděk Galuška, *The Question of Evaluating and the Present Level of Knowledge about the Great Moravian Agglomeration of Staré Mesto-Uherské Hradiště*, in Č. Staňa, L. Poláček (eds.), *Frühmittelalterliche Machtzentren in Mitteleuropa. Mehrjährige Grabungen und Ihre Auswertung. Symposium Mikulčice, 5.-9. September 1994*, Brno, 1996, p. 192, fig. 2; Idem, *Kirchliche Architektur des großmährischen Veligrad und die Besiedlung des Machtzentrums. Funktion und Lage einzelner Bauten im Rahmen der Siedlungsstruktur der frühmittelalterlichen Agglomeration Staré Město-Uherské Hradiště*, in L. Poláček, J. Maříková-Kubková (eds.), *Frühmittelalterliche Kirchen als archäologische und historische Quelle. Internationale Tagungen in Mikulčice VIII*, Brno, 2010, p. 168.

³⁵ F. Curta, *Transilvania în jurul anului 1000*, *EphNap*, 12, 2002, p. 278.

cathedral which was previously investigated by Radu Heitel (in 1973). Heitel has covered with earth his discovery, the so-called Cathedral Ia, dated at the beginning of the 11th century, a building considered to be the first siege of the bishop of Alba³⁶. This is the same monument excavated by Daniela Marcu Istrate in 2011, but on a more extended area than Heitel was able to dig³⁷. After the works, the ruins were again covered with earth by the archaeologist. There are significant differences as concerns the dimensions and the shape of the construction, in comparison with what Heitel had observed. The church has a rectangular nave with four central pillars set in the form of a Greek cross, and a semicircular apsis. The dimensions are 21 x 12 meters. No graves could be linked with this church. The foundation of the monument destroyed some archaeological assemblages belonging to the settlement dated in the 9th-10th centuries, which means that it was built after the abandonment of the settlement which occupied the area of the former Roman camp. On this basis, Marcu Istrate argues that the *post-quem* moment of the construction could be placed by the middle of the 10th century, and that the monument was in its turn put down when the so-called Ib cathedral was constructed, that is by the third quarter of the 11th century (the churchyard was inaugurated in the same period, using the space of the former church Ia.) As concerns the pillars set in the shape of a Greek cross, Marcu Istrate points to some analogies in the Byzantine and Bulgarian churches, like those of Pliska and Preslav, and she remarks its large size, comparable with the Byzantine prototypes. She also supposes that the monument could testify direct relations with the Byzantine Empire, suggesting that the mission of Hierotheos was responsible for that, but avoiding to discuss the contradiction between this conversion of the first Gyula and the paganism of Gyula Minor, who had certainly not been baptized, according to all the sources.

If the church was indeed built for the first Gyula by the middle of the 10th century, this would mean that the second Gyula, even being a

³⁶ R. Heitel, *Contribuții...*, p. 346-347; Idem, *Die Archäologie...*, p. 429.

³⁷ Daniela Marcu Istrate, *Biserica din secolele X-XI, de influență bizantină, de la Alba Iulia. Restituiri preliminare*, *Apulum*, 51 (Series Historia et Patrimonium), 2014, p. 95-120; Eadem, *Byzantine influences in the Carpathian Basin around the turn of the millennium. The pillared church of Alba Iulia, Dacia*, NS, 59, 2015, p. 177-213.

heathen, left his uncle's church undestroyed, and that the destruction was done later, after the defeat of Gyula Minor, when Alba became a bishopric of the Hungarian church, in order to be replaced by a new one. Such a tortous interpretation cannot be accepted, because it is based on the premise that the monument could be dated only before 1003. Actually, it must be emphasized that the archaeological situation does not offer a certain date exclusively in the 10th century for the construction moment. The single certain fact is the superposition of a dwellings level that existed until an undetermined moment in that century, but whose destruction could be easily associated with the Magyar conquest dated after 934. It is not proved that the church was built short time after the end of this habitation, by the middle of the 10th century, in order to fit with the Hierotheos moment.

Marcu Istrate has found what Heitel has partially unearthed before her: the church called Ia. The Byzantine plan does not contradict this theory, because the Byzantine influence survived a long time in Hungary after the coronation of Stephen I, and because Alba was, most probably, in its first period of existence, a bishopric included in the Greek metropolitanate of *Tourkia*, like Biharia and Morisena. This kind of organization which extended east of Tisza an ecclesiastical structure subordinated to the Eastern Church was necessary because the population living in those regions, Romanians among them, belonged to that Church. Therefore, it could be said that after the conquest of 1003, the new Hungarian masters allowed the construction of a church for their subjects, who were already Christians. If the church Ia could be associated with the eastern bishop settled there after 1003, the church Ib was constructed as the siege of the Latin bishopric, after the schism of 1054. Taking as true the idea of location of Hierotheos at Bălgrad-Alba, D. Marcu Istrate avoided to discuss the identification made by Heitel.

The doubtful interpretation of Marcu Istrate was commented by Miklós Takács, who remarked that the Greek cross plan is not decisive to establish the western or eastern origin of the churches dated in the 10th-11th centuries. He makes it clear that there is no certain chronology for the monument excavated at Alba Iulia, namely for its building sometime in the 10th century, and that the location at Alba Iulia of that baptized Gyula is based only on the name of the town, given after the

other Gyula who was defeated in 1003³⁸. Răzvan Theodorescu has instead no doubts about the conclusions of Marcu Istrate, resuming his previous considerations occasioned by the discovery of the rotonda, which was, according to him, a baptisterium³⁹.

If Hierotheos had no relation with Alba Iulia, it is nevertheless true that Bălgrad was the residence of a Magyar ruler who moved there from Cluj, when he conquered the previous Romanian-Slavic voivodate dominated by Bulgaria. His family remained heathen, and this polity remained independent until the new conquest, that of Stephen I. The newcomers were buried near their cathedral and in the cemeteries excavated in the spots “Stația de salvare” and “strada Brândușei”, living together with the natives who were already Christians.

³⁸ Miklós Takács, *Considerații privind bisericile ce configurează crucea în planul și structura lor spațială. Cazul unor monumente din evul mediu timpuriu, recent descoperite în Bazinul Carpatic*, *Marisia*, 33, 2013, 114-123.

³⁹ Răzvan Theodorescu, "Hierotheos al meu", in I. A. Pop, J. Nicolae, O. Panaite (eds.), *Sfântul...*, p. 25-44; Idem, *Découvertes archéologiques à Alba Iulia et une conversion des Hongrois*, *RRHA*, 51, 2014, 3-9.