

BISHOP MANUEL OLSAVSZKY AND THE UNREST IN THE  
ROMANIAN UNIATE CHURCH OF TRANSYLVANIA  
(THE FIFTH DECADE OF THE 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY)

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In the spring of 1748, Manuel Olsavszky made his second visit to Transylvania as an official envoy of Maria Theresa. Consequently, the province in question was not entirely unfamiliar to him. He had previously been there in the winter of 1745-1746, barely two years after becoming Bishop of Rossos (“in partibus”) and apostolic vicar for the Uniate believers in Upper Hungary.<sup>1</sup> During his first visit to the region, he had been called upon to end the religious unrest present among the Romanians in the principality.<sup>2</sup> The disturbances, with which the hierarch from Mukachevo had gradually become familiar on that occasion, as he traveled across the various counties of the province, had caused considerable turmoil within the local Uniate Church. They had come mostly as a consequence of the daring and successful voyage across southern Transylvania undertaken by the Orthodox monk Visarion Sarai. The unrest in question had also been caused by the absence from the eparchy of Bishop Inochentie Micu, who had sought refuge in Rome following the conflict he had had with the central and with the provincial civil authorities.<sup>3</sup>

The recourse to Manuel Olsavszky, suggested to the empress by the Ministerial Conference of May 18, 1745,<sup>4</sup> clearly indicates the magnitude of the crisis affecting the Uniate diocese of Făgăraș, whose system of ecclesiastic authority had been severely disrupted by the two recent blows it had received. However, the solution of dispatching an outsider – even if the person in question was a Uniate bishop – had not been seen as a long-term one, meant

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<sup>1</sup> A. Pekar, *The Bishops of the Eparchy of Mukachevo with Historical Outlines*, Pittsburgh, 1979, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> About his mission, see N. Nilles, *Symbolae ad illustrandam historiam Ecclesiae orientalis in terris coronae S. Stephani*, vol. II, Oeniponte, 1885, p. 571-574; A. Bunea, *Din istoria românilor. Episcopul Ioan Inocențiu Klein (1728-1751)*, Blaș, 1900, p. 193-195, 199-201; S. Dragomir, *Istoria dezrobirii religioase a românilor din Ardeal în secolul XVIII*, vol. I, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Dacia, 2002, p. 225-227; Z. Păclișanu, *Istoria Bisericii Române Unite*, Târgu-Lăpuș, Editura Galaxia Gutenberg, 2006, p. 310-311; I.Z. Tóth, *Primul secol al naționalismului românesc ardelean 1697-1792*, București, Editura Pythagora, p. 158-160.

<sup>3</sup> D. Prodan, *Supplex Libellus Valachorum. Din istoria formării națiunii române*, București, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1984, p. 171-178; Fr. Pall, *Inochentie Micu-Klein. Exilul la Roma 1745-1768*, vol. I, București, Fundația Culturală Română, 1997, p. 8-26.

<sup>4</sup> A. Bunea, *Din istoria românilor*, p. 189. The order to dispatch the bishop to Transylvania, sent to the archbishop primate of Esztergom, was issued by Maria Theresa on August 30, 1745 (F. Pall, *Inochentie Micu*, vol. 1, p. 54). Olsavszky was notified of the empress’s decision on October 20, 1745 (A. Bunea, *Din istoria românilor*, p. 193).

to fill the void created by the departure of the temperamental bishop of Blaj. In fact, at the time it was hard to estimate how long the latter's absence would last. Under the pressure of the unfolding events, it was expected that the presence in the region and the direct intervention of the Ruthenian bishop would have an immediate effect, appeasing the population and restoring the control over the Romanian priests and believers. Therefore, his mission was to be one of pacification, but also of information gathering. As the political authorities had obviously lost control of the situation, we could even say that the bishop was basically called upon to gather information and opinions from that troubled region and present the higher authorities (the Gubernium of Transylvania and the Court in Vienna) with possible solutions to the problem. The fact that Olsavszky was chosen for the task clearly shows that the authorities needed the comments and the suggestions of a neutral and credible observer, unrelated to the opposing systems of authority which had begun to emerge and manifest themselves amid the crisis experienced by the eparchy of Făgăraș.

The solutions proposed by the bishop of Mukachevo were meant to bring about a recovery of the Uniate Church of Transylvania through the rapid elimination of the two main factors which had destabilized it and had implicitly compromised the cause of the religious union in the principality. On the one hand, Maria Theresa's envoy pleaded for decisive and drastic measures against the supporters of Visarion Sarai, who were still stirring the rural population against the religious union. Priests, monks, and also laymen, these agitators were particularly active in the southern parts of Transylvania.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, Olsavszky saw the rapid return of Inochentie Micu at the head of the diocese as the best and most effective way of restoring order and of appeasing the various categories of agitators.<sup>6</sup> Besides – still in order to improve the control exercised by the provincial authorities over the Romanian population – the visiting bishop supported the proposal submitted to the empress in April 1745 by the Governor of Transylvania, John Haller, who had advocated the appointment of a lay protector of the union from among the Roman-Catholic magnates.<sup>7</sup> Positively received in Vienna, the proposal indicated the awareness, at several levels, of the need to support the troubled Church in question with the help of an influential local high official, officially appointed to closely

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 194-195, 199-200; S. Dragomir, *Istoria dezrobirii*, vol. I, p. 226-227; I.Z. Tóth, *Primul secol*, p. 158-159; K. Hitchins, *Conștiința națională și acțiune politică la românii din Transilvania 1700-1868* (the chapter "Religia și conștiința națională românească în Transilvania în secolul XVIII"), vol. 1, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Dacia, 1987, p. 47.

<sup>6</sup> A. Bunea, *Din istoria românilor*, p. 195; F. Pall, *Inochentie Micu*, vol. I, p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> A. Bunea, *Din istoria românilor*, p. 189. The idea had been previously suggested, with little effect, by Inochentie Micu: *ibidem*, p. 202.

monitor it, protect it from agitators, and defend its interests. The name suggested by the hierarch from Mukachevo was that of the fiscal director, the Romanian Petru Dobra.<sup>8</sup>

Two of the recommendations made by Manuel Olsavszky were quickly embraced. In the decree issued on April 15, 1746, and sent to the Gubernium, the Court in Vienna demanded determined action against those who were working against the religious union and were disturbing the peace, including the priests who had joined the disciples of Visarion Sarai.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, the Transylvanian authorities were asked to protect from the anger of the rebels all the priests who had remained loyal to the Uniate Church, and also to put an end to the insidious rumor whereby the Uniate believers were to be forced to abandon the Greek rite in favor of the Latin one. In the decree sent on the same occasion to the Governor of Transylvania and to the Catholic division of the Gubernium, the Court in Vienna demanded firm action against the agitators, but recommended tact rather than violence.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the document in question included the important decision taken by the empress to appoint not one but four protectors of the union in the principality – Petru Dobra among them –, responsible with protecting and supporting the Uniate Church in the areas (constituencies) ascribed to each of them.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, Manuel Olsavszky's suggestion that Inochentie Micu be allowed to return at the head of the Făgăraș diocese was ignored. Of course, his proposal had been based not only on what the Ruthenian bishop had seen and heard during his visit to Transylvania, or on his feelings towards the hierarch who had ordained him bishop. We can assume that the proposal also had to do with the solidarity towards a fellow clergyman in his time of need, and with Olsavszky's belief that the person most likely to solve such a religious and authority crisis was the legitimate bishop of that region. The peace likely to

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 189; I.Z. Tóth, *Primul secol*, p. 159. Petru Dobra seems to have been the “distinguished Catholic gentleman” delegated by the Gubernium to accompany Manuel Olsavszky during the latter's stay in Transylvania, at the explicit request of the empress: F. Pall, *Inochentie Micu*, vol. I, p. 54; I. Mârza, *Petru Dobra (?-1757), protector al Unirii. Preliminarii*, in *Annales Universitatis Apulensis, Series Historica*, 10/II, 2006, p. 104-105.

<sup>9</sup> The full text of the decree can be found in G. Barițiu, *Părți alese din istoria Transilvaniei. Pre două sute de ani din urma*, vol. I, Sibiu, 1889, p. 728-730.

<sup>10</sup> For the decree, see S. Dragomir, *Istoria dezrobirii*, vol. I, p. 389-393. For its context, see also M. Săsăujan, *Politica bisericească a Curții din Viena în Transilvania (1740-1761)*, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2002, p. 153-154.

<sup>11</sup> A. Bunea, *Din istoria românilor*, p. 198-199; Z. Pâclișanu, *Istoria Bisericii*, p. 313-315; I.Z. Tóth, *Primul secol*, p. 159. For the instructions they received from the Gubernium, see P. Bod, *Breviis Valachorum Transylvaniam incolentium historia* (edited by Nicolae Dănilă), in A. Dumitran, G. Botond, N. Dănilă, *Relații interconfesionale româno-maghiare în Transilvania*, Alba Iulia, 2000, p. 406-410.

be restored by the bishop's return was to make it possible for the priesthood to become involved in an action which Olsavszky saw as imperiously necessary in the given context: explain to the believers the terms and the meaning of the union.<sup>12</sup>

The fact that the Court<sup>13</sup> refused to allow the return of the Romanian bishop did little to appease the population. After Olsavszky's departure from the principality, the strategy of the authorities when it came to restoring the peace within the Uniate Church (and even to improving its organization and social impact) relied mostly on the four Roman-Catholic protectors and on the services of the general vicar of Blaj, Petru Pavel Aaron.<sup>14</sup> The bishop who had sought refuge in Rome was simply left out of this strategy. Still, he was not the man to passively observe the unfolding events from a safe distance and do nothing. Unavoidably, the conflict between Inochentie Micu and the political authorities sharpened, both sides resorting to firm and harsh measures. Under these circumstances, the Orthodox issue was relegated to a secondary position, but remained still present.<sup>15</sup> In the two years that followed, the center stage would be occupied by this acute conflict and by its devastating consequences.

Thus, when Manuel Olsavszky returned to Transylvania, the threat no longer came from the supporters of the cause advocated by Visarion Sarai. The danger now lay within the Uniate Church itself, at was at least as serious as the previous one. Measures such as the freezing of bishopric revenues on the orders of Maria Theresa (in response to the staggering excommunication by Inochentie of the Jesuit theologian Balog)<sup>16</sup> or especially the excommunication of the general vicar Aaron, on August 25, 1747 (the latter had failed to obey the imperative request of the bishop, refusing to publicize in the eparchy the decision to excommunicate the Jesuit theologian)<sup>17</sup> had led to the emergence of a large and extremely vocal group of archpriests unhappy with the policy of the authorities and firm supporters of the bishop who had sought exile in Rome.<sup>18</sup> It was from among the members of this group that Inochentie Micu appointed another general vicar, after the surprising removal of Aaron (formerly a close

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<sup>12</sup> K. Hitchins, *Conștiință națională și acțiune politică*, p. 47.

<sup>13</sup> A. Bunea, *Din istoria românilor*, p. 195.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 201-202, 216-218; Z. Pâclișanu, *Istoria Bisericii*, p. 313-318; Greta-Monica Miron, "...poruncește, scoale-te, du-te, propoveduește..." *Biserica greco-catolică din Transilvania. Cler și enoriași (1697-1782)*, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2004, p. 93-94.

<sup>15</sup> S. Dragomir, *Istoria dezrobirii*, vol. I, p. 236-239.

<sup>16</sup> A. Bunea, *Din istoria românilor*, p. 213-215; Z. Pâclișanu, *Istoria Bisericii*, p. 321-322; I.Z. Tóth, *Primul secol*, 161-162; D. Prodan, *Supplex Libellus Valachorum*, p. 180.

<sup>17</sup> A. Bunea, *Din istoria românilor*, p. 223; Z. Pâclișanu, *Istoria Bisericii*, p. 323; F. Pall, *Inochentie Micu*, vol. I, 78-87.

<sup>18</sup> G.M. Miron, *Biserica greco-catolică din Transilvania*, p. 172-174.

collaborator of the bishop).<sup>19</sup> In his *Istoria*, Samuil Micu wrote: “After this, Bishop Clain appointed archpriest Nicolae from Balomir as general vicar and had him summon a synod instructing all archbishops to announce the excommunication of the theologian and of Petru Aaron [...] Aaron was hard hit by this excommunication, as now all Romanian clergy and laymen hated him, avoiding him in disgust, refusing to deal with him and even talk to him, and the church he frequented was presently visited only by his own familiars.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, after the summer of 1747, the unwavering support shown by this group to their exiled bishop translated into their firm and reproachful separation from the “disobedient” Aaron. We could even say that what brought them together and gave them a common purpose was the manifest desire to see the return of their bishop and, to the same extent, their negative and harsh position towards the vicar who had suddenly found himself excommunicated. In point of fact, the vicar in question had not previously been an archpriest and did not belong to the network in which they operated.<sup>21</sup>

Cast out by Inochentie, Petru Aaron became a target not only for those unhappy with his performance as a high ecclesiastical official, but also for those who disliked the actions taken by Vienna in order to solve the crisis within the Uniate Church of Transylvania. He began to be identified with the inflexible involvement of Viennese and Roman authorities in the affairs of the Uniate diocese, especially because, prior to his excommunication, the Holy See had appointed him as an apostolic vicar, giving him a higher and legitimate authority and subordinating him directly to the sovereign pontiff and no longer to the exiled bishop.<sup>22</sup> With Aaron caught in the middle, a quiet battle was practically being fought between the central authorities (civil and ecclesiastical) and the elite of the Romanian Transylvanian clergy, at stake being the crucial issue of decision-making and control within the Church in question.

The autumn of 1747 saw a number of actions taken by the group put together (and coordinated from far away) by Inochentie Micu. During their gatherings held both south and north of the Mureș river (such as, for instance, at Daia Română and at Jucu, in September),<sup>23</sup> and during the synod convened in Blaj in the month of October, the archpriests expressed their desire for Inochentie Micu’s return, stating that he should not abandon them and should not give his resignation. The meeting convened in the diocesan seat provided

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<sup>19</sup> A. Bunea, *Din istoria românilor*, p. 223; Z. Pâclișanu, *Istoria Bisericii*, p. 323.

<sup>20</sup> S. Micu, *Istoria românilor* (first edition based on the manuscript, by Ioan Chindriș), vol. II, București, Editura Viitorul Românesc, 1995, p. 230.

<sup>21</sup> G.M. Miron, *Biserica greco-catolică din Transilvania*, p. 94, 174.

<sup>22</sup> F. Pall, *Inochentie Micu*, vol. II, p. 70-71, 81, 121.

<sup>23</sup> A. Bunea, *Din istoria românilor*, p. 230; F. Pall, *Inochentie Micu*, vol. I, p. 109-111, vol. II/1, p. 304-305.

the opportunity for the official announcement of the bishop's decision to excommunicate Aaron and appoint Nicolae Pop from Balomir as general vicar of the diocese.<sup>24</sup> These events – as well as the letters sent by Micu to people in the country or the Viennese attempts to prevent things from moving in an unwanted direction – come to show us who were the most loyal supporters of the exiled bishop: archpriests Ioan Săcădate from Blaj, Avram Pop from Daia, Gheorghe Pop from Dobra, Gheorghe Timandi from Jucu, Ioan Dragoș from Turda or Nicolae Pop from Balomir, as well as the Basilians Leonte Moschonas, Grigorie Maior and Silvestru Caliani.<sup>25</sup> The number of archpriests who openly supported the movement increased considerably through the efforts of these activists, but never reached the point where it would have included all occupants of this ecclesiastical position. The minority group of those who, for various reasons, still sided with the disgraced Aaron and supported the official imperial policy clearly demonstrated that the Uniate Church presently had two centers of power and authority,<sup>26</sup> that it had become divided at the level of its leadership, even if the two sides were far from being evenly matched in size and influence. The majority group, much more active, more determined and outspoken than the minority group during the last months of 1747, demonstrated its loyalty towards the exiled bishop also by resorting to actions and messages manifestly inspired by the bishop's programme. Relevant examples in this respect are the recourse to a general synod as a supreme discussion and decision-making body in the Church, the idea to send an official delegation to Vienna in order to present the Romanians' claims, and the rhetorical references to the people (as a legitimizing factor), a manifestly artificial collective character, allegedly monolithic in terms of its anxieties and attitudes. A "character" ready to forswear the union should the beloved bishop be further prevented from returning to his diocese, or if the unheard of title of apostolic vicar was to be imposed upon it.<sup>27</sup>

Faced with such initiatives and with this kind of discourse, the Court in Vienna decided to intervene. On the one hand, it asked the Gubernium to summon to Sibiu all of the main agitators (Nicolae Pop from Balomir, Silvestru Caliani and Grigorie Maior were questioned there in December), tell them to calm down, refrain from organizing rallies, cease to correspond with Micu and

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<sup>24</sup> F. Pall, *Inochentie Micu*, vol. I, p. 113-114.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. I, p. 99-100; G.M. Miron, *Biserica greco-catolică din Transilvania*, p. 172-173.

<sup>26</sup> A. Bunea, *Din istoria românilor*, p. 231-232; G.M. Miron, *Biserica greco-catolică din Transilvania*, p. 173.

<sup>27</sup> For these particular aspects, see F. Pall, *Inochentie Micu*, vol. II/1, p. 305, 400.

recognize Aaron as their apostolic vicar.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, the Ministerial Conferences from January and March of 1748 devised the imperial strategy meant to end the confusion and the conflicts among the leaders of the Romanian Uniate Church of Transylvania.<sup>29</sup> The first of these conferences, held at the residence of Count Ferdinand Kollowrat, was also attended by Manuel Olsavszky. When asked about the possible solutions, the imperial councilors suggested that the Ruthenian bishop be sent on another mission to Transylvania, as “vicario o visitatore apostolico per la diocesi di Fogaras.”<sup>30</sup> His task was to have a synod convened there, where he would hear the complaints of the Romanian clergy and appease them, while also taking firm action against those who might prove disobedient or stubborn. This time, the emblematic institution of the synod was to be placed in the service of those who supported “the Aaron solution.” In this broad context, the challenge was to straighten out the vehement opponents of the vicar. The plan was that, using the decision-making authority of the synod, a message of reconciliation between the opposing factions would be sent and that a common direction would be adopted. However, considering the balance of power within the category of the archpriests and the high stakes of the planned meeting, its venue was to be decided by Manuel Olsavszky and by the Gubernium. The efforts to find “the most suitable alternative” indicated that the eparchial seat of Blaj – the natural venue of a synod – was not the best location for such an exercise in authority.

During the second Ministerial Conference, of 2 March 1748, the idea of dispatching the bishop of Mukachevo to Transylvania resurfaced. On the same occasion, given the obvious irritation caused by the title granted by the sovereign pontiff, a demand was made for Aaron to use only the title of vicar (while maintaining the prerogatives of an apostolic vicar) until the appointment of a new bishop.<sup>31</sup> And this was not the only example of the fact that, as dictated by caution or by other tactical considerations, the messages sent to the Court by the Uniate clergy in Transylvania did not necessarily remain unheard. The participants at the conference also supported the proposal to receive in Vienna a delegation meant to present the empress with the claims of the Romanians, proposal made by the archpriests gathered in Alba Iulia on November 2, 1747.<sup>32</sup> In keeping with the plan previously devised by Inochentie

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. I, p. 117-118.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 127, 130-131.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 127, vol. II/2, p. 13-14, doc. 150.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 130-131, vol. II/2, p. 46-49, doc. 168.

<sup>32</sup> A. Bunea, *Din istoria românilor*, p. 244 (see also note 1 at page 245); Z. Pâclișanu, *Istoria Bisericii*, p. 327.

Micu, they had also demanded permission to begin by discussion their claims in a general synod and thus give them more legitimacy.

It seemed that the synod was the solution envisaged by both sides. However, the expectations related to its outcome were rather different. While some saw in it a way to restore central diocesan control over the Uniate clergy and laymen, through the agency of vicar Aaron, the others were getting ready to state, discuss, and write down the “national grievances.”

On March 28, 1748, in response to a proposal made by the high official who had attended that conference, Maria Theresa appointed Manuel Olsavszky “royal commissioner” in charge of restoring peace within the Uniate Church of Transylvania.<sup>33</sup> The decree also indicated the date and the venue of the synod (called “gathering” in the text): May 15, in Sibiu. Thus, the choice had been in favor of the administrative capital of the principality, a city where things could be kept under close civil and military supervision. The unexpected choice of the venue is only one of the elements suggesting that the coming ecclesiastical gathering was to be a truly unique one. Another indicator was the letter sent that very day by the empress to the members of the Catholic division of the Gubernium, in which she asked them to become directly involved in the organization of the event and send out the summons to the synod.<sup>34</sup> It follows that the provincial governing body was the institution charged with announcing the event and with summoning the participants to the synod of the Uniate Church. The document in question also outlined an agenda for the coming meeting, with three distinct moments, sequenced as follows: a presentation of the orders of the empress, discussions regarding the current state of the union, and the identification of the grievances to be presented to the Court by a delegation.

Also on March 28, the Court issued an imperial patent to “the vicar (Aaron), the archpriests and priests, the nobles, as well as the other members of the Romanian nation, of any situation and condition, inhabitants of the hereditary principality of Transylvania and of the parts annexed to it.”<sup>35</sup> The document announced the upcoming arrival of Manuel Olsavszky in the province as royal commissioner sent to chair the synod scheduled to take place in mid-May in Sibiu. The main purpose of the meeting in question – the document said – was to gather and send to the Court the grievances of the clergy and to discuss the solutions likely to end the impasse of the union.<sup>36</sup> This approach was naturally meant to allay the fears of the archpriests and

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<sup>33</sup> F. Pall, *Inochentie Micu*, vol. I, p. 137 .

<sup>34</sup> A. Bunea, *Din istoria românilor*, p. 244-245.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 245; F. Pall, *Inochentie Micu*, vol. I, p. 137.

<sup>36</sup> A. Bunea, *Din istoria românilor*, p. 245-246.

encourage them to attend the synod.<sup>37</sup> It was also meant to counterbalance the clear demand, stated in the text, to cease all correspondence with Inochentie Micu.<sup>38</sup> At that time, the unfortunate bishop was under pressure from both the Roman and the Austrian authorities, which wanted him to repeal the excommunication of Petru Pavel Aaron. And that pressure was mounting, as the rehabilitation of the vicar had to be perfectly correlated and synchronized with the new pacifying mission of Manuel Olsavszky.

On April 11, the Ruthenian bishop was still in his “eparchy,” at Mária-Pócs. From there, he wrote to Count Kollowrat, telling him that he had received the royal decision courtesy of Ladislau Gyulaffy, the head of the Aulic Chancellery of Transylvania.<sup>39</sup> Ready to leave at any time, he was only waiting for the instructions related to the royal mandate he had been entrusted with.<sup>40</sup> He also expected clarifications regarding his travel expenses which, according to the protocol discussed during the Ministerial Conference of March 2, were to be covered from funds coming from the sequestered revenue of the Blaj bishopric.<sup>41</sup> Apart from the 800 Rhennish florins available from that fund, Olsavszky also wanted to receive some money from the royal taxes collected in Debrecen.<sup>42</sup>

Thirteen days later, the bishop of Mukachevo received a letter to an address in Sibiu, which suggests that he had already reached the city in question.<sup>43</sup> He was still not in possession of the papal credentials required for that mission – which were late in coming, despite the insistence of the Court in Vienna – but that seemed to be of little consequence under the given circumstances. In exchange, he had three weeks in which to carefully prepare the synod. What happened during the weeks in question remains a mystery, at least for the time being. We do not know what people he met, what strategies he devised, and how he was seen by the Romanian clergymen with whom he came into contact.

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<sup>37</sup> The fact that many of the archpriests continued to be hostile to vicar Aaron is also indicated by the petition drawn up by the archpriests “of Transylvania” gathered at Jucul de Mijloc on March 14, 1748, and submitted to Cardinal Valenti Gonzaga, state secretary with the Holy See: *ibidem*, p. 233-234; F. Pall, *Inochentie Micu*, vol. I, p. 133.

<sup>38</sup> In what concerns the close monitoring of Bishop Micu’s correspondence by the imperial authorities, see M. Săsăujan, *Habsburgii și Biserica Ortodoxă din Imperiul austriac (1740-1761)*. *Documente*, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2003, p. 242, doc. 55.

<sup>39</sup> Magyar Országos Levéltár (hereinafter called M.O.L.), *A 108, Ungarn und Siebenbürgen*, 52 cs., f. 148r (in connection to documents from the year 1748).

<sup>40</sup> They would be sent to him by way of the Aulic Chancellery of Transylvania (under the signature of chancellor Gyulaffy and of counselor Kozma): F. Pall, *Inochentie Micu*, vol. I, p. 137.

<sup>41</sup> F. Pall, *Inochentie Micu*, vol. II/2, p. 51 (doc. 168) and 53 (note 40).

<sup>42</sup> M.O.L., *A 108, Ungarn und Siebenbürgen*, 52 cs., f. 148r.

<sup>43</sup> F. Pall, *Inochentie Micu*, vol. I, p. 137, vol. II/2, p. 69, doc. 178.

In fact, the actual unfolding of the Sibiu synod remains an enigma. Given the scant data available in the literature, historians are usually happy to gloss over its two major achievements: the return of Petru Pavel Aaron as general vicar recognized by the majority of Romanian archpriests and the comprehensive petition sent to the Court in Vienna.<sup>44</sup> It was only recently that more information has become available in what regards the names of the archpriests who attended the synod, the identity of 35 of them being presently known.<sup>45</sup>

More light on the event in question is cast by a set of documents preserved either in original or as copies in a miscellaneous section of the Archives of the Hungarian Aulic Chancellery. Clear evidence of the fact that Olsavszky chose to keep the authorities in Vienna informed using more than just the services of the Aulic Chancellery of Transylvania,<sup>46</sup> these documents include an *account* of the Ruthenian bishop detailing what had happened in Sibiu, a *request* “of the Uniate Transylvanian clergy of the Greek rite” addressed to the Catholic Status, a *resolution* of the Transylvanian Gubernium regarding the aforementioned petition of the clergy, a *synthesis* in three points of the Romanian grievances communicated to the Court through the agency of the royal commissioner and of the delegates appointed by the Uniate Church, two *documents* in Romanian signed and bearing the seals of the archpriests north and south of the Mureș river, respectively, and a *list* of the archdeacons who attended the synod (including the “hesitant ones”).<sup>47</sup>

From the bishop’s account, we learn that the activity of the synod, which began on May 15, lasted for three days. According to the request submitted by the Romanian clergy, the venue of the meeting was “the palace of His Excellency the Treasurer.”<sup>48</sup> The choice of this particular venue tells a lot about the desire of the authorities to highlight, symbolically as well, the close civil monitoring of the synod. In the building in question, the royal commissioner received the clergymen who had “dutifully gathered together at

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<sup>44</sup> The publication and analysis of the petition by Augustin Bunea (*Din istoria românilor*, p. 246-248, 275-287) was a true landmark in the attempts to piece together the religious and political context in which the synod had taken place. Before this turning point, the historiography on this matter includes the writings of P. Bod, S. Micu and G. Barițiu, and after it, those belonging to Z. Pâclișanu, I.Z. Toth, D. Prodan and F. Pall.

<sup>45</sup> G.M. Miron, *Biserica greco-catolică din Transilvania*, p. 437-501.

<sup>46</sup> In fact, upon giving her approval to the proposals made during the Ministerial Conference of March 2, 1748, Maria Theresa requested that Bishop Olsavszky “convey his information directly to Us”: F. Pall, *Inochentie Micu*, vol. I, p. 131, vol. II/2, p. 56, doc. 169.

<sup>47</sup> M.O.L., *A 108, Ungarn und Siebenbürgen*, 52 cs., f. 157r-160r, 164r-166v (in connection to documents from the year 1748).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 158r.

the appointed time.” The same petition tells us that, in keeping with the summons sent by Governor Haller, “all archdeacons (archpriests)” had come there accompanied by two deputies each.<sup>49</sup> This is quite a significant detail. It indicates that there were no other archpriests in the province apart from those featured on the list as present or as represented by a substitute. Apart from them, according to Olsavszky’s report, the meeting was attended by the members of the Catholic Status, who were acting as advisers.<sup>50</sup> The bishop mentioned the fact that their involvement had been requested in the “royal mandate,” once again indicating the desire of the Imperial Court to keep the troublesome Uniate elite under close Catholic supervision.

The first of the three “acts” of the Sibiu Synod took place according to the original plan detailed in the decree of March 28 addressed to the Catholic division of the Gubernium. According to Olsavszky, on May 15 the participants listened to a reading, in Latin and Romanian (as planned), of the full text of the imperial patents in which Maria Theresa, in her maternal concern for her subjects, expressed her anxieties regarding the situation of the religious union. In order to improve that situation, the empress asked both priests and laymen to openly praise the Holy Union and prove their support of it. As to the content of the “royal mandate” (a document that started from fundamental principles and listed the measures which, according to the Court, were likely to solve the problem in the Uniate Church), the commissioner indicated that it was accepted with dutiful obedience by the priests gathered for the synod, all willing to obey the commands of the supreme authority. However, the petition addressed by the Uniate clergy to the Catholic Status indicates a somewhat different situation. In fact, the commissioner suggested that the participants refrain from raising any objections concerning his person or the royal mandate, if they wanted to achieve “a good result.”<sup>51</sup> Consequently, the “unhappy and desperate clergy” showed obedience, if we are to believe the text in question, clearly written by someone unhappy with the turn of events.<sup>52</sup> Regardless of how it was obtained, we can assume that the public statement of loyalty to the empress made by the archpriests was the main objective set by the organizers for that day. Given the earlier rebellious attitude of the Transylvanian archpriests, the next step – the actual discussion of the recommendations featured in the “royal mandate” – had to be grounded

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<sup>49</sup> “[...] convenimus omnes Archidiaconi cum nostris duobus Deputatis [...]”: *Ibidem*.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 157r.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 158r.

<sup>52</sup> Quite possibly Grigorie Maior, given the verve and the expressive force of the phrases in the petition.

in such a ritual marking their recognition of the higher authority and acceptance of its will.

Even if the account written by Bishop Olsavszky tells nothing more about the events of that first day, there is certain evidence that something of notable significance had also occurred on that occasion. In fact, the bishop himself confessed that he did more than just hold official meetings with the Romanian archpriests during the works of the synod, and negotiated with them at his own residence, “either in public or in private.”<sup>53</sup> It was probably as a consequence of such discussions that the Romanian archpriests north of the Mureș River decided to obey the decree and the commands of the empress, recognizing Petru Aaron as their vicar.<sup>54</sup> Their decision, reached in common and countersigned by each of them on 4/15 May (telling of the strong group solidarity created in the vicarage that had operated until recently in the northern part of the eparchy), shows their cold and unenthusiastic acknowledgement of the man they had vehemently challenged until that point. They even declared openly that they had accepted him “on the order of the Imperial Court,” in the manifest hope that the return of Inochentie Micu would turn the tables. Until that point, the archpriests has seen actually themselves as acting under the authority of Gheorghe Timandi, “the inspector from Juc” appointed by their bishop, and Vicar Aaron had been seen as anything but their higher authority.

The following day, also in keeping with the scenario devised by the Court, the discussions focused on the three points featured in the royal decree. In fact, they were three closely correlated solutions envisaged by Vienna as a way of ending the crisis. The first solution involved the repeal of the order issued by the secular authorities and concerning the freezing of bishopric revenues in response to the two “null and void excommunications” issued by Inochentie Micu. The second, revealing the actual intentions of the Court when it came to the self-exiled bishop, referred to the prerogative “of the clergy and of the people” to nominate three candidates for the bishop’s position, “in case the bishop does not come back.” Finally, the third and most important solution requested the acceptance of Petru Pavel Aaron as a legitimate vicar, considering the fact that the pope had confirmed him in that office prior to the serious decision taken by Micu. In his official account, greatly pleased by the outcome of his mission, Olsavszky chose not to comment on the discussions and on the arguments raised in connection to these points. The bishop was only interested in presenting the explanations he provided during the public presentation of the three solutions. He also

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<sup>53</sup> M.O.L., *A 108, Ungarn und Siebenbürgen*, 52 cs, f. 157v.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 164r-v.

mentioned the fact that the archpriests had been fundamentally reasonable and had cooperated with him. However – and quite significantly – the skillfully written report suggests that the members of the synod were far from resigned and that their step backward was rather a tactical maneuver, as they expected to see how the sovereign would respond to the requests presented to the Court by their delegates. Hoping that the turning point would actually occur in Vienna, the more combative members of the Romanian ecclesiastical elite focused their attention on the documents meant to communicate their grievances to the higher authorities. This “hard core” of the clergy, unhappy with the acceptance of Aaron (passionately portrayed in their petition to the Catholic Status as an obstacle to the return of the emotional and omnipotent people to the Holy Union),<sup>55</sup> was still unwavering in its support of Inochentie Micu. Both in the synthesis<sup>56</sup> and in the extended version,<sup>57</sup> the Romanian grievances requested the speedy return of the bishop to his diocese, as the only solution to end the unfortunate situation “of the clergy and of the people.” Clearly and openly stated, this request indicated more than just the solidity of the personal bond established between Micu and his collaborators. Behind it, we also find a manifest spiritual affinity, a convergence of ideas proven by the comprehensive petition addressed to the Court, closely related, in its far-reaching political and religious objectives, to the ambitious demands of the exiled bishop.<sup>58</sup>

The discussions held by the synod on May 16 also produced one result pursued by the organizers. As the three points had been explained and read by the Bishop of Mukachevo, eight archpriests and the representatives of two archpriests from the southern and the eastern parts of Transylvania recognized “the honorable Father Petru Aron” as the “vicar responsible for all of their affairs.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, the circle was widening. Just like those who had showed their submission the previous day, this group saw Aaron’s return as a temporary solution until the return of “His Grace our Bishop,” who “will do his own bidding, as a high spiritual authority.” On the other hand, their statement indicated no desire to impose any territorial limitations to the authority of the vicar. This probably had to do with the absence of a character likely to form

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 158v.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 160r. Comprised of three points, this document pleaded for “the return of Bishop Klein,” for the fact that, if they could not be increased, then the bishopric revenues should at least be kept at the old level, and requested that Uniate believers should not be coerced or forced into celebrating other feasts than their own.

<sup>57</sup> A. Bunea, *Din istoria românilor*, p. 275-287.

<sup>58</sup> For the significance of the petition, see I.Z. Tóth, *Primul secol*, p. 163-169.

<sup>59</sup> M.O.L., *A 108, Ungarn und Siebenbürgen*, 52 cs, f. 165r-v.

around him a regional center of ecclesiastical authority, as the main archpriests in the region had thus far refrained from signing the document.

The 27 clergymen who had put their names on the document in question were now a category apart. They still firmly supported the return of Inochentie Micu. “On the orders” of the empress, they had nevertheless accepted Petru Pavel Aaron as their temporary leader, which separated them from those determined not to change their original position. Because of their inflexibility, the latter emerged as the actual leaders of the revolt that had shaken the Uniate Church of Transylvania.

The creation of a group of archpriests supporting (more or less sincerely) the solutions proposed by the Court made possible the final and third “act” in the activity of the synod. On May 17, the clergy made their peace with Petru Pavel Aaron, after being allowed to deliberate “alone and freely,” as Manuel Olsavszky stated in his report. What happened was the following. First, given the position reached by the members of the conclave, Nicolae Pop from Balomir “stood up from where he sat” and, “in a lengthy intervention,” announced his abdication from his position as vicar.<sup>60</sup> Then the floor was given to the winner. Accompanied by two archpriests, Petru Pavel Aaron made his entry in the synod, a gathering he had never attended before (at least according to the account left by the royal commissioner). In front of the clergymen present there, the unfortunate vicar delivered a “moving” speech in “his native language,” lamenting the animosity and the aversion emerged between brothers. His words “softened” even those who had been previously opposed him, wrote Manuel Olsavszky.

Thus, while the bishop of Mukachevo may have seen the end of the synod as an apotheosis, it actually failed to meet the objective of its initiators and bring peace within the Romanian Uniate Church. In point of fact, the existence of that diehard group (the “hesitant ones,” as Olsavszky called them) was obviously not likely to allow for a rapid solution to the crisis.<sup>61</sup> Equally troublesome would be the disregard showed towards the petition taken to Vienna by Grigorie Maior, Silvestru Caliani and Gheorghe Pop from Dobra,<sup>62</sup> or the treatment suffered by Inochentie Micu in the period that followed. The coming years saw their share of internal turmoil and disputes. Still, the

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 157v-158r.

<sup>61</sup> The list of “hesitant ones” drawn up by Bishop Olsavszky included the following people: Nicolae Pop from Balomir, Avram Pop from Daia, Petru “Dalensis,” Zaharia from Hunedoara, Gheorghe Pop from Dobra, Petru from Grădiște, Samuel from Sebeș, Samuel Pop from Bobâlna, Ionaș from Alba Iulia, Ionaș from Geomal, Ioan Săcădate from Blaj, Leonte Mosconas and Stoia from Sadu.

<sup>62</sup> I.Z. Tóth, *Primul secol*, p. 167-168; F. Pall, *Inochentie Micu*, vol. I, p. 138-139.

energetic action taken by the Imperial Court did achieve something. The Petru Pavel Aaron “solution” proved to be a long-term one.

EPISCOPUL MANUEL OLSAVSZKY ȘI FRĂMÂNTĂRILE ÎN BISERICA  
ROMÂNĂ UNITĂ DIN TRANSILVANIA (DECENIUL CINCI  
AL SECOLULUI AL XVIII-LEA)

Rezumat

Studiul analizează situația confesională din Transilvania de la mijlocul secolului al XVIII-lea și criza de autoritate de la conducerea Bisericii Unite, ca urmare a părăsirii Principatului de către episcopul unit Inochentie Micu-Klein. Autorul prezintă una dintre soluțiile găsite de Viena, pentru aplanarea crizei ce cuprinsese dieceza unită de Făgăraș, prin trimiterea în provincie a episcopului rutean unit de la Muncaci, Manuel Olsavszky. De asemenea, este descrisă încercarea de soluționare a stării confesionale conflictuale prin convocarea unui Sinod la Sibiu (între 15 și 17 mai 1748), care să desemneze un nou episcop la conducerea Bisericii Unite și să dezbătă cererile clerului pentru a fi înaintate Curții de la Viena. La Sinod au participat 33 de protopopi, dintre care 28 erau susținătorii episcopului Inochentie Micu-Klein, care au și semnat actele sinodale. În urma Sinodului, toți au ajuns să-l accepte drept căpetenie provizorie pe Petru Pavel Aaron, alesul Vienei.