

**THE RELIGIOUS UNION OF BUDA (1366) IN THE CONTEXT
OF THE RELIGIOUS OFFENSIVE OF HUNGARIAN KING
LOUIS I OF ANJOU AGAINST THE “SCHISMATICS”**

IOAN-AUREL POP*

In the second half of the 14th century the Byzantine Empire found itself in a rather desperate situation, as the Ottoman Turks had managed to gain a foothold in continental Europe by capturing the fortress of Gallipoli (1354), followed shortly afterwards by other territories, including the city of Adrianople, which became the residence of the sultans. Emperor John V Paleologos (1355–1376) made a few diplomatic attempts at securing Western assistance, but all ended in failure. Consequently, the emperor decided to personally go to Hungary and demand assistance. For the first in the history of the (Eastern) Roman Empire, an emperor from Constantinople was travelling abroad as a supplicant, which clearly reveals the magnitude of the unprecedented crisis experienced by the Byzantine state. John V arrived in Buda in the late winter of 1365–1366 and immediately began discussions with the Hungarian king, Louis I of Anjou (1342–1382). A serious obstacle was represented by the issue of the religious union, demanded by the Catholic sovereign as a pre-condition to any military assistance against the Turks. It seems that before leaving the city of Buda John V promised that the union would take place and accepted it himself. Still, the Hungarian king refused to make any firm and concrete commitments.

These events occurred in a broader European context, and in the regional context of Southeast Europe. On the one hand, we have to take into account the official position of the Holy See and the “congress” of Catholic kings that took place in Krakow, which envisaged a crusade (in the year 1366) against the Turks who had attacked the Byzantine Empire and were threatening Christendom. On the other hand, we must also take into account the interests of Hungary and the expansionist policy of King Louis I in Southeast Europe, in 1365–1370. This eastward expansion envisaged by the Angevins included first and foremost the land of Wallachia, led by Voivode Ladislas-Vlaicu (1364–circa 1376) and Bulgaria, led by Tsar John Alexander (1331–1371). The Bulgarian tsarate was undergoing a major crisis (divided between the two sons of the tsar since around 1363), and the Hungarian king took advantage of it both in 1365 and later. Plans were also made

* Member of the Romanian Academy.

to punish the Romanian prince, who had inherited his father's throne without the approval of the Hungarian king but with "the treacherous agreement and secret understanding of the Romanians, that is, of the inhabitants of that country." At that time (1365–1366), the king was in conflict with the princes of both Wallachia and Moldavia. However, while mustering an army in Timișoara for an attack on Wallachia, Louis I abruptly diverted his expedition in the direction of Vidin (the northeastern part of Bulgaria, which had become a separate tsarate under John Stratimir), around May of 1365. By June of 1365 the Hungarians were in control of Vidin (a fortress on the Danube), and this "district" (turned into a banate in 1366, once again *de facto* legitimizing the title of "King of Bulgaria" borne by the Hungarian sovereign) was provisionally placed under the authority of Benedict Himfy (dubbed captain of Vidin),¹ then of Emeric Lackfi and of his brother Dionysus, voivode of Transylvania (they had the same title of captain of Vidin), and then again of brothers Benedict and Peter Himfy (bans between 1366 and 1369), together with Ladislaus Kórógyi (ban between 1366 and 1368).² A fragile and temporary agreement was reached with the Romanian ruler (in October 1366). Thus, in exchange for becoming a vassal to the Angevin king, the Romanian prince gained official recognition of his older claims to the banate of Severin and to the duchies of Amlaș and Făgăraș, which he held in fief.

It was in this context that Emperor John V left Constantinople sometime in late 1365. He travelled on the Danube as far as Vidin, from where he departed for Buda in the company of Voivode Dionysus. Documents indicate that in early February of 1366 the latter had left for Buda, precisely in order to escort the "emperor of the Greeks" to the king. In late February, Voivode Dionysus was still at his residence in Hungary. The negotiations proceeded rather quickly, as it seems that by early March the king and his imperial guest were on the way back, stopping for a while at Caransebeș, in Banat. We do not know whether the Hungarian king accompanied John Paleologos all the way to Vidin or whether he left Caransebeș in the direction of Transylvania (where he spent approximately six months, from April to October of 1366, dealing with the domestic "evildoers" and with the foreign "infidels"). The emperor was forced to remain in Vidin at least from April to November of 1366, as the Bulgarian tsar in Trnovo refused to allow him passage over his territory. The deadlock was ended by the Balkan expedition of Count Amedeus VI of Savoy (a cousin to the emperor), also known as the Green Count. He reached the straits (the Sea of Marmara) in July 1366, recaptured Gallipoli from the Ottomans and marched against Trnovo, where he paused for a while in the

¹ Maria Holban, *Din cronica relațiilor româno-ungare în secolele XIII-XIV*, Bucharest, 1981, p. 162.

² Engel Pál, *Magyarország világi archontológiája 1301-1457*, vol. I, Budapest, 1996, p. 34–35.

Apart from being captain of Vidin and of his own district, Emeric Lackfi was also a great *comes*, castellan of Mehadia and Caransebeș; Dionysus Lackfy was "captain of our town of Vidin and of its district," voivode of Transylvania and *comes* of Timiș; Benedict Himfy was ban of Vidin and comes of Timiș, Caraș and Cuvin.

company of John Paleologos (who had been brought from Vidin). In December 1366 the two discussed the reimbursement of the expenses incurred with the emperor's voyage from Vidin, with the war against the Tsarate of Trnovo, and with ransoming the Catholic prisoners held there. The Emperor received Gallipoli and the town of Mesembria (today Nessebär, in Bulgaria) in exchange for 20,000 florins, meant to cover a part of the aforementioned military expenses.

What did John V Paleologos and Louis I actually agree upon in Buda, in February of 1366? According to papal documents from the summer of the same year, some agreements were concluded and oaths were exchanged. The bull of July 1 addressed by the pope to the emperor in Constantinople states that "you solemnly promised to this king and swore to him that you and your noble sons, Emanuel and Michael, would accept, do and fulfil, to the glory of the Roman Church and for the furtherance of the Catholic faith, anything that we would demand of you and of your sons in what concerns the aforementioned (agreement to) restore (the unity of the Church)."³ The sources covering the later actions of the Byzantine emperor fail to confirm that such a clear commitment was ever made in Buda, although discussions must have taken place concerning the military assistance to be offered to Byzantium by Louis I in exchange for a possible acceptance of the religious union by the Greeks. Still, even on the Latin side things are far from clear, as in another bull, sent on 23 June 1366 to King Louis I, the pope alludes to the shrewdness of the Greeks, who had allegedly agreed to the religious union only because they were hard pressed and needed assistance from Hungary. Consequently, on the same occasion, the Angevin king was urged to refrain from any hasty action and was released for one year from the possible oath concerning his assistance for Byzantium.⁴

It is obvious that both the Holy See and the king of Hungary has serious reservations in what concerned the crusade against the Turks, just like the Byzantines were not truly interested in a union with Rome. Still, the visit to Buda made by John V greatly served the interests of the policy pursued by the Hungarian king in Southeastern Europe: on the one hand, the Angevin monarch was recognized as the head of the planned crusade and, on the other, his actions on the Danube seemed to receive a justification. For Louis I, the outcome of the agreement with the "emperor of the Greeks" was not a future campaign in support of the latter, but rather a step forward towards fulfilling his own goals. He was not interested in a military campaign against the Ottoman conquerors—who were still far from Central Europe—but rather in a strike against the neighboring "schismatic" states and against the "schismatics" living in his own kingdom, as that would have increased the glory, the power, and the territory of Hungary. Of course, the official

³ Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki, *Documente privind istoria românilor*, vol. I, part 2, Bucharest, 1890, p. 128. Maria Holban, *op. cit.*, p. 169, note 49.

⁴ Maria Holban, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

discourse constantly referred to the “furtherance of the faith” and to the struggle against its enemies.

Very little is known about the relation between this episode of the “union of Buda” and the “schismatic” Romanians, especially in Western historiographies. But the “union of Buda” is an episode in the greater struggle of the West against the “schismatics,” which were deemed enemies of the true faith alongside the “pagans” and the “heretics.” In this respect, we know of the often tense relations between the Kingdom of Hungary and the Principality of Wallachia, whose rulers, seen as vassals to the Hungarian kings, were deemed “schismatic,” especially after the establishment of the Metropolitan See of Argeş (1359), directly connected to Constantinople, a center capable of granting legitimacy to the political authorities. The political and military conflict between Hungary and Wallachia stemmed from the radically different positions of the protagonists: Wallachia sought to gain increased sovereignty and make the authority of the Angevin kingdom a purely nominal one (and only in exchange for sizable territorial concessions—the banate of Severin, the duchies of Amlaş and Făgăraş), while the Hungarian Crown wanted to effectively incorporate Wallachia into its territory and turn the ruler (prince) into a baron of the realm, as it had done with the voivode of Transylvania.⁵ Consequently, during that period (circa 1364–1376), relations between the two countries ranged between open fracture (and military conflict) and cooperation (accompanied by mistrust and suspicion). Louis’ 1365 conquest of the Tsarate of Vidin (led by John Stratimir, cousin and brother in law of the Romanian prince) and its transformation into a Hungarian banate of Bulgaria (placed, beginning with 1366, under the authority of Emeric Lackfi and of his brother Dionysus, and then under that of Benedict and Peter Himfy) came as a severe blow to the Romanian ruler. Similarly, the voyage to Buda made by the Byzantine emperor John V Paleologos (1365–1366), in an attempt to secure Hungarian (and Western) assistance against the Turks in exchange for a religious union, also went counter to the southeast European and Orthodox orientation of the same Romanian prince.

Given the advantages enjoyed by Hungary and the increased power of the Angevin king, Wallachian prince Ladislas–Vlaicu ended the conflict and accepted the suzerainty of Louis I, in exchange for the estates of Severin, Amlaş and Făgăraş (October 1366). Still, relations once again deteriorated in the autumn of 1368, when Louis I entered the territory of Wallachia by way of Severin and the voivode of Transylvania forced a passage across the southern Carpathians. The invaders were repelled, and the Wallachian army retaliated in southern Transylvania. As in February of 1369 the local population rebelled against the Hungarian authorities, Vlaicu seized Vidin and put an end to the royal banate established there. The failure of the Hungarian expeditions and the loss of Vidin led to another short-lived

⁵ See Şerban Papacostea, *Evul Mediu românesc. Realităţi politice şi curente spirituale*, Bucharest, 2001, p. 18–22.

Romanian-Hungarian reconciliation. In the meantime, Ladislas–Vlaicu successfully joined the crusade, leading the Wallachian army, supported by Transylvanian units, against an Ottoman army south of the Danube which, together with Bulgarian forces coming from the tsarate of Trnovo, had attacked the tsarate of Vidin, led by his kinsman. The tendency towards an anti-Ottoman Orthodox solidarity, also directed against the increasingly powerful Catholic offensive fervently mounted by Hungary, led the Romanian prince to another conflict with the Angevin king (starting with the year 1373), which would ultimately cost him his life (probably in 1376).

During all this time, the knezes and the Romanian nobles in Banat (the traditional leaders and owners of the villages) remained on high alert, experiencing periods of acute crisis and turmoil, followed by minor gains and considerable losses. The best portrayal of the situation experienced by the Romanian knezes can be found in a petition sent in 1369 to Benedict Himfy, the Hungarian ban of Bulgaria, and signed by the “community of knezes and of other Romanians from the district of Sebeş, as well as by the inhabitants of the fortress and by all people, rich or poor, from the town of Sebeş.”⁶ The petition mentions the passage of John V Paleologos, both on his way to Buda and during the return journey to Vidin.

The first “dire” moment mentioned by the knezes was the moment when King Louis “marched into Bulgaria and we all followed as part of his army, with our assets and also with our bodies.” This event, left undated by the knezes, must have occurred in May–June of 1365. Mention is also made of the hospitality showed to the king by the knezes, of the establishment of the “banate” of Bulgaria, placed under the authority of Transylvanian Voivode Dionysus Lackfi and of his brother Emeric, their entry into Vidin, together with the knezes, “as is the custom of those under arms.” These events also took place in May–June of 1365.

The second episode described by the knezes is the arrival on their lands of Lord Dionysus (Lackfi), accompanied by the “emperor of the Greeks” (the pejorative, ethnicity-based Western title, used instead of the official political title of “Roman emperor” used in Byzantium), whom they had to accommodate, at the order of the king and at great expense. The arrival of the two from the direction of Vidin and their stay in Caransebeş probably took place in January of 1366.

The following moment (probably occurred in early March of 1366), was the arrival “during the same winter of our master and king, accompanied by the said emperor,” also hosted at great expense by the same knezes and Romanian commoners (264 florins had to be covered by the inhabitants of the fortress and were never paid, while the district was also 150 florins in arrears). In this case we are dealing with the emperor’s voyage home in the company of his host, the king of Hungary.

⁶ *Documenta Romaniae Historica*, C. Transilvania, vol. XIII, Bucharest, 1994, p. 631–633 (DRH).

Another grievance had to do with the fact that the knezes were called under arms at least twice a year, starting from that moment (the year 1365), and that they had to cover the military expenses from their own pocket.

The document also mentions the time when “our royal master once again sent his army against those Wallachians unfaithful to him,” indicating that from that moment on the knezes had been forced to maintain “at least 200 men in the mountains, day and night, until the arrival of winter.” Besides, the knezes, “with 500 of our best men, remained at Mehadia, until the return of your lordship [the ban Benedict], and we also hosted our master the king and even your grace, and for those expenses we could not pay a single denarius back to the community.” This episode of the war waged by Louis I against Wallachia, involving the march of the royal army towards the fortress of Severin, occurred in the winter of 1368 (October-November).

Towards the end of the document the knezes complain about the “devastation” of their lands by the army “of the king our master,” which had “burned to the ground all of the gardens and the courtyards and other buildings in which there were no people, forcibly took our hay and other useful things they found in our houses, and therefore the cattle starved to death and we ourselves are utterly destitute.”

The final grievance concerned Ban Benedict’s demand that the district and the town of Sebeş (Caransebeş) pay him 300 florins, an amount the knezes strongly claimed not to be able to pay, demanding an exemption.

This grievance is rich in meanings. It pieces together, in their actual succession, events of great importance not only for the community of knezes and Romanians from the district of Caransebeş and also from the homonymous fortress (fortified settlement), but also for the political and military history of Hungary and of Transylvania, and for the Romanian-Hungarian relations of those years (1365–1369): the arrival of the king and of his army in Severin and their inroad into “Bulgaria” (the tsarate of Vidin) in may of 1365, the creation of the banate of Bulgaria (in June 1365), the appointment of its first leaders (Dionysus and Emeric Lackfi), also in June of 1365, the arrival in Vidin of the Banat Romanians, together with the rest of the royal army, the Caransebeş stopover of the Byzantine emperor, accompanied by the voivode of Transylvania, Dionysus Lackfi (in January 1366), the return of the emperor this time in the company of the king and their stay in the same town of Caransebeş (March 1366), the resumption of the conflict between the king and the ruler of Wallachia (1368), etc. Of course, many details are still missing, when it comes to politics on the grand scale, to the outcome of the military campaigns, to the cause behind certain events, to the clash between Catholicism and Orthodoxy, to chronology, etc., but the succession of events, as perceived by a Romanian community from Banat, a land belonging to the Kingdom of Hungary and located on the border with Wallachia and the tsarate of Vidin, is

accurately presented, in keeping with the system of values shared by the community in question. Quite clearly outlined are the obligations incumbent upon the knezes in times of war, namely, their direct military service, in the company of their men, the quartering of their master the king and of other officials, with their retinues, the upkeep of defensive local military units and of reserve units, the billeting of the royal army, with all that it entailed (expenses, abuse, forced requisitions, arson, devastation, etc.). The complaint submitted by the knezes indicates that they were seen as small nobles, owing military service (commanding their own men) and having to provide accommodation to the high officials of the realm and especially to the king. During this period, quite a lot of the Banat knezes loyally served the king, others betrayed him, while others remained hesitant, in a difficult context that often presented the risk of open revolt. The knezes were forced to send people to work on the reconstruction of Orșova fortress, to take up arms and be ready for combat, together with their men, to accommodate at their own expense some high officials (from emperors and kings to the voivode of Transylvania and some members of the Himfy family), to deal with some proscriptions by the palatine of Hungary, most of them abusive in nature (1370), to be deprived of their assets and see them destroyed, confiscated, burned, etc. Some took advantage of the situation and gained more power by serving the king, while others changed sides and gave their allegiance to Vlaicu, the ruler of Wallachia, being subsequently accused of treason. The essential reason behind the prosperity of the former were their military achievements, stemming from their status as feudal vassals whose main function, as everywhere in Europe, was armed combat.

The dissatisfaction of the knezes from Banat must be correlated to the greater dissatisfaction alluded to in a diploma issued on 28 June 1366 and concerning Transylvania. In official terms, the diploma is a solemn royal privilege, a writ of utmost authority and value in the Kingdom of Hungary. It is clear that the document was written in response to a complaint and request submitted to King Louis I of Anjou, not by an individual or by a group of private individuals, nor by a lay or ecclesiastical institution, but by a privileged estate or community, namely, the nobles (*universitas nobilium*). Indeed, we are not dealing here with the entire nobility of the realm, but only with the noblemen of Transylvania, that is, the elite of a distinct “country” under the authority of the king (*universi nobiles terre nostre Transilvane*).

The complaint of the nobles is related to the daily troubles caused by the so-called “evildoers.” In other words, the nobles of Transylvania complained to the king about the “evildoers,” and every reference to them is accompanied by the indication that they are in fact Romanians: the first time around they are mentioned as *malefactores, specialiter Olachi*, and the second time, when the king gives his nobles the right to annihilate these evildoers, the later are mentioned as *malefactores quarumlibet nationum, signanter Olachorum*. In other words, the Transylvanian nobles, as an estate (privileged political group), were in a direct

confrontation with the Romanians, who also showed the tendency of operating as a group, as a distinct entity, following the corporatist model of that time. Nevertheless, all of the clauses in the document of 28 June 1366 are in favour of the nobles, despite the feeble attempt at keeping some appearances. In order to meet the demands of the nobles, a summary procedure was introduced against the “evildoers, especially the Romanians.” They could be sentenced by a set number or people equal in rank to them – 7 if they had been caught in the act and 50 in the other situation – and then legally executed. Basically, the law no longer protected these “evildoers of any nationality, more precisely the Romanians.”⁷ This was apparently not entirely unfair, as the nobles themselves could be tried and as Romanian witnesses were also accepted. But the weight given to each testimony was not the same. According to this document and to many other sources, at that time Transylvania saw the unfair competition and rivalry between two distinct social structures: a Western one imposed by the Hungarian state and which postulated the existence of nobles and serfs, and a local Romanian one, of Slavic-Byzantine extraction, involving knezes and commoners. Naturally, the Romanian commoners, gradually turned into serfs, were deemed to be serfs in the eyes of the law, but the knezes, the Romanian feudal elite, were not seen as the equivalent of the nobles, unless they met certain criteria. The prerequisite set on 28 June 1366 was for the knez to be “confirmed by our royal writ in his knezate,” namely, to have received from the sovereign a deed to what he and his forebears had actually possessed since times of old. For many knezes it was nearly impossible to secure such a royal writ. Consequently, in a court of law the equivalence between a knez in possession of a royal writ and a nobleman was not a royal favour, but rather a severe restriction. Quite clearly, this was a fashion of discriminating between the knezes themselves and between the knezes and the nobles, as from the internal point of view of Romanian society all knezes enjoyed the same status of authority. By way of this provision the Romanian elite officially recognized as such by the courts of law was drastically reduced. Furthermore, it was about to be assimilated by the feudal nobility. Within Romanian society the knezes were all one and the same, namely, masters by virtue of tradition and of unwritten customs, while for the Hungarian authorities the knezes were henceforth officially divided into two, recognition being granted only to those in possession of a royal writ. In the eyes of the Romanians, a knez was a knez even without a written document, but for the Hungarian authorities such a document was everything, following the regulation of 1366.

The document presents three particular cases, namely, the procedure to be followed when a Romanian commoner is accused or caught in the act, when a Romanian commoner comes with a complaint against a commoner belonging to another nation, and when a Romanian lodges a complaint against a nobleman. It says nothing about the situation – possibly very frequent – in which a Romanian knez was brought to trial, an oversight that most certainly left a lot of room for

⁷ Maria Holban, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

abuse and made it possible for the knezes to be tried as commoners.⁸ In other words, there was no room for the great mass of knezes among the “true noblemen.” The same Romanian knezes are also largely concerned by the provision concerning the situation of those without a royal writ for one specific estate and who brought to trial (using the procedure of witness testimony) an individual having a deed to the estate in question; in such cases, the trial was not to take place in Transylvania, but right at the royal court, where the chances of the one without a writ (usually a knez) were absolutely minimal, as it was nearly impossible to gather and take 50 witnesses to the royal court.

Still, the historical circumstances in which the document was issued can tell us even more: on 28 June 1366, after the visit to Buda of Emperor John V Paleologos, King Louis was in Transylvania (where he had arrived in April of that year), where he remained until October. During the six months of his stay in Transylvania, the sovereign fulfilled the demands of the nobility and gave them the legal weapons to eradicate the evildoers, “more precisely the Romanians,” also doing his best to extend his authority over Wallachia and the other “schismatic” territories in the region. In 1365–1366, the two Romanian principalities were concomitantly in conflict with the Kingdom of Hungary, which mustered armies and mounted campaigns out of Transylvania in order to punish the “rebels.”⁹ Under these circumstances, we can naturally assume that the king wanted the help of the nobles in the fight against the “infidels” in Moldavia and Wallachia, and not so much against those living in his own kingdom. In fact, the document provides additional evidence in this respect: the aforementioned Transylvanian nobles have to lend assistance only to the king and to his stewards in Transylvania (the voivode and the vice-voivode), or, as part of the Kingdom of Hungary Transylvania only shared a border with Wallachia and Moldavia, which at that time was “rebellious.” Thus, the king offered judicial assistance to the nobles in eliminating the Romanian “evildoers” in Transylvania, and the nobles offered military support to the king in eliminating the Romanian “infidels” beyond the Carpathians. Henceforth, the royal and the Transylvanian officials would see a correlation between the Romanians in Hungary and those living in their free states, the reaction towards both categories being one of hostility. Let us see how this actually came to be.

The six months that King Louis I spent in Transylvania and the measures taken then marked a turning point in the history of the voivodate. Internally, the king sought to gain to his side the privileged groups, the towns, and the Church, as well as to bring some uniformity to the diverse structures present in this eastern part of his kingdom.¹⁰ Thus, on 20 June 1366, the sovereign reconfirmed for the

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ Șerban Papacostea, *op. cit.*, p. 53–55, 85.

¹⁰ This has been accurately pointed out by Francisc Pall (in *Academia Română, Istoria României* (a treatise), vol. II, Bucharest, [1962], p. 274) and does not come to contradict Maria Holban’s interpretation, as it has been suggested.

seven Saxon seats the diploma of privileges originally issued by King Charles Robert on 25 May 1317 and which, in its turn, had been meant to confirm the Saxons' Golden Bull of 1224.¹¹ Between May and August of the same year, Louis I granted or confirmed privileges to some of the major towns, also inhabited largely by Germans but located outside the "Royal Land": Dej, Ocna Dejului, Cluj, and Bistrița.¹² In July of the same year, 1366, the king approved and encouraged any donation of land to the "Church of Transylvania" (i.e., the Roman-Catholic bishopric having its seat at Alba-Iulia) and reconfirmed the chapter's possession over the "district of the land of Abrud" (*districtus terre Obrugh*), which included Zlatna and a number of villages.¹³ Furthermore – and most importantly – on 28 June 1366 the king issued the aforementioned diploma that favored the nobility, reconfirming ancient rights identical to those of the nobles in the kingdom and also defining within the confines of Transylvania the status of this provincial nobility that lived among the Romanians. The nobility was the most important of all decision-making elements in Transylvania, hence the attention given to it. However, the privileges granted to the nobility came at the expense of the Romanian malcontents, collectively labeled and treated as "evildoers." As it has been indicated, this royal document was the first case of "legal" discrimination, along ethnic lines and directed against the Romanians, in the history of Transylvania.¹⁴

The privilege of 28 June 1366 was related to two other acts of that time whose content may be related to the Romanians. The first of them (of which we know from a confirmation writ issued by Sigismund of Luxemburg on 2 December 1428), probably dates back to the same year, 1366, being issued by Louis I at the request of the Franciscans. It said that "in the whole province or district of Sebeș (Caransebeș), no man shall hold or keep an estate, as a noble or as a knez, if he is not a true Catholic dutifully following the faith held and confessed by the Roman Church."¹⁵ In other words, for a large Romanian district of Banat, King Louis ruled that nobles or knezes could only hold lands if they were Catholic. Another act related to the previous two was issued in Lipova, by the same King Louis I, on 20 July 1366. In it, the sovereign ordered the nobles, the other landowners, as well as the free royal towns and villages in the counties of Cuvin and Caraș, to gather all "Slavic or schismatic" priests in the area and present them, together with their children, wives, or assets, but "without any damage, harm, or mockery," to Count Benedict Himfy or to his brother, at a time and place to be set by the aforementioned count, who was to carry out the orders sent in the meantime by the king.¹⁶ It has been considered that this royal writ "initiated the systematic and

¹¹ *DRH*, C, vol. XIII, p. 148–151.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 133–134, 137–139, 142–144, 231–233.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 177–178, 179–181.

¹⁴ Șerban Papacostea, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

¹⁵ *DRH*, C, vol. XIII, p. 2.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 226–227.

legalized persecution directed against the Orthodox clergy, which was to continue until the end of King Louis's reign."¹⁷ For the time being, we must take note of the fact that, as opposed to the solemn royal privilege of 28 June 1366, the other two aforementioned documents are of local interest (they concern certain areas of Banat), have no connection to voivodal Transylvania, and there is no direct testimony indicating that they had a general scope (for instance, that they concerned all Orthodox landowners or all Orthodox priests in Hungary). Despite some suggestions to the contrary,¹⁸ no testimony comes to cast doubt on the authenticity of the document whereby Louis I condition land ownership on one's Catholicism in the district of Sebeş. If we take into account the important role played by the Franciscans in the policy of Catholic proselytism implemented by the second Angevin monarch in both Hungary and the surrounding areas,¹⁹ the document in question appears to be fully plausible, and the fact that it is not featured in the kingdom's collection of decrees has nothing to do with the authenticity and the value of the information it contains. The document of 28 June 1366 is also absent from the collection of royal decrees, even if it refers to the whole of Transylvania and to the special status enjoyed by the nobility of the voivodate. Things are a bit more complicated when it comes to the document of 20 July 1366 concerning the clergy. There is a possibility that it actually referred to the Slavic priests who had fled from the regions located south of the Danube as a consequence of the events that took place there.²⁰

The association between this royal decree of 20 July and the plan aiming at a religious union, accepted in principle in the year 1366 by Emperor John V Paleologos, during his trip to Buda,²¹ can only be made in a general context, and not directly. That illusory union never became a certainty, not even after the year 1369, when John V accepted the Catholic faith in Rome. As we have seen, the priests had to be rounded up together with their families and assets, but this does not imply that they were asked to accept the union; finally, if they were indeed Slavic priests fleeing from the south, as we tend to believe, then the authorities in Banat were expected not to persuade or force them to accept the union, but rather to send them back.

Despite the absence of a direct correlation between the three acts of 1366 mentioned above, we can talk about some consistent elements of Louis I's policy concerning the "schismatics" (Orthodox) and the Romanians, elements fully reflected by these documents: one of the most determined medieval attempts at bringing into the Catholic fold entire peoples belonging to other denominations and

¹⁷ Şerban Papacostea, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

¹⁸ Viorel Achim, *La féodalité roumaine du Royaume de Hongrie entre orthodoxie et catholicisme. Le cas de Banat*, in "Colloquia", I, 1994, no. 2, p. 21.

¹⁹ Şerban Papacostea, *op. cit.*, p. 90–96, 209–221.

²⁰ Viorel Achim, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

²¹ Maria Holban, *op. cit.*, p. 255, note 22.

even religions²²; the marginalization of the Romanians, deemed to be “schismatic,” illegal owners of land, and “evildoers”; the tendency to isolate the Romanian elite from the political life of Transylvania, by undermining the unity of the knezes and by introducing preconditions for land ownership; the correlation between the policy concerning the Romanians in Transylvania and Hungary and the policy regarding the Romanian principalities located beyond the Carpathians. During his reign, we witness authentic “crusades” directed against the “pagans, the heretics, and the schismatics.”

The available testimonies indicate that the “leveling” policy of King Louis I predated the nominal acceptance of the religious union by the Byzantine emperor, during his visit to Buda. Still, notable advances in converting the “schismatics” were reported after the visit in question (1365–1366), largely owing to the joint efforts of the Holy See and of King Louis I and to the use of a most efficient instrument, the Franciscan order. If the top-down union envisaged by King Louis, though the agency of Byzantium, proved to be ineffectual, with Franciscan help the sovereign planned a “union” of a different kind, or indeed the Catholic conversion of the “schismatic” population, regardless of their social status.

As part of the territorial divisions created in order to increase organizational efficiency and also ensure the success of proselytizing actions, in 1340 the Franciscan order had created the Bosnian vicarage which, at the time of its maximum expansion, in the second half of the 14th century, also came to include some of the southern and southeastern territories of Hungary, inhabited by a large non-Catholic majority: Bosnia, Ozora, Mačva, the Tsardom of Vidin, Banat, the Land of Hațeg, Wallachia. The Franciscan monks, from this vicarage or from elsewhere, also operated in Transylvania, Crișana, Satu Mare, Maramureș, and even in Moldavia, their “missionary” area coming to include at certain times the entire space inhabited by Romanians. A report of this order, drawn up around the year 1380, speaks about 400,000 “schismatics” from the areas in question who had been rebaptized in the Latin rite in the space of only one year, which is obviously an exaggeration. Even so, we must recognize the magnitude reached by the conversion process, especially with the Romanians – the largest Orthodox people in the Kingdom of Hungary.²³

The conversions proceeded at an increasingly rapid pace after 1365–1366, following the visit to Buda made by the Byzantine emperor, the annexation of Vidin and the six months-long “visit” to Transylvania by King Louis I. It was only at this point that the king and his aides set as their goal the mass conversion of the non-Catholics – and especially of the “schismatics” and “heretics” – to the “true faith.” However, it was increasingly obvious that successes of such magnitude

²² Șerban Papacostea, *op. cit.*, p. 89; Ioan-Aurel Pop, *Observații privitoare la structura etnică și confesională a Ungariei și Transilvaniei medievale (secolele IX-XIV)*, in “Istoria României. Pagini transilvane”, coord. Dan Berindei, Cluj-Napoca, 1994, p. 31–43.

²³ Șerban Papacostea, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

could not be achieved only by peaceful means. The Franciscan Bartholomew of Alverna, vicar of Bosnia, supported the idea of converting by any means possible the “schismatics” living in the Kingdom of Hungary and in the neighboring areas. He took charge of the conversion actions, emerging both as a theorist and an advocate of this policy.²⁴ He and the other friars minor always stood by King Louis I as advisers, supporters, and forerunners of the great action meant to bring about the “unity of faith” in Hungary and in the surrounding regions inhabited by large non-Catholic populations. However, the violent methods, the “crusades,” the persecutions and the harsh punishment inflicted on those who were being “stubborn” and refused to obey stirred considerable criticism at the time, sometimes even that of other Catholics. Precisely in order to reject the arguments presented by the latter – dubbed “careless simpletons, slanderous gossips” – Bartholomew of Alverna decided to explain and justify the policy of the Hungarian king and the means of implementing it.²⁵ The Franciscan leader made some value judgments, supported by pro domo arguments and sometimes accompanied by syllogisms. He claimed that the conversion to Catholicism of the Romanians, the Serbs, and the Bulgarians was absolutely necessary, for both theological and political reasons. From a theological point of view – he said – everyone must agree that redemption is not possible outside the Church of Rome. Therefore, the conversion to Catholicism – by any means – of the aforementioned peoples was essential for their salvation. He also argued that they must be saved even against their will as, in their backwardness, they were not capable of understanding the true divine message. Besides, the “schism” was in fact a “heresy,” and heretics had to be eliminated at any cost and by any means. Cynically interpreting history, the Franciscan contended that in every case the secular power had played a fundamental role in bringing various peoples into the Christian fold, citing as examples the conversion of the “Germans” by Charlemagne and of the Hungarians by Stephen I; these political leaders – continued he didactically – converted their subjects “less with words and more by sword and fierce wars.”²⁶ Thus, by resorting to violent means, Louis I himself merely followed the illustrious examples praised by the Church. Persuasion alone and the education of the targeted groups were vehemently rejected, as they failed to bring any results. To be successful, one needed to force, threaten, expel, execute, one needed weapons and war. First of all – indicated the Franciscan – one had to drive away of Romanian and Slavic priests or monks. The priests were “false ones” simply because they were “schismatic,” but also because they did not follow the canon and had not received a valid christening.

The theorist believed that the conversion of the “schismatics” by any means – especially secular ones – was also necessary for political reasons related to the

²⁴ See Șerban Papacostea, *Geneza statului în Evul Mediu românesc. Studii critice*, București, 1999, p. 96–101.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 97–98.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 98.

force and the strength of the Kingdom of Hungary, both internally and externally. In order to increase the internal cohesion of the country, Bartholomew of Alverna pleaded for unity of faith among both masters and subjects: “those who follow a foreign belief and are unfaithful to Our Lord will never be loyal to their masters.”²⁷ Thus, the Romanians and the Slavs – once rightful inhabitants of the Kingdom of Hungary – were now seen as the enemy, their belief was “foreign” and they were “unfaithful” to their secular masters (lords) and to the God in heavens. Like a true politician, the vicar of Bosnia saw things in their broad dynamics, as present and future, in Hungary and in Southeast Europe. Consequently, he contended that the conversion by any means of the Romanians, the Serbs, and the Bulgarians to the “true and single faith” would also have ensured the external safety of the kingdom, “for this would bring the end of many evils, like the stealing and the killing they presently perpetrate against the Christians without conscience [of sin], together with those living beyond the border but who share their language and their cult.”²⁸ By making reference to language and faith, two of the essential components of the medieval nation, the Franciscan indicated the presence of ethnic cohesion and solidarity. Quite possibly, this was not an acknowledged or deliberate solidarity, just like the “evils” committed together, across the border, were still not perceived by the perpetrators as sinful (for they were “schismatics”). In other words, the “stealing and the killing” committed by the Romanians, the Serbs and the Bulgarians from the Kingdom of Hungary together with the Romanians, the Serbs and the Bulgarians from the free states on the Hungarian borders – doing great damage to Hungary and to the “faith” – was taking place because of the bonds of language and faith that united the perpetrators and prevented them from feeling any guilt. Their conversion at any costs would eliminate the “schism” in the kingdom and implicitly sever the spiritual bond uniting the Romanians and the Slavs across the border; once turned Catholic, the Romanians and the Slavs from within the kingdom would obey their lords and sever the ties to their fellow nationals, first losing the religious bond and then the linguistic one. We notice that, within the same logic of equating between schism and heresy, Bartholomew of Alverna sees Orthodoxy as a “cult,” rejecting it vehemently and discriminating against it in keeping with the moral custom of that time.

The Franciscan adopts here a predominantly political discourse, in the service of the forward bastion of Catholicism in the east, the Kingdom of Hungary. Although moral for him and for most of his Catholic brethren and contemporaries, the violent conversion (through the agency of the “secular arm”) of the “schismatic” Romanians promoted by Bartholomew of Alverna, which peaked in the second half of the 14th century (and continued, sporadically, in the period that followed), created a serious rift between Catholicism and Orthodoxy in this region. As the main instrument in the action of the “secular arm” against the “schismatics”

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 101.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

had been the king of Hungary and the Hungarian authorities, most Romanians came to equate Catholicism with Hungary. Fighting against the violent conversion methods, the Romanians saw themselves as fighting not only against Catholicism, but also against the Hungarian aggression, as by rejecting the Hungarian “secular arm” they had also rejected Catholicism. The whole process that took place in the 14th century – despite the fact that it was not sustained, continuous, or unitary – gradually turned the Romanians in Transylvania and Hungary into a group operating outside the power structures. But the Middle Ages was a world of communities and not so much one of individuals. Group privileges were essential, and those denied such privileges were lost, marginalized, despised. Presently seen as “foreigners” in Hungary – as indicated in the text written by the vicar of Bosnia – because of their “foreign” faith, designated as “schismatic,” “heretical,” or as a “cult,” the Romanians in Transylvania, who had at one point formed an “Estate” similar to that of the nobles, of the Saxons, or of the Szeklers, scattered to the old “lands,” to their valleys and villages, to their mountains, forests, and hills, becoming “serfs of the Hungarians” and living a “miserable life,” as Antonius Verancius would write many years later. Separation from the power structures meant discrimination, discrimination led to marginalization, and the latter resulted in backwardness. Gradually, the Romanians’ backwardness became deeply entrenched in the collective mentality, the masters beginning to display infinite pride, contempt, and arrogance, and the subjects experiencing humility, a sense of inferiority, and resorting to “nefarious deeds” (theft, robbery, looting, rebellions, etc.)

The “union of Buda” was but an episode in the long process that saw confrontations, rejections, and rapprochements between the two denominations that had become officially separated in 1054. It was envisaged for political reasons, as the Ottomans were advancing towards Europe. From a Byzantine perspective it was meant to rescue the Christian empire of the East, and from the perspective of the Holy See it was to bring all Christians under the authority of the pope. Even if it ultimately failed, the action initiated in Buda allowed King Louis I to present himself as a “crusading” leader, a champion of Catholic unity, achieved with Franciscan help and involving the conversion of entire peoples and populations, deemed “schismatic,” “heretical,” or “heathen,” from within the kingdom’s borders or from its close vicinity.