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NOS CHRISTIANI QUI HABITAMUS IN HAC URBE TEMESUAR. CHRISTIANS AND OTTOMANS IN TIMIȘOARA IN THE SECOND HALF OF 16TH CENTURY

ABSTRACT
In 1552, following a brutal military campaign, Timişoara and its surroundings were occupied by Ottomans and integrated in the Empire. Although the political change was initially a real shock for the Christian communities inside the city (Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox), the religious life continued under Turkish rule. A lot of documents from the second half of the 16th century offer information about the cohabitation between different Christian denominations and, of course, Christian-Muslim relation. The Ottoman authorities had established the best relations with the Serbian Orthodox church, recognizing many of its privileges, even allowing the foundation of a Serbian Orthodox bishopric inside the city. The Catholic and Protestant communities felt much stronger the Ottoman pressure, because the two Christian denominations tried to get support from Turkish authorities in their dispute over faith. In the early 1580, the Holy See sent the first missionaries to the city in order to help Catholic inhabitants and to stop the spread of the Reformation among them. The Protestant believers had their own dispute with the Catholics, but were not united at all: a few Lutherans, some Calvinists and even a curious Anti-Trinitarian bishopric under influence of Judaic theology can be found inside the city in the second half of the 16th century.

KEYWORDS: Timișoara; 16th century; Ottomans; Christian denominations; cohabitation.

Timișoara (Hung. Temesvár) was one of the most important urban centres in the south of the medieval Hungarian kingdom, certainly the most representative of today's Banat territory, a province which, in its present form, acquired its specific identity after its integration into the territories of the House of Austria at the beginning of the 18th century. Despite its importance and the research carried out to date, the history of the town still retains many white spots. Of course, the archives can still offer surprises, new contributions to the detailed knowledge of political, military or ecclesiastical life. The history of the city's religious life is perhaps the least known, with specialist research being channelled into other aspects such as Timișoara's role as a royal residence, the sieges it went through, urban topography during the Ottoman period, etc.

POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

In 1526 the medieval Hungarian kingdom succumbed to Ottoman troops. The defeat at Mohács, and the death of the Hungarian king in battle sparked a dispute

for the throne between John Szapolyai and Ferdinand of Habsburg. The first one manage to impose himself with Ottoman support, but his death in 1540 prompted Ferdinand to reclaim the Hungarian kingdom. The Ottoman Empire's forceful intervention in 1541 partially resolved the problem of the Hungarian inheritance, and the kingdom was divided into three distinct parts: northern and western Hungary remained with the Habsburgs, the central part was occupied directly by the Ottomans, and the eastern and southern parts (Transylvania and present-day Banat) came under the administration of the minor John Sigismund Szapolyai and his mother Isabella. But the Habsburgs never gave up on recovering the whole kingdom. Driving the Turks out of Buda was beyond Ferdinand's military capacity, so attempts were made to recover Transylvania and the adjacent territories, especially as brother George Utješenović Martinuzzi was receptive to the idea. After several attempts, with the complicity of Martinuzzi, who had been awarded as cardinal of the Catholic Church, the imperial general Giovanni Battista Castaldo entered Transylvania, occupied the main urban centres and forced the minor John Sigismund and the widowed Queen Isabella to give up the throne in favour of the House of Habsburg. Imperial garrisons made up of Spanish, German, Hungarian and Serbian soldiers were set up in the urban centres south of the Mureș River. With this act, the Ottoman High Porte saw its rights violated, since the territory was considered both in theory and legally as an integral part of the Ottoman Empire[1]. The Sultan considered it necessary to recover the territory from the Habsburgs and impose direct Ottoman authority. Mehmet Sokollu, the Beylerbey of Belgrade, was appointed in the summer of 1551 to bring the area back under the authority of the Porte. In September of the same year, the fortresses and urban centres of Beche (Becsej), Becicherecul Mare (Nagy Becskerek, today Zrenjanin-Serbia), Cenad (Csanád), Lipova (Lippa), Ciacova (Chák) and Ilidia (Illyad) were attacked and occupied. Timișoara, however, resisted Turkish military pressure which ceased with the onset of the cold season. The Christian counterattack that year was successful, with most of the lost centres recovered. The following year, a large Turkish army under Ahmed Ali Pasha attacked again the area between the Mureș, Danube, Tisa and Carpathians. After prolonged resistance, on 27 July 1552 Timișoara fell into the hands of the Ottomans, who slaughtered the Christian garrison led by Stephen Lossonczy. Alongside this urban centre, the plain area's towns were occupied: Cenad, Arad, Lipova, Felnac (Fenlak). For more than 160 years the Ottoman rule was established, the territory being integrated into the Empire under the administrative form of the vilayet of Timișoara[2].

1 Cristina Feneșan, *Constituirea principatului autonom al Transilvaniei* (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 1997), 18-20.

2 Almost daily description of the fighting at Károly Czimer, "Temesvár megvétele 1551–1552", *Hadtörténelmi közlemények*, 6 (1893), 15-71, 196-229, 308-76. Useful are also George Postelnicu, "Asediul Timișoarei în 1551-1552 și cucerirea ei de către turci", *Banatul. Revistă literară, artistică, socială*, 12 (1927), 26-31, and Petru Iambor, "Cucerirea Banatului de către turci și transformarea lui în pașalâc (1552)", in *Vilaetul Timișoarei (450 de ani de la întemeierea pașalâcului 1552-2002)*, ed. Doina Benea (Timișoara: Mirton 2002), 14-22.

THE OTTOMANS AND CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS SOUTH OF THE MUREȘ RIVER

Because the Islamic enclaves in Europe were surrounded by a Christian majority, the need for collaboration and coexistence between the different ethnic and confessional groups arose. Even so, according to the Ottoman legal system, the Christian population was subject to a number of social restrictions in order not to disturb the good Muslims: not to build houses higher than those of the Muslims, not to ring bells, not to ride horses. What was wanted of the reya (Christian subject) was to be a good taxpayer, under such conditions the state was tolerant of his religious choices[3]. The conquest of Hungary, and thus of the present-day territory of Banat, superimposed Ottoman authority on a large Christian population. Sixteenth-century Hungary was a "linguistic and confessional Tower of Babel". As we have seen, the southern area of the kingdom was no exception. A specific situation in the period immediately following the conquest was the transformation of some of Christian churches into Muslim places of prayer. In Timișoara «its churches were turned into mosques, the bells were thrown out of the towered belfries and the reading of the ezan was started there»[4]. The situation was the same in Lipova where, immediately after the Turkish troops took over the town, the churches were transformed into mosques, or in Becicherec where the Ottomans «decorated the fortress according to the customs of the Mohammedan religion». On this occasion, a lot of Christian objects of worship and crosses in the town were destroyed and a mosque and Islamic school were built[5].

The tradition of occupying Catholic churches and converting them into mosques was perpetuated until the end of the 17th century, when the precarious state of the few remaining Catholics in the province, who had lost their places of worship to the Ottomans or the Reformed, was deplored[6]. The latter, for their part, considered the situation after the Ottoman conquest catastrophic. The Reformed deanery of Zarand, which had owned sixty-seven churches, lost a large number of them to the Ottoman occupiers[7].

The Ottoman state encouraged trade and crafts, which attracted many South Slavic elements involved in these activities, who founded specific colonies in Timișoara or Lipova. Some of these were Islamic, such as the Bosnians of Lipova, the so-called Poturi. The Muslim population, much smaller in number than the Christian one, was mainly concentrated in the urban perimeter, being represented by soldiers

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3 Mihai Maxim, "Teritorii românești sub administrație otomană", *Revista Arhivelor*, 9 (1983): 884.

4 Mihail Guboglu and Mustafa Mehmet, eds., *Cronici turcești despre Țările Române*, vol. I (București: Ed. Academiei RSR, 1965), 274.

5 Guboglu and Mehmet, *Cronici turcești,* vol I, 280, 287; The impact of turning Christian churches into mosques is examined by Cristina Feneșan, *Vilayetul Timișoara 1552-1716* (Timișoara: Ariergarda 2014), 319-25.

6 Arhiva Episcopiei Romano-Catolice Cenad-Timișoara, *Anales Venerabilis Capituli Cathedralis Ecclesiae Csanadiensis*, Liber secundus, mss., 111: *Certe templa a Catholicis olim erecta, in Turcarum fana, vel Calvinianorum oratoria cesserunt*, f. 111r.

7 Pál Ember, *Historia Ecclesiae Reformatae in Hungaria et Transilvania*, ed. Adolf Lampe (Trajecti ad Renum: Jacobum van Poolsum 1728), 639.

and their families, officials of the administration, merchants and small producers of traditional products[8]. In the case of the area under study, there has been no massive settlement by Muslims, with Christians retaining their absolute majority. The Ottomans, even if reduced in numbers, held the levers of power, being in administrative positions or as holders of land plots (timars). In the occupied towns, especially in Timișoara, the social and cultural life of the Muslim communities was particularly flourishing, especially in the 17th century[9].

The political changes after 1552 benefited the Orthodox denomination. In 1557, at the intervention of vizier Mehmed Sokollu, a Bosnian Serb, the old Serbian patriarchate of Ipek (Peć) was reactivated. The first patriarch, Macarius, was, not coincidentally, the brother of the vizier. The jurisdiction granted to the new patriarchate was very large, extending over the whole of the Balkan Peninsula and occupied Hungary, with the patriarchs having religious, political, administrative and fiscal powers over the faithful, obviously within the limits allowed by the Ottoman authorities to whom they were submitted[10]. After the foundation of the Patriarchate of Ipek, the former southern areas of the Hungarian kingdom automatically came under the jurisdiction of this institution, especially since the territory south of the Mureș River seems to have been institutionally annexed to the Serbian Church since the 14th century[11]. The Ottoman conquest had a major impact on the other two Christian segments: the Reformed denominations and Catholic Church. Both confessions were seriously affected by the change of political context. The Catholics were left without the few churches and convents they still had in the province after the impact of the Reformation, such as the Franciscan convent in Lipova. The Protestants, on the other hand, had to reconsider their strategy because of the halt of institutional progress in its infancy and isolation from other like-minded communities. The favouring of one or other of the confessions was not dictated

8 Cristina Feneșan, *Cultura otomană a Vilayetului Timișoarei (1552-1716)* (Timișoara: Editura de Vest, 2004), *passim*; Lists of Muslim officials and soldiers in Timisoara and neighbouring towns can be found at Antal Velics and Ernő Kammerer, *Magyarországi török kincstári defterek*, vol. I (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1886), 379-81, 383, 414-23; As elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire, the Muslim population of towns in the formerly occupied southern territory of Hungary was concentrated in the central areas, while Christians lived mostly on the periphery.

9 Towards the end of the 17th century, several Ottoman chroniclers from Timișoara, such as Ibrahim Pecevi, Ali, Osman Aga, Ibrahim Naimeddin, who were familiar with the cultural aspects of the empire but, at the same time, through their experiences, were connected to the Central European cultural context, came to the fore: Feneșan, *Cultura otomană*, 178-225.

10 Ivana Andrić, "Položaj Pećke patrijaršije u Osmanskom Carstvu od 1557 do 1690 godine", *Povijesni prilozi*, 27 (2004): 71-90; László Hádrovics, *Le peuple serbe et son eglise sur la domination ottomane* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1947), 48-52; Jovan Radonitsch, *Histoire des serbes de Hongrie* (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1918), 105.

11 Radoslav M. Grujić, "Духовни живот", in Војводина, vol. I: Од најстаријих времана до велике сеобе, ed. Душан Поповић (Нови Сад: Историско друштво у Новом Саду, 1939), 343-48; Id., "Pećka patrijaršija", in *Narodna enciklopedija srpsko-hrvatsko-slovenačka*, vol. III (Zagreb: Bibliografski Zavod, 1928), 374-75.

by religious considerations but, in most cases, by the performance of the Turkish authorities in the territory, as well as by the political context of the time[12].

CHRISTIANS IN OTTOMAN TIMIȘOARA IN THE 16TH CENTURY

We have very little information about what happened in Timișoara after the Ottoman conquest. We know little about what happened to the Christian population of the city immediately after 1552, and for more than two decades we have no information about what happened at a religious level. Timișoara underwent an urban, administrative and social transformation, but the Christian community survived, including through the arrival of new members from the Balkan area, because almost immediately after the conquest various South Slavic merchants settled in the city, especially Ragusans. The first merchant from Ragusa present in Timișoara after the city's integration into the Ottoman Empire was Ivan Radov in 1554[13]. Both Roman churchmen and reformers struggled to survive in the new political and institutional climate. Leaving aside the relationship with the Orthodox world, historiography considers that the Ottomans generally favoured the Reformed confessions. Initially, the Protestants suffered like all other Christians: they lost their churches and the priesthood was killed or driven out. In the case of central Hungary, the Reformed represented a numerical majority compared to the Catholic faithful. The local Ottoman authorities often took into account the numerical factor in the religious field in order to maintain the status quo established before the conquest. In the case of the Protestants, other aspects that made them desirable were also taken into account: the puritanism of the church, the doctrine of obedience to the superior and, above all, the anti-German sentiments specific to the Hungarian Reformed world[14].

In the southern area remaining under the Ottomans, the tendency of the Reformation was one of radicalisation and it particularly targeted the population remaining faithful to the dogmas promoted by the Catholic Church. The Balkan merchants, together with the Hungarian community in the town, would form the Catholic core of the area, but were deprived of the functioning of divine services because of the shortage of priests. Several letters from the local population to the Holy See or from missionaries who came to offer them religious assistance have survived, letters from which we can partially reconstruct the religious life of the Christian communities in the town and how they interacted with each other and with the Ottoman authorities in a well-defined time segment.

The earliest letter known to date comes from January 6, 1578, when the Catholic community, represented by Ragusan and Bosnian merchants, together with John Herceg, judge of the Hungarians (*de primatibus et ex antiquis Ungarorum civis*

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12 Adrian Magina, *De la excludere la coabitare. Biserici tradiționale, Reformă și Islam în Banat (1500-1700)* (Cluj-Napoca: Academia Română, Centrul de Studii Transilvane 2011), 129-30.

13 Bogumil Hrabak, "Дубровачки трговци у османлијском делу Паноније до 1570 године", *Зборник Матице српске за историју*, 30 (1984): 17.

14 Fodor Pál, "The ottomans and their christians in Hungary", in *Frontiers of faith*, eds. Eszter Andor and István György Tóth (Budapest: Ariergarda, 2000), 142-43.

Temesuariensis), sent a pathetic letter to the Holy See asking for help and spiritual assistance. In addition to the vexations coming from the Ottomans, the Catholic community had to endure the pressures of the anti-Trinitarian "heretics", active at that time in the city on the Bega River. «In these countries the heretics of the various sects» (*In questi paesi gli eretici delle varie sette*) write the South Slavic merchants, the good Catholics were bitterly attacked by them «continually sneaking with their predications blaming the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and seduce the debaters in the faith» (*continuamente serpendo con le lor predicationi il biasfemare il nome di nostro signor Giesu Christo et sedure le debati nella fede*) and with «their diabolical and poisonous predications» (*loro diabolici et velerose predicationi*). The followers of the Catholic Church, simple people, were frequently exposed to such preaching, especially since there were no Catholic priests to help the community. The letter to the Holy See stated that Boniface, the bishop of Ston (Stagno), was asked to send «a good priest» (*un pastore idoneo*) «to fight false Protestant teachings» (*confutar li falsi dogma di eretici*) – who made «thousand evils of Christian piety» (*mille mali della pieta christiana*) and to administer the sacraments and lead the community. There was only one Catholic priest in the town, the Ragusan Dominican Dominic Giurgević, but he was always running into difficulties with the «perverted heretics» (*perversi heretici*). The Dominican was making great efforts to be a good shepherd of the souls, «defend his flock against the infernal wolves» (*difendere le pecorele de Christo dei lupi infernali*) and «answer the heretical threat» (*rebatere le loro falsità*). The authors of the letter identify very well the threat coming from the Unitarians, the dogma they professed and propagated among the Catholic Christians of the city:

> perfidi eretici qui nagano la Santissima Trinità, la divinita del nostro redentore, li sancti sacramenti, l`autorita della romana Gesa, la croce di Christo, la intercesione et la veneratione di Sancti et de Dio et brevemente tutta la pieta Christiana predicando et insegnando per il contrario ogni impieta et ogni pravita[15].

The letter reveals the shortcomings of Catholicism in the southern part of Hungary, but also the stubborn tenacity of the radical Reformation, which appealed to preaching and public disputes to gain a foothold. Apart from professing typical Reformation concepts such as preaching, the rejection of the authority of the Catholic Church and the papal primacy or the intercession of saints, the emphasis on the denial of the divinity of Christ and the Holy Trinity indicates pressure from the most radical wing of the Unitarians, the Judaizing one, which was flourishing in the Timisoara area in those years. Although it did not succeed in dislodging the Catholic community, the anti-Trinitarian propaganda seems to have been successful because «many have apostate» (*molti hanno apostate*), especially among the Hungarian population, to whom the anti-Trinitarians addressed themselves in the vernacular, while the Ragusan Catholic priest did not know that language[16].

15 Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, *Instrumenta Miscellanea*, n. 5907, ff.nn.

16 A letter from 1582 mentioned only one Ragusan priest in the Hungarian Catholic community of Timișoara, but he was unable to preach in their language: «quorum unus

How did the anti-Trinitarians become a danger to the Catholic community in Ottoman-occupied Timisoara? The case was not unique, as the Unitarians managed to spread their ideas and become religiously influential in several territories of Ottoman-occupied Hungary during that period. This is also the case in the Pécs area, where in 1581 the Catholic community complained about both the Turkish rule and the anti-Trinitarians from Transylvania, who denied the Holy Trinity and the divine nature of Christ[17]. In the case of Timișoara, the role of Paul Karádi, one of the most interesting Hungarian Unitarian figures of that period, is worth mentioning. Originally from Székesfehérvár, Karádi went through various stages in his search for the true Christian faith. He was quite familiar with the present-day Banat region, having worked in Caransebeș in the 1560s in the entourage of the local lord Gregory Bethlen. After the death of his patron, Karádi returned to Transylvania and spent some time in the Principality. In 1568 he took part as an arbitrator in the great dispute between the Calvinists and the Unitarians in the princely palace of Alba-Iulia, and the following year he was in Abrud (Hung. Abrudbánya), where he had set up a printing press where he printed the "Comedia Balassi Menyhart"[18].

The success of the promotion of Anti-Trinitarian ideas was limited in Transylvania to certain areas, the most representative Unitarian urban centre being Cluj (Hung. Kolozsvár). The dissemination of anti-Trinitarian ideas was, however, constantly opposed by the reformed (Calvinist) Hungarian community. Since Karádi was familiar with the territory of the province of Banat, he together with a group of young Unitarians from Cluj headed for the Ottoman-occupied southern areas. Taking advantage of the goodwill of the Turkish authorities in Timișoara, who saw certain similarities between the denial of the Trinity and the Islamic monotheistic faith, the anti-Trinitarian managed to take over by force a number of Reformed churches, from which the Calvinist pastors were expelled. The Unitarians established two main parishes, one in Șimand (Arad County, north of the Mureș River), where Benedict Ovári remained as preacher, and another in Timișoara, where Karádi himself settled. The anti-Trinitarians tried to use the Abrud printing press for proselytising purposes, but without notable results, because shortly after settling in the area the Ottomans confiscated it. Apparently the Unitarians met with a reaction from the representatives of the Orthodox Church, who, in collaboration with the

est inter nos, qui vocatur Dobronichi frater Dominicanus, qui etiam nescit concionari Hungarice». The Latin translation of the original Hungarian document was published in Augustinus Theiner, ed., *Annales Ecclesistici*, vol. III (Romae: Typographia Tiberina, 1856), 331; Adrian Magina, "Între Luther și Mahomed. Catolicii din Timișoara în a doua jumătate a secolului al XVI-lea", *Analele Banatului, S.N., Arheologie-Istorie,* 15 (2007): 142.

17 Theiner, *Annales Ecclesistici*, vol. III, 273-274.

18 János Kénosi Tőzsér, *Unitario-ecclesiastica historia Transylvanica Liber I-II*, vol. IV/1, ed. János Káldos, (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2002), 165; Adrian Magina,"The Unitarian Denomination in Sixteenth century Banat", *Transylvanian Review*, 13/1 (2004): 3-11; Antal Molnár, "Ragusa and the beginning of Balkan missions", *Dubrovnik Annals,* 25 (2021): 104-08.

Ottoman authorities, stopped their action[19]. Recently, Antal Molnár considered that instead of the Orthodox who instigated the Ottoman authorities against the Unitarians, one should see the Ragusans, who at that time felt the pressure from the radical Reformation acutely[20]. After 1576, both Karádi and Ovári came closer and closer to the Judaizing dogma promoted by Francis David, which they will disseminate in turn in Șimand, Timișoara and Cenad. After David's condemnation in 1579, the Sabbatarian Unitarians in Banat came into open conflict with those in Transylvania, with Karádi becoming the first Judaizing bishop in the whole of Hungary. It was the only such attempt in the sphere of the radical Reformation, which divided the anti-Trinitarian church for over a hundred years. After 1580, in the context of disputes with the Catholic community and due to the disappearance of their leaders, Ovári and Karádi, the Unitarians lost their persuasive power. The Sabbatarian bishopric of Timișoara is the last ecclesiastical institution linked to any of the Reformed denominations mentioned in the Ottoman-occupied southern area[21]. In the territory south of Mures River, only parishes' continued to function, without the necessary institutional support.

To respond to the challenge in the Ottoman area, the Holy See resorted to a specific weapon of the Counter-Reformation: the apostolic visitation. To some extent the framework was similar to that in other areas occupied by the Ottomans: the situation had to be assessed and it had to be decided what could be saved and, as far as possible, the existing Catholic community strengthened. In 1581 the Bishop of Ston (in present-day Croatia), Bonifacije Stefanović Drakolica (known as Boniface of Ragusa), was appointed Apostolic Visitor. He was accompanied by Bartolomeo Sfondrato (Bartol Sfondrati), a Croatian Jesuit, priest confessor at the Casa Sacra in the College of Loretto, and the Franciscan Observant Antonio Matković. The appointment of Boniface of Ragusa was no coincidence as he had been a missionary in Jerusalem at a Franciscan convent, spoke Turkish and through his connections was able to obtain a pass from the Ottoman authorities[22]. Bartolomeo Sfondrato, was born in Ragusa around 1534 into a famous local family. Once in the Jesuit order he was sent as a missionary to Italy, Dalmatia, Bosnia and Croatia[23]. Because of his training he was recognised at the time as *doctissimus missionarius*. On his return to his homeland he was appointed by Pope Gregory XIII to accompany the apostolic visitor Boniface of Ragusa to the South Slavic areas and Ottoman Hungary[24]. Coming from Ancona in Italy, the bishop and the two missionaries disembark in the port of Sibenik and head for Sarajevo where they arrived on 24 May 1581. A month later they were at the Franciscan convent in Olovo, from where they crossed

19 Magina, *De la excludere*, 132.

20 Molnár, "Ragusa and the beginning of Balkan missions", 107.

21 Magina, *De la excludere*, 132.

22 István György Tóth, "Raguzái Bonifác a hódoltság első pápai vizitátora (1581-1582)", *Történelmi Szemle*, 3-4 (1997): 448-51.

23 Dragoljub Pavlović, "Elogia Iesuitarum Ragusinorum", *Croatia Sacra*, 3/6 (1933): 120-22.

24 Miroslav Vanino, "Ljetopis Dubrovačkoga kolegija (1559-1564)", *Vrela i prinosi: zbornik za povijest isusovačkoga reda u Hrvatskim krajevima*, 7 (1937): 4-5.

to Tuzla. From this last location they entered the former Hungarian territories, at Požega from where the bishop went to Pécs and Sfondrato to Belgrade[25]. From here, he left for Cluj, via Alba-Iulia, to renew his votes, and then returned to Timisoara[26]. On 18 September of the same year, the missionaries reached their final destination in the urban centre on the Bega River. What they knew from the letter of the Catholic community was only part of the shortcomings of the faithful, as revealed in the first letter sent from the mission site[27]. Until 1551-1552, when the Ottomans came to power, there is no known case of acceptance of the Reformation in the rural world south of the Mures River. Reformed communities had been established exclusively in urban areas, in Lipova (Hung. Lippa), Caransebeș (Hung. Karánsebes) or Timișoara, in particular through the efforts of the former lord of Timis County, Peter Petrović. As in other areas of the former Hungarian kingdom, the lack of a priestly body, felt after the Turks conquered the area, led some Catholics to turn to Protestant pastors[28]. The missionaries concentrated their efforts in those urban area where they would try to implement Tridentine Catholicism and reform Catholic communities to face the Protestant pressure. The instructions received by the missionaries in this regard speak for themselves. In 59 points they were asked to punish apostates and those who did not accept the new Reformed Catholicism, to open schools, to solve the marriage problem. Particular emphasis was placed on the dissemination of religious books in Latin to the faithful, but especially to the priestly body, secular or regular, remaining in the territory, so that they could discover the new Tridentine dogma[29].

In Timisoara the Bishop of Ston had limited success in promoting the message through the printed book, because after his death 18 copies of the Roman Breviary remained, which the Holy See was endeavouring to recover. Members of the community were to receive books on doctrine, probably catechisms in the vernacular, printed in both Latin and Cyrillic characters[30]. In February and March 1582, two letters from the Ragusan and Hungarian communities in Timișoara revealed new aspects of the Reformation's relationship with the Catholic faithful. The death of the Bishop of Ston further reduced the city's precarious Catholic priesthood. The only priest left to effectively shepherd the Catholic community was the same Ragusan Dominic Giurgević. As parish priest of the town, he strove to promote Catholic

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25 Endre Veress, ed., *Fontes Rerum Transilvanicarum*, vol. I (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1911), 171; Tóth, "Raguzai", 454.

26 Ladislaus Lukács, ed., *Monumenta Antiquae Hungariae*, vol. II (Roma: Institutum Historicum S.I., 1976), 158-59; Veress, *Fontes Rerum Transilvanicarum,* I, 153.

27 István György Tóth, ed., *Litterae Missionariorum de Hungaria et Transilvania*, vol. I (Roma-Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézete-Római Magyar Akadémia, 2003), 118-19.

28 This situation is highlighted by a series of reports from the early 17th century: Magina, *De la excludere*, 137.

29 Eusebius Fermendžin, ed., *Acta Bosnae potissimum ecclesiastica cum insertis editorum documentorum regestis ab anno 925 usque ad annum 1752* (Zagrabiae: Academia Scientiarum et Artium Slavorum Meridionalium, 1892), 321-34.

30 Fermendžin, *Acta Bosnae*, 335-36.

principles among the youth, but was limited by his poor knowledge of Hungarian. Both letters insist on material support that would have helped to found a school. Only through education could the young people, and thus the community, face the "Lutheranism" and unbelief in the town. The zealous Dominican made full use of the weapons of the counter-reformation: preaching and public disputes[31], and finally succeeded in eliminating the threat from the radical Reformation, because his intervention prevented the Unitarians from holding the synod scheduled for Simand, practically affecting the possibility of coordinating their actions, which in time led to an Anti-Trinitarian backlash in the area[32].

Father Bartolomeo Sfondrato, although he was well prepared for the mission, could not give him any support in his actions because, in the meantime, he had fallen ill. The Jesuit, with his mind wandering (*mente captus*), refused to pray or attend the Holy Mass, and ended up wandering around the city and making a pact with one of the Protestant preachers. On 10 November, because he refused treatment, Sfondrato died in the house of a Ragusan merchant[33]. His death marked the end of the first attempt to restore the Catholic positions south of the River Mures. The large number of Christian believers left without spiritual assistance in the Ottoman-occupied territories attracted the attention of the Jesuits on mission in Transylvania. They found that there were many Catholics under Ottoman rule who were in dire need of priests:

> Christiani, qui sub Turcis Tömösvarini et Giulae habitant, miserunt ad eum nuncios rogantes, ut ipsis aliquem Sacerdotem Catholicum concederet, asserentes se omnes sub Basa Tömösvariensi in quadraginta villis et in civitate in Catholica Religione constanter permansisse[34].

For economic reasons, but also because of the large number of followers of the Roman religion, the Ottomans favoured the Catholic communities in the Timisoara area, contrary to what happened in other parts of the former Hungarian kingdom. The Ragusan and Bosnian merchants, who were actively involved in trade with the Levant, brought important benefits to the Ottoman state, even though they were of

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31 «fratrem Dominicum Giurgevich Ragusinum ordinis Sancti Dominici, hic Temesuarii nobiscum morantem, patrem quidem et vitae integritate et scientia admodum insiquem, qui tum praedicationibus, tum disputationibus inimicos Sanctae Fidei persequi non cessat». The letter is signed by 23 members of the town's South Slavic community, most likely merchants from Ragusa. This documents was first published in *Annales Ecclesiastici*, III, 330-331, but without the names of South-Slavic merchants and in full by Magina, "Între Luther și Mahomed", 140-41.

32 Molnár, "Ragusa and the beginning of Balkan missions", 111 and Id., *Le Saint-Siege, Raguse et les missions catholiques de la Hongrie ottomane 1572-1647* (Roma-Budapest: Accademia d'Ungheria, 2007), 118.

33 Veress, *Fontes Rerum Transilvanicarum*, II, 30; Maria Holban, Maria Matilda. Alexandrescu, Dersca Bulgaru et al., eds., *Călători străini despre Ţările Române*, vol. III (București: Editura Stiintifica, 1971), 79; Miroslav Vanino, "Bartol Sfondrati u Temesvaru g. 1582", *Vrela i Prinosi,* 4 (1934): 153.

34 Lukács, *Monumenta Antiquae Hungariae*, III, 344.

the Catholic faith. By favouring them economically and religiously, the Turks had everything to gain. Secondly, their numbers and ethnic composition also favoured the Catholic population. Most of the faithful were South Slavs, and there was a fairly large number of South Slavs among the local authorities in the provinces of the Ottoman Empire who had converted to Islam, but who continued to favour their former co-religionists[35].

Thus it can be explained why the Pasha of Timisoara «ordered, under penalty of having their noses and ears cut off, that they should bring only a priest of the old religion, and if they brought him he would give him maintenance. Another, also a Turk, rebuilt the church from the ground up»[36]. The situation is not unique. Another step promised to allow the safe return of Catholic priests by giving the missionaries letters in the Turkish language by which they were free to preach the Gospel in the occupied regions: «literas ei Thurcica lingua scripta dedit, ut per ditionem Turcarum libere in Ungaria predicaret Evangelium Christi»[37].

The envoys of the Holy See also took advantage of the goodwill shown by the Ottoman authorities. In the region between Gyula and Timișoara, Protestant pastors were expelled from three towns, if a report from 1585 is to be believed, and 80 villages were restored to the Catholic faith, while in over a hundred villages the faithful who had not accepted the Reformed preachers hastened to reaffirm their attachment to the traditional religion[38]. The reports show how effective the mission can be when a favourable political factor is present. This success has also been facilitated by the summary reception of the Reformation. In rural areas, the success of the Reformation was not due to a good reception and understanding of the message, but to the lack of Catholic priests. The communities in southern Hungary accepted the Protestants for want of something better, a priest to officiate at divine services. Here it was no longer a question of educating the population in the spirit of the Reformation and building an identity, but of filling a void in the priesthood, although even the Reformed pastors were not enough, as links with the Protestant world had become increasingly tenuous after the integration of the territory into the Ottoman Empire. The missionaries' reports were optimistic, but perhaps only partially reflected the reality on the ground, because despite some auspicious predictions, things did not always work out as well as expected. The changing political situation at the end of the 16th century and the Ottoman conflicts with the Habsburgs marked a setback for the success of the missionaries

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35 For the role of the South Slavic Catholic population in the Ottoman Empire and relations with the missionaries see: Antal Molnár, *Le Saint-Siege, Raguse et les missions catholiques*, passim and István György Tóth, *Politique et religion dans la Hongrie du XVIIe siècle. Lettres des misionnaires de la Propaganda Fide* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004), 13-58.

36 Holban, et al., *Călători*, III, 111.

37 Lukács, *Monumenta Antiquae Hungariae*, III, 345.

38 «Sunt denique pagi 80, in quibus sum versatus ab eo tempore. Essent centum quoque et ultra pagi, qui carent sacerdotibus et haereticis ministris si fuissem sufficiens ad peragrandum illos, in quibus a Quadragesima usque ad Pentecostes audivi confessiones mille hominum et ultra». Veress, *Fontes Rerum Transilvanicarum*, II, 119-20.

in the occupied area, so that at the end of that century the Catholic community in Timișoara was in the same situation as before the beginning of the mission. It was the Orthodox Church in Timișoara and its surroundings that benefited from these changes and managed to establish an institutional structure and become the dominant denomination in the region.

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