

CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING THE INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND OF THE BISHOPS OF ORADEA IN THE MIDDLE AGES UP TO THE YEAR 1526

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Abstract: *The present study aims at proving the fact that the bishops of the dioceses in Eastern Medieval Hungary were men of notable culture acquired in the great European universities of the time. The knowledge they mastered was of scholastic and humanist nature, two specific tendencies of that epoch. The fact that some of the prelates had undertaken academic studies was to be a catalyst of their social and ecclesiastic ascension, which culminated with the promotion to the bishopric. Up to 1526, there existed 11 bishops of Oradea with academic studies (mentioning that three bishops headed both Oradea and Alba Iulia episcopal. The attended universities were in the Italian Peninsula, especially Bologna and Padua. This situation accounts for the relative closeness to Rome, the religious centre of the Catholic world, as well as to the specialization in canon law of the Italian universities, the fame of these academic institutions, to the strong bounds between the Italian territory and the Hungarian one, especially during the times of Matthias Corvinus. It is important to consider that the academic studies of the ecclesiastical personalities counted as a major factor of their religious and secular ascension. Many of the bishops were notable humanists, contributing decisively to the outspread of the Renaissance ideas and spirit throughout Hungary and Transylvania. The activity of the academically educated bishops placed the ecclesiastic life of Hungary in the European pattern of the epoch.*

Keywords: Oradea, bishop, university, diocese, Humanism

Preliminaries

The present study aims at proving the fact that the bishops of Oradea from the medieval period were men of letters who acquired their academic background at the most important European universities of the time. The acquired competences were of scholastic and, later, of humanistic nature, two specific tendencies of the epoch. The fact that some of the prelates had undertaken academic studies was a catalyst of their social and ecclesiastic ascension, culminating with the elevation/promotion to the bishopric.

Gratian's Decree, the main resource of medieval canon law, presented the description of the ideal bishop of the XIIth century. According to this document, the hierarch had to have a faultless behaviour (*sine crimine*), to be serious, balanced, hospitable, capable of learning, to abstain from alcohol, to avoid involvement in scandals, not to show interest in material goods, but to be able to lead his own

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household. Equally, a bishop had to be moderate, an abstinent and pacifist spirit, generous and learned¹. Referring to the nomination of a bishop, in the Middle Ages there were two procedures in use: the election inside the cathedral chapter and direct nomination from Rome.

The Third Council of Lateran (1179) dominated by the figure of Pope Alexander III brought important specifications with reference to the prototype of the candidate to the bishopric. These council regulations can be summed up by the formula *aetatis maturitas et morum gravitas et scientia litterarum*. The minimal age was 30 and the candidate to bishopry had to be of legitimate birth². Among the terms, an important highlight is literacy which will gain new valence together with the development of the European university phenomenon. Beginning with the end of the XIIth century and especially in the XIIIth century, the Western Catholic bishops start attending the major European universities, their education being a determinant of their ecclesiastic career. Peter Lombard, bishop of Paris (1158-1160) studied at Bologna, Reims and Paris. His successor, Maurice de Sully (1160-1196) asserted himself as a keen theologian having studied at the University of Paris. The relationship between the professor and his student was a long-lasting one, persisting after the graduation. In this regard, one can mention Peter of Corbeil, Lothario, count of Segni's Theology professor at the University of Paris. The disciple, who later became Pope Innocent III did not forget his master and presented/rewarded him with the bishopric of Cambrai (1199) and later with the archbishopric of Sens (1200)³. The bishop of Chartres, Peter of de Mincy (1260-1276) was doctor *in utroque* of the University of Paris⁴. For the dioceses from the South of France a thorough university education was claimed for by the presence of the Cathar heretics. Thus, Peter of La Chapelle Taillefer, bishop of Carcassonne (1291-1298) and later bishop of Toulouse (1298-1305) had a profound juridical preparation at the University of Orléans⁵. The bishops' university training span from France to the Italian Peninsula, Iberian Peninsula, the British Isles, later to the whole Europe and eventually to Hungary.

In the Middle Ages, Oradea was an important political, economic and religious centre of the kingdom of Hungary. This fact was due to the strong connections between the town and King Ladislaus (1077-1095), one of the most important monarchs from the House of Arpad, who was buried, at an unspecified

¹ Jean Gaudemet, *Le Gouvernement de l'Église à l'Époque classique*, II^e partie *Le Gouvernement Local*, Paris, 1979, p. 46.

² Wilfried Hartmann, Kenney Pennington, *The History of Medieval Canon Law in the Classical Period 1140-1234. From Gratian to the Decretals of Pope Gregory IX*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, 2008, p. 335.

³ Jean Gaudemet, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁴ The sintagm doctor *in utroque* shows that the person bearing this title was a doctor both in civil and canon law.

⁵ Jean Guademet, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

from the East of Hungary which at present are not included in the Romanian territory. From a canonic point of view, the bishop of Oradea was the suffragan of the archbishop of Kalocsa, together with the bishops of Transylvania, Cenad, Zagreb, Bács, Bosnia and Sirmium.

It is highly probable that Saint Ladislaus, the king considered to be the founder, designated his own candidate to the office of bishop, according to the patronage right¹³. During the XIIth century this situation changed, the bishop being chosen inside the cathedral chapter. Thus, in 1156 Michael is mentioned as chosen bishop of Oradea¹⁴. In the XIVth century, the way the bishops were elected changed again, the final decision pertaining to the pope.

The bishops of Oradea with university education up to 1526

Some historians believe that bishop Lodomerius of Oradea (1268-1279) acquired his university education at Bologna¹⁵. Two persons named Lodomerius were registered at this Italian university in the XIIIth century, but it is not possible to make an accurate identification with the bishop of Oradea, who later became archbishop of Esztergom¹⁶. From our point of view this debate remains open. We believe that the line of hierarchs from Oradea who benefited from higher education opens with bishop **Benedict II** (1291-1296), who was also the provost of the church St. Thomas of Esztergom¹⁷. He was a remarkable cultural personality of the time, having accomplished his education with a doctor's degree at the University of Padua¹⁸. After returning to Hungary, Benedict kept in touch with Bartholomeo da Brescia, one of his professors from the Italian university who was one of the greatest specialists in canon law in Europe¹⁹. Referring to Benedict during the period when he

included areas from the homonymous county (Hungary); the archdeaconry of Homorog extended around the present-day towns of Salonta and Beiuș; the archdeaconry of Călata included the valley of the Crișul Repede River from Oradea to Huedin; the archdeaconry of Zeghalm was named after the town Szeghalom from the present-day county of Békés, also including part of the county of Hajdú-Bihar; the archdeaconry of Coleșer was named after the homonymous village, vanished in time, located West of Salonta, where there is a homonymous river, tributary stream to Crișul Alb River and included areas from the valleys of the Crișul Alb and Crișul Negru Rivers cf. *Documente privind istoria României, seria C Transilvania*, veacul XIV, vol. III (1331-1340), Bucharest, 1954, p. 42-56.

¹³ Liviu Borcea, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

¹⁴ Liviu Borcea, *op. cit.*, p. 72; DIR C, XI, XII, XIII, I, p. 3.

¹⁵ Tudor Sălăgean, *Transilvania în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIII-lea. Afirmarea regimului congregațional*, Cluj-Napoca, 2007, p. 139.

¹⁶ Nora Berend, *At the Gate of Christendom. Jews, Muslim and Pagans in Medieval Hungary c. 1000-c. 1300*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, p. 180.

¹⁷ Jakubinyi György, *Romániai katolikus, Erdélyi protestáns és izraelita vallási archontológia*, Kolozsvár, 2010, p. 90.

¹⁸ Jakó Zsigmond, *Philobiblon transilvan*, Bucharest, 1977, p. 40.

¹⁹ *Monumenta Ecclesiae Strigoniensis*, tomus secundus (1273-1321), Strigonii, 1882, p. 419-420 (from this point on MES II).

Emeric's university career was certainly one of the major factors which influenced his ascension in the Hungarian ecclesiastic hierarchy²⁹.

The first bishop of Oradea from the XVth century with academic degree was the Italian **Giovanni Melanesi da Prato** who held the bishopric of Oradea for a very short time (1426). He was a familiar of the previous hierarch of Oradea, Andrea Scolari, also known as *The Florentine*. Giovanni Melanesi da Prato was a Doctor of Law of the University of Padua, one of the most famous ones on the Italian Peninsula³⁰. His academic preparation in law is also certified on the occasion of his participation at the Council of Konstanz (1414-1418), where he is mentioned among the representatives of the various universities as *a scholar in the canon law*. It is highly probable that he represented his university at this important clerical meeting. Unfortunately, there is very little information about this bishop. It is certain that he was appointed in the office of Oradea in 1426, replacing his fellow countryman Andrea Scolari. He pastored the church less than a year because he was relieved of his position (*depositus*)³¹.

The bishop **Dionysius Kusalji** (1427-1432)³² came to Oradea from the dignity of bishop of Bosnia and in 1405 he owned a canonry inside the cathedral chapter of Oradea. He was originary from Coșeu (the county Solnocul Interior - present-day Sălaj county). He was a student at the University of Vienna (1404) when he was mentioned as provost of Sibiu (*prepositus Cibiniensis*), as well as in 1414 when he is attested as *custos et canonicus ecclesie Tr.*³³ This impressive ecclesiastic career is due, most certainly, to his family's connections at the Hungarian royal court where his father, George, was a treasurer (*magister tavernicorum-tárnokmester*) from 1398 to 1401.

The most important titular of the bishopric of Oradea in the Middle Ages was, doubtlessly, **John Vitéz of Zredna** (1445-1465)³⁴. He was a humanist of European standards, known in the intellectual circles of the time. He started his studies at the University of Vienna where he was registered in 1434³⁵, then later he

²⁹ For details about the life and activity of Emeric Czudar see Răzvan Mihai Neagu, *Cariera politică și eclezastică a unui important episcop al Transilvaniei din secolul al XIV-lea: Emeric Czudar* in "Marisia. Studii și materiale de Istorie", XXXII-XXXIII, 2013, p. 9-15.

³⁰ Prajda, Katalin, *Rapporti tra la Repubblica Fiorentina e il Regno d'Ungheria a livello di diplomazia, migrazione umana, reti mercantili e mediazione culturale nell'età del regime oligarchico (1382-1434), che corrisponde al regno di Sigismondo di Lussemburgo (1387-1437)*, Florence, 2011, p. 53.

³¹ *A váradi püspökség története* I, p. 245.

³² Engel Pál, *Magyarország világi archontológiája 1301-1457* [CD-ROM], Budapest, 2001, (from this point on *Magyarország világi archontológiája*).

³³ Tonk Sándor, *op. cit.*, p. 190; Tüskés Anna, *Magyarországi diákok a Bécsi egyetemen 1365 és 1526 között (Students from Hungary at the University of Vienna between 1365-1526)*, Budapest, 2008, p. 75.

³⁴ *Magyarország világi archontológiája*.

³⁵ Tüskés Anna, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

