

The Rise and Fall of Bishop Georg Wolfgang Chiolich, 1699–1764¹

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Abstract. In my prosopographic examination of new aristocrats in the eighteenth century, I came across Georg Wolfgang Chiolich, an atypical member of this group, as he was the only one to receive the title of baron for himself alone, as a bishop, during the century. What was the point of conferring a noble title on a bishop? Searching for a reply to this question, we can gain some insight into the social, economic, and especially political processes of the Habsburg Empire in the mid-eighteenth century. Descended from a wealthy patrician family of Senj (Zengg), while Chiolich proved to be a talented organizer and took significant steps towards rebuilding his still-ruined bishopric in the mid-eighteenth century, he may not have been a saint. The rumors about the bishop of Senj (Zengg) finally escalated into a scandal in Vienna and in the Holy See in 1759, when a local noble family accused him of making a daughter of the head of the family pregnant. The legal proceedings, including the investigative material, were partly preserved in the Vatican Archives, and most of them were published by Tihamér Vanyó. Georg Wolfgang Chiolich eventually traveled to Rome, where the investigation declared him innocent despite all the efforts of the affronted family. If we look more closely at the main stages of his career and the course of this investigation, I believe that we can get closer to the political, social and economic conditions of a peripheral region of the Kingdom of Hungary.

Keywords: new aristocracy, diocese of Senj–Modruš (Zengg–Modrus), Chiolich family

This article is an attempt to uncover the reasons for the “rise and fall” of Georg Wolfgang Chiolich, bishop of Senj–Modruš (Zengg–Modrus). His was by no means an ordinary life: even in the context of the eighteenth century, it was uncommon for a descendant of a patrician family from Senj (Zengg)² to attain the rank of

1 The research was supported by the NKFIH K 116166 The Political Culture of the Hungarian Estates (1526–1848) program.

2 Bogovič, “Čolič, Juraj Vuk.” See also: Viczián, “Chiolich György Farkas”; Lentić-Kugli, “Portreti senjsko-modruških,” 194; Ljubovič, “Senjski uskoci,” 79.

bishop, receive a baronial title³ and then be tried in Rome by a committee for corruption of a minor.⁴ To reconstruct his career, I used a variety of sources, from his letter of donation in the Hungarian Royal Books (*Libri Regii*)⁵ and the documents related to his trial in Rome⁶ to a contemporary account⁷ by Balthasar Kercselich, a canon in Zagreb, and the inheritance documents⁸ in the Austrian National Archives (Österreichisches Staatsarchiv). The available genealogical summaries and the literature on ecclesiastical history also helped me to give a more refined account of the adventurous life of Chiolich.⁹

New aristocrats in Hungary in the eighteenth century

To understand his career more thoroughly, first, we must look at the sociocultural context in which he lived and worked as a high-ranking member of the church and the aristocracy. From the beginning of the reign of Charles III in 1711 until the end of the eighteenth century (1799), all in all, ninety-one persons from seventy-six families were accorded the title of baron or count in their own right.¹⁰ Among them, sixty-three obtained the Hungarian baronial title, whereas twenty-eight were given the rank of count,¹¹ and though most of them worked in bureaucratic or military positions,¹² two made their careers as prelates and one as a merchant.

One of them, Stephan Ladislaus Luzsénszky, won his baronial title as the titular Bishop of Skopje on 20 May 1727, together with five of his relatives¹³ (with his brothers and cousins, Emerich, Franz, Johann, Alexander, and another Emerich¹⁴). Consequently Luzsénszky, who was invested as Bishop of Oradea in 1733, not long before his death, did not need to worry about the male line of his family's

3 MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 40, 250–51. On 18 April 1746 the Pope affirmed his appointment and on 20 May he was ordained as a bishop. See also: Viczián, “Chiolich György Farkas” and MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 43, 154–57.

4 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 82.

5 MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 43, 154–57.

6 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 82–83, 333–49.

7 Kercselich, *Annuae*.

8 ÖStA FHKA NHK Kamerale Ungarn, Fiskalitäten und Verlassenschaften.

9 Bogovič, “Čolič, Juraj Vuk”; Viczián, “Chiolich György Farkas”; Lentić-Kugli, “Portreti senjsko-modruških”; Ljubovič, “Senjski uskoci.”

10 Szemethy, *A magyarországi új arisztokraták*, 12.

11 Szemethy, *A magyarországi új arisztokraták*, 118.

12 Szemethy, *A magyarországi új arisztokraták*.

13 MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 35, 631–39.

14 MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 35, 631–39.

aristocratic branch dying out with his passing.¹⁵ Another rather peculiar path was followed by Michael Horváth (Manduka),¹⁶ who obtained his baronial title on 10 February 1794 as a Greek orthodox merchant from Gyöngyös, a small town in northern Hungary.¹⁷ As mentioned earlier, his career differed from those of other aristocrats in the eighteenth century: both his occupation and his Greek orthodox faith made him an atypical figure among other noblemen. However, unlike the Roman Catholic prelates, he resembled the other members of the group of new aristocrats in that he was able to pass on his aristocratic rank through the direct male line of his family, via his son, Constantine.¹⁸

The case of Georg Wolfgang Chiolich, the bishop of Senj–Modruš, is only partially comparable to the previous two examples. On the one hand, like Stephan Ladislaus Luzsénszky, he belonged to the Catholic clergy. On the other hand, when he was given the baronial title by Maria Theresa on 17 September 1753,¹⁹ his position as a prelate meant that he was already a member of the aristocracy. He was appointed to be the bishop of Senj–Modruš on 12 February 1746²⁰ and as such he could, for example, attend the sessions of the House of Magnates at the Diet of Hungary. As we saw in the case of Luzsénszky, bishop of Skopje and then of Oradea, the extinction of the male line of an aristocratic family could be avoided if several members of the same family received the higher rank at the same time. However, in the case of Chiolich, even though he may have had more than one brother at the time, only his own rank was elevated. This was probably unusual in the period, especially in the eyes of the central government agencies. This is shown by the fact that after the death of Chiolich, during an inheritance dispute, his brother Johann was often called “baron” even though he did not and could not use this title.²¹

15 As Stephan Ladislaus Luzsinszky. See: Viczián, “Luzsénszky.”

16 He became a citizen of Pest as Michael Manduka. See: BFL, *Buda és Pest polgárai*, 1686–1848.

17 MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 58, 92–101.

18 MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 55, 715–18.

19 MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 43, 154–57.

20 MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 40, 250–51.

21 MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 36, 811–13. Even though Georg Wolfgang Chiolich had siblings, according to the letter of donation, he was the only one to attain aristocratic rank. See: MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 43, 154–57. However, after his death, his brother Johann Chiolich appealed to the court several times to obtain part of Georg Wolfgang’s inheritance, and in some of the documents he appears as ‘baron.’ See: ÖStA FHK A NHK Kamerale Ungarn, Fiskalitäten und Verlassenschaften (Fasz. 13.) Sub. 13.2. 1765. 557. rt. Nr.: 56. 21 January 1765. He never used this title in his letters, which he wrote in Italian, Cp. Fasz. 13. Sub.: 2NR.: 56. ex Jan. 1765 (Kt) fol. Nr. 42.

The rising elite of the Croatian–Slavonic region

Besides the broad social context, the specific social, economic, and political system also has to be taken into account when discussing the career of the bishop of Senj–Modruš. Georg Wolfgang Chiolich was born on 28 May 1699 in Senj to a wealthy patrician family.²² He was not the only person from the Croatian–Slavonic region who was given an aristocratic rank during the eighteenth century. Many of the new aristocrats had connections with this politically (administratively) complex region. Martin Knezevich, who later received the baronial title and after a successful military career became a general,²³ was also born in Senj (on the shores of the Adriatic, belonging at the time to the military frontier region of Ogulin)²⁴ on 7 April 1763.²⁵

Johann Felix Gerliczy-Gerlichich was also born in this region, in Rijeka (Fiume, located on Kvarner Bay, an inlet of the Adriatic). His efforts to obtain a higher rank can serve as a good example if we wish to understand how a problem which at first glance may seem merely administrative could modify the pursuits of a nobleman embedded in the elite circles of local society. Originally, Rijeka, as part of the Habsburg Hereditary Lands, belonged to the Austrian seaboard and remained so until the middle of the 1770s, when the City Council requested that the city be annexed to Hungary, and more specifically to Croatia, which Rijeka had belonged to back in the Middle Ages. Though there is some disagreement as to when Rijeka came under the control of the Holy Roman Empire, in the fifteenth century, when it passed to the Habsburgs, it was part of the Kingdom of Hungary. Finally, in 1776 Maria Theresa annexed the city to Croatia, then in 1779, as “*corpus separatum Sacrae Coronae Regni Hungariae*”, Rijeka and its immediate surroundings were annexed to the Kingdom of Hungary.²⁶

But how did these changes affect the way Johann Felix Gerliczy-Gerlichich climbed the social ladder? In the family, which originated in Hungary, his father Georg Anton was the first to obtain a noble title in 1736.²⁷ By this time, the whole family lived in Rijeka, where Johann Felix was born on 21 July 1715.²⁸ Later—after a short period in Transylvania—Georg Anton served as the commissioner of Buccari and then as the

22 Bogovič, “Čolič, Juraj Vuk”; Viczián, “Chiolich György Farkas”; Lentić-Kugli, “Portreti senjsko-modruških,” 194; Ljubovič, “Senjski uskoci,” 79.

23 Schmidt-Brentano, *Kaiserliche und k. k. Generale*. He was appointed general in 1771. On his career and rise to this rank, see his son’s memoir: Deželić, “Memoari baruna Vinka Kneževića,” 44–73.

24 Soksevits, *Horvátország a 7. századtól*, 244, 287.

25 MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 46, 199–203.

26 Soksevits, *Horvátország a 7. századtól*, 239.

27 ÖStA Hofadelsakten, Johann Felix Gerliczy, Ritterstand, 18 November 1747. fol. 36.

28 Gerliczy, “Johann Felix Gerliczy (Gerlichich).”

president of the courts of justice of Rijeka, Buccari, and Tersakti.²⁹ However, Johann Felix was by no means satisfied with his rank as a member of the lesser nobility and in 1742, together with his brothers, he applied for the title of regional baron; however, he only received a knightly rank in 1747.³⁰ After the first fruitless attempts, he did not give up on the idea of obtaining higher status, and finally, on 10 November 1774, he was elevated to the rank of regional baron.³¹ However, as two years later Rijeka came under the control of the Croatian, and somewhat later, the Hungarian authorities, this also meant that the originally rather empty title of regional baron was almost irrelevant in this new context. Probably this was the motivation behind Johann Felix's appeal for the Hungarian baronial title, which he eventually received on 23 May 1777.³²

Several other examples serve to illustrate the differences in the career paths of those who originated from the Croatian–Slavonic region, as opposed to those who were native to the Hungarian territories. In the examined period, between 1711 and 1799 several families entered the Hungarian aristocracy as Hungarian barons and counts (in Croatia there existed no aristocratic ranks), such as the Malenich,³³ Madgalenich,³⁴ Guozdanovich³⁵ or Rauch³⁶ families. And even though they were almost irrelevant from the perspective of Hungarian history, in Croatian history they are considered as significant figures.

The Chiolich family

To gain an even clearer image of the socio-cultural settings in which the career of Georg Wolfgang Chiolich unfolded, one more context must be considered: the place of the Chiolich family in the urban society of Senj. As for their origins, the Chiolichs were an Uskok family which moved from Herzegovina to Dubrovnik (Ragusa) in the fifteenth century and then to Senj in the sixteenth, where they were naturalized in 1585.

29 Nagy, "Gerliczy család. (Báró)." See also: Kemény, "Gerliczyek," 184; ÖStA AVA Hofadelsakten. Johann Felix Gerliczy. Ritterstand, 18 November 1747. fol. 2. "Titulus Equestris cum Armorem Insignibus et Praedicato Nobilis de Gerliczi pro Joanne Felice de Gerliczi Locumtenente ac Representante Caesareo-Regio in Justitialibres Flumine, Buccari et Tersacti."

30 ÖStA AVA Hofadelsakten, Johann Felix Gerliczy, Ritterstand, 18 November 1747.

31 ÖStA AVA Hofadelsakten, Johann Felix Gerliczy, Ritterstand, 18 November 1747. In his appeal in 1747, together with his brothers, he had already asked for baronial status. He eventually won the title of baron in 1774, for which he paid 2000 Forints. See: ÖStA AVA Hofadelsakten, Johann Felix Gerliczy, Freiherrstand, 10 November 1774. fol. 4.

32 MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 50. 468–71.

33 MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 46, 88–91; MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 50, 422–25.

34 MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 46, 69–73.

35 MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 51, 107–10.

36 MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 47, 5–10.

They were a well-connected and influential family with substantial estates in the city, the size of which is well illustrated by the fact that later a high school was located in the building.³⁷ The Hungarian noble title of the family was received by Andrew, the judge of Senj, on 31 December 1706,³⁸ which was followed by a noble title in Carniola (a historical region comprising parts of present-day Slovenia).³⁹ On 9 October 1731, Georg Wolfgang, Matthias, Johann, and Georg were given the title “Löwensperger” and their coat of arms was enhanced.⁴⁰ The family had two branches, the older in Senj and the younger in Slavonia. Georg Wolfgang, later bishop of Senj–Modruš, was a member of the Senj branch, as was his cousin Maximilian (1749–1818).⁴¹ Since he was a member of the family, Maximilian’s rank was also elevated, and he enjoyed a successful career.⁴² He completed his secondary education in Rijeka, continued his studies in Graz, and was eventually sent to Rome to obtain his doctorate in theology. In 1789, he was appointed professor of moral theology at the University of Pest.⁴³ Other important descendants of the Senj branch of the family include Iwan Franz, who later became the archdeacon of Senj and Michael Karl (1766–1844), a general who was a member of the Military Order of Maria Theresa and had a successful career as a military engineer.⁴⁴ The most notable members of the Slavonian branch of the family were Mark, who on 15 September 1810⁴⁵ was given the title of baron of the Habsburg Hereditary Lands, was naturalized in Hungary in 1820⁴⁶ and Paul (1768–1838), another general.⁴⁷ Bishop Chiolich belonged to the elite of Senj, made up of families that had made their fortunes at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries mostly via pirate raids on Venetian and Ottoman merchant ships, in an area which the Habsburg authorities were barely able to control. Following the Treaty of Madrid which concluded the Uskok war of 1615–17, they were able to avoid punishment and after consolidating their political and economic power in the region, they operated as Adriatic merchants.⁴⁸

37 Ljubovič, “Senjski uskoci,” 90.

38 MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 27. 217–20.

39 Ljubovič, “Senjski uskoci,” 90. Cp. Margalits, *Horvát történelmi repetorium*. Margalits quotes the following work: Magdics, “Adatok,” 224–29.

40 MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 36. 811–13. See also: Áldásy, *A Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum*.

41 Ljubovič, “Senjski uskoci,” 90.

42 Palanović, “Čolič, Maksimilijan.”

43 Szinnyei, “Chiolich Miksa (löwenspergi).”

44 Ljubovič, “Senjski uskoci,” 90.

45 Frank, *Standeserhebungen*, 1.

46 Kempelen, *Magyar nemes családok*.

47 Ljubovič, “Senjski uskoci,” 90.

48 Bada, “Horvát kalózok,” 60–61.

The city and the bishopric of Senj–Modruš

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Senj was not among the most significant cities of the Adriatic region. Even though it had been an episcopal see in the Middle Ages,⁴⁹ and became a free royal town in 1473,⁵⁰ the diocesan bishop fled to Modrus as early as 1459, when the Ottoman army captured Krbava (Corbavia, in Croatia).⁵¹ In the sixteenth century, the city became the headquarters of Uskok pirates, and in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Ottomans made altogether six attempts to capture it.⁵² Due to the miserable conditions and the constant Ottoman threat, the bishop chose to stay in Rijeka from 1610 onwards. Consequently, even though he was a diocesan bishop, he was virtually unable to exercise authority over his diocese.⁵³ In the early eighteenth century, Martin Brajkovic was the first bishop who had his seat in the city; still, not only did he have to face the almost complete destruction of his diocese, he also had to struggle against an opponent, Stephan Dojic who claimed the episcopal see as the Titular Bishop of Krbava.⁵⁴ This problem arose because part of the diocese was taken over by the Ottomans in the sixteenth century and thus became part of the Ottoman Empire. The remaining parts were unified as the diocese of Senj–Modruš in 1617,⁵⁵ and the title of titular Bishop of Corbavia was also created.⁵⁶ Finally, in 1702 the dispute was settled in favor of the diocesan bishop. Leopold I allowed him to exercise his authority over all the territories and gave him the title “episcopus Segniensis et Modrussiensis, seu Corbaviensis.”⁵⁷ However, the large but sparsely populated area, which was on the military frontier, was barely profitable,⁵⁸ and Maria Theresa, on the occasion of the appointment of Manzador Pius, the successor of Chiolich, allegedly stated that “Senj was not wealthy, nonetheless it was a diocese of great significance.”⁵⁹

The development of Senj was hindered not only by the devastation it suffered during the Ottoman wars but also because the once prospering Dalmatian trade

49 Diós, “Zenggi püspökség.”

50 Horváth, “Zengg.”

51 Diós, “Zenggi püspökség.”

52 Horváth, “Zengg.”

53 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 63.

54 Bahlcke, “A ‘Magyar Korona püspökei,’” 21–22.

55 Diós, “Zenggi püspökség.” According to other sources, they were unified in 1600. See: Cherrier, *A magyar egyház története*, 388.

56 Viczián, “Korbáviai püspökség.”

57 Bahlcke, “A ‘Magyar Korona püspökei,’” 21–22.

58 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 81.

59 Temesváry, “Manzador Pius,” 219.

was in decline.⁶⁰ It was only possible to transform the method of transportation by developing the road system, which was to gradually replace the mule caravans, a mode of transportation originating in the Middle Ages. However, in the case of Senj, this did not happen until 1789, when the city was linked to Karlovac (Karlstadt, in Croatia).⁶¹ However, despite all the setbacks, major shipyards operated in the city during the eighteenth century; between 1730 and 1764, fourteen and between 1767 and 1781, twenty-four great ships were built in Senj using timber from nearby forests.⁶² All in all, it was a territory where Habsburg, Ottoman, Venetian and local interests came into conflict, not to mention the rivalry between the ecclesiastical and military administrations.

The rising career of Georg Wolfgang Chiolich

If we focus on the life of bishop Chiolich, it is hard to identify any peculiarities which could differentiate him from other prelates in the period. He was ordained as a priest on 1 November 1723,⁶³ and then, after a period of study in Graz, he received his doctorate in 1727.⁶⁴ Between 1725 and 1746, he was a vicar in the diocese of Senj–Modruš;⁶⁵ on 12 May 1730 he was appointed abbot of an abbey at Sveti Juraj (Szentgyörgy), near Senj;⁶⁶ in 1743 he was mentioned as the archdeacon of Senj,⁶⁷ and finally, on 12 February 1746, Maria Theresa appointed him bishop of Senj–Modruš.⁶⁸ Besides his ecclesiastical titles, he received the title of royal councilor on 27 July 1743⁶⁹ and became a real secret councilor on 1 August 1751.⁷⁰ Finally he was awarded the title of baron by Maria Theresa on 17 September 1753.⁷¹

On the one hand, as a prelate Chiolich was an atypical member of the group of new aristocrats, but on the other hand, his elevated priestly career fits into the concept that characterized Habsburg ecclesiastical policy in the middle third of the eighteenth century. By such actions, Maria Theresa sought to “integrate and develop

60 Soksevits, *Horvátország a 7. századtól*, 241.

61 Soksevits, *Horvátország a 7. századtól*, 239.

62 *Az Osztrák–Magyar Monarchia*, 322.

63 Viczián, “Chiolich György Farkas.”

64 Viczián, “Chiolich György Farkas.”

65 Bogovič, “Čolič, Juraj Vuk.”

66 MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 36, 421–22.

67 MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 39, 490–91.

68 MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 40, 250–51. See also: Viczián, “Chiolich György Farkas.”

69 MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 39, 490–91.

70 ÖStA HHStA Interiora Geheime Räte, 3. krt. 8. Fasz. 1 August 1751.

71 MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 43, 154–57.

a multi-ethnic society” and to use the structure of the church for this purpose.⁷² In this system, the ideal people to fill high ecclesiastical posts were those who could act not only as prelates but also exercise secular authority in the area.⁷³ As we have seen, bishop Chiolich—although he did not hold secular office in Senj—by winning the title of secular baron and with the help of his influential relatives, may have been in a position to help achieve the goals set by the Viennese court in the city.

As we examine his ecclesiastical work, he comes across as a hard-working bishop who was eager to carry out visitations⁷⁴ and to spread the word of God.⁷⁵ During his time in this position, he compiled the list of the bishops of Senj–Modruš, which he probably found important after the disputes concerning ecclesiastical positions that had preceded his appointment.⁷⁶ All in all, the image left for posterity is that of a very diligent and scrupulous bishop.

All this indicates that not only did Chiolich appear to be a suitable bishop in the eyes of the Habsburg court, but he also met the ecclesiastical expectations expressed by Pope Benedict XIV (1740–1758) in his program.⁷⁷ These required bishops to live righteously, and to be diligent and pious. For in the event that they were incapable of this exemplary way of life, the system would immediately fail, according to the Pope.⁷⁸ During my research, I have unearthed documents that can support this idealized representation of Chiolich.

The fall of Bishop Chiolich

In 1759, an important letter was sent from Vienna to Senj. One of the noble families of the city, the Domazetoviches finally received permission from Maria Theresa to turn to the Pope with their complaints about Georg Wolfgang Chiolich. Due to the gravity of the matter, they needed the consent of the monarch. We can reconstruct the details of the affair from two main sources: the account of Balthasar Kercselich,⁷⁹ and the research conducted by Tihamér Vanyó, who explored the archival documents of the ecclesiastical investigation.⁸⁰

72 Gózszy, “Exemplo praelucere,” 81.

73 Gózszy, “Exemplo praelucere,” 81–82.

74 Vanyó, *A trienti zsinat*, 13.

75 Cherrier, *A magyar egyház története*, 389.

76 Chiolich, “Additamenta ad Lucium, 1747,” 466–73.

77 Gózszy, “Exemplo praelucere,” 83.

78 Gózszy, “Exemplo praelucere,” 87–88.

79 Kercselich, *Annuae*, 388–89.

80 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 82–83, 333–49.

The Domazetovich family, similarly to the Chiolichs, was of Uskok origin; they had moved to Senj from Bosnia (not Herzegovina, as the Chiolich family did) around 1463 when the Ottoman army occupied the territory. They were naturalized in 1655, then on 21 October 1724 Paul Domazetovich, in recognition of his valor in the wars against the Turks, won an Austrian noble title, and later, for the same military merits, he received the rank of baron. When the family resettled in Senj, most of the descendants of the family were merchants and captains, and later on ship-owners. Some of their vessels also joined the Habsburg fleet in the War of the Polish Succession (1733–1735). Georg Domazetovich built the family mansion in Senj in 1744; it was one of the greatest palaces in the city and later, in the nineteenth century, it became the most important center of political and social life.⁸¹ All things considered, the Domazetovich family was one of the greatest and most influential dynasties in the city of Senj.⁸²

The charge: rape of a young girl

How could the news of a conflict that seemed at first a quarrel between two families, but gradually grew greater, travel first to Vienna and then to Rome? The background to the conflict is described in Balthasar Kerceselich's account in great detail, which, complemented with the archival documents published by Tihamér Vanyó, provides a fairly accurate picture of the nature of the conflict. In the 1750s, the powerful and ambitious bishop reached the peak of his career. As a prelate and an aristocrat, he used his family's credit, as well as its economic and political power, not only to enforce his will in ecclesiastical matters but also to interfere with the city's administration and commercial life. His pursuit of power was not without friction in either the ecclesiastical, or the secular sphere: he was in constant conflict with the clergy and the citizens of Senj. To settle these, he often turned to bribery or other even less honorable methods.⁸³

From among the powerful families of the city, the bishop was on good terms with the Domazetovich family, especially with one of its female members, Anna, nicknamed Anka. One day, the girl disappeared. After two incriminating letters were confiscated, it turned out that she had fled to the Island of Krk (Veglia), which at the time was under the control of Venice, where she had given birth to a child in a nunnery. The letters also revealed that the father of her child was the fifty-nine-year-old bishop, who, by the time the investigation commenced, had passed sixty.⁸⁴

81 Ljubovič, "Senjski uskoci," 90.

82 *Az Osztrák–Magyar Monarchia*, 325, 356.

83 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 82–86; Kerceselich, *Annuae*, 388–89.

84 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 82–86; Kerceselich, *Annuae*, 388–89.

During the investigation, on 13 September 1762, the Domazetovich family turned to the papal legate to discuss the difficulties of the procedure; the letter was signed by Anton as captain and Georg as a judge, and the petition also revealed that the plaintiff was their cousin.⁸⁵

The investigation

Pope Clement XIII entrusted Vitaliano Borromeo, the papal legate in Vienna, with the investigation and set up a committee of five cardinals in Rome to pronounce the necessary verdict. Simultaneously, the bishop was suspended and summoned to Rome. Borromeo ordered the archbishop of Kalocsa to make the necessary inquiries promptly; however, the archbishop, Joseph Batthyány refused to do so, and the case was forwarded to the bishop of Zagreb, Franz Thauszy. The latter decided to undertake the case, but due to his poor command of Italian he commissioned one of his canons, Georg Malenovich, to investigate the case.⁸⁶

At this point, however, we should turn our attention to the main source reporting the affair. On the one hand, Balthasar Kercselich served as a canon in Zagreb together with Georg Malenovich,⁸⁷ so he may have received first-hand information from him during the investigation. On the other hand, his account is distinctly unfavorable to Chiolich, which is rather peculiar, because one might assume that as a cleric, he would have supported the bishop's case against the rival merchant family's accusations.⁸⁸

85 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 342. In Vanyó's translation, they referred to her in the letter as their "cousin."

86 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 82–83; Kercselich, *Annuae*, 400. Malenich was probably a relative of Alexander Michael Malenich, who won the Hungarian baronial title in 1762 and was awarded the rank of count in 1776. See: MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 46. 88–91. and MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 50, 422–25. According to Joachim Bahlcke, Rome was dissatisfied with the bishop and tried to recall him from his position, however, this is not mentioned in the documents published by Tihamér Vanyó. What is more, Bahlcke adds that the archbishop of Kalocsa regarded the papal legate's instructions as a breach of his privileges and this is why he tried to sabotage the investigation, in which, according to Bahlcke, he eventually succeeded. See: Bahlcke, "A Magyar Korona püspökei," 297. The sources, however, reveal that the investigation was conducted, and the bishop was called to Rome where he was cleared of all charges. Cp.: Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 82; Kercselich, *Annuae*, 467. Bahlcke refers to a set of documents which he claims would provide more details about the case (MNL OL A1 11:1757), but these are related to the bishop of Đakovo (in Croatia), Joseph Chiolnich. The confusion may be due to the similarity of their names and the period when they were active. See: Bahlcke, "A Magyar Korona püspökei," 297.

87 Kercselich, *Annuae*, V.

88 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 82–83; Kercselich, *Annuae*, 388–89.

Among the documents of the Archive of the Apostolic Nuncio in Vienna (Archivio della Nunziatura Apostolica in Vienna) published by Tihamér Vanyó, there is a letter of 3 February 1762 written by the clergy in Senj, asking for their bishop to be exculpated and sent back to the diocese.⁸⁹ The letter, written in Italian, is not only interesting because of its contents, which show that not all the clerics who served under Chiolich were dissatisfied with his activities, but also because of the list of signatories. At the end of the document, we can find the signature of Georg Homolich, the archdeacon of the Cathedral of Senj, Anton Cerovac, canon, and protonotary, Karl Vukassovich, a vicar, and Anton Rosanich, a canon. Their request was repeated on 14 March 1762, with the additional information that the bishop had an alibi, as he was in the company of others on 25 November 1758 between five and nine o'clock. Though the alleged companions remained unnamed, the clerics asked the legate not to believe the malign accusations of the Domazetovich family.⁹⁰ These letters do not prove that Chiolich's relationship with the clergy in Senj was free of conflicts; however, the opinion expressed in it throws a different light on the complex nature of ecclesiastical relations in the diocese.

Uncovering all the details of the case must have put a strain on the legal system. At first, it seemed even to the Domazetovich family that since it was a dispute between two patrician families, the authorities in Senj should be responsible for investigating it. This idea was also fueled by the hope that—due to the family's significance—, they would be able to exert more influence over the decision-making of the local authorities than over the courts in either Vienna or Rome. In one of the letters published in Vanyó's collection, written in March 1762 by the representatives of the local court, they tried to clarify their rather unfortunate role in the case to the imperial and royal governor-general. They complained that it had recently come to their attention that the bishop had sent a memorandum to the central authorities, accusing the courts of justice in Senj of overstepping their authority by launching an investigation against him.

The local court representatives explain that though it was not their intention to launch an investigation, the news about the bishop being the child's father spread quickly through the city, and since the girl's family had made a formal complaint, they believed that it was their responsibility to act properly. By this, they meant that they excluded the two relatives of the girl from the bench of judges, what is more, they also tried to prove that since the Domazetovich family was quite a significant one in Senj, it was wrong of the bishop to accuse someone else of having fathered the child. However, applying the principle of "innocent until proven guilty",

89 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 333. I am grateful to Katalin Farkas for her help in translating the Italian documents.

90 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 334.

they tried to act carefully in handling the accusations against the bishop. At the end of the letter, we find the signatures of Franz Vukassovich, “vicecanellarius juratus” and Sigmund Guszich de Preisegg, imperial baron and, the civil and military governor of Senj and Carlobag.⁹¹ It is important to note that, as proven by the quoted documents, we can find a Vukassovich on both sides of the debate—they probably found themselves unexpectedly embroiled in the case. They were one of the most influential families in the city, and the vicar, Karl Vukassovich was a cousin of Chiolich⁹² on the maternal side. The Vukassovich family was part of the city’s elite: they had built a Gothic and Renaissance house in the sixteenth century,⁹³ Martin Knezevich, the judge mentioned earlier, married into the family⁹⁴ and in 1802 Philipp Vukassovich won the title of Hungarian baron.⁹⁵

On 30 June 1762, the papal legate received another letter, in which Cardinal Gianfrancesco Stoppani, the Secretary of the Holy See, pressed for an investigation of the bishop’s case, indicating that he was sympathetic to the sufferings of bishop Chiolich.⁹⁶ One month later, the papal legate had to face another objection from the archbishop of Kalocsa. According to Joseph Batthyány, the investigation went against the rights of the archbishop, canon law and customary law; however, since he was being pressured by Chancellor Esterházy and Thauszy, who was entrusted with the investigation and indicated that he would forsake his “loathsome task” if the archbishop “would come to his senses”, he allowed the proceedings to continue.⁹⁷

These glimpses into the case show clearly that the accusations against Georg Wolfgang Chiolich generated a remarkable degree of tension within the clergy and inflamed old conflicts. During the eighteenth century, the monarchs could exert their supremacy in Hungary with only minor interruptions; however, removing a prelate from his position might spark a conflict with the Holy See.⁹⁸ This already rather problematic situation was further exacerbated by the Croatian clergy’s attempts to loosen the grip of the Hungarian prelates on the territories south of

91 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 334–37. It is not clear why the Lower Austrian government was involved; one possible explanation is that the family bore an aristocratic title in Carniola, and therefore felt the need to turn to the relevant authorities.

92 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 341.

93 Horváth, “Zengg”; *Az Osztrák–Magyar Monarchia*, 325.

94 Deželić, “Memoari baruna Vinka Kneževića,” 48. See also: Brnardić, “Hrvatska vojnička obitelj,” 308.

95 MNL OL A 57 MKL LR Vol. 60, 768–76.

96 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 339.

97 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 340.

98 Forgó, “Korszakváltás – elitváltás?,” 73. Cp. the cases of Stephan Telekessy and Matthias Radanay, in Forgó, “Korszakváltás – elitváltás?” 78, 87.

the River Drava from the sixteenth century onwards. The bishops of Zagreb often spoke out against the attempts of the court or Hungarian prelates to exert tighter control over the Croatian dioceses.⁹⁹ At the same time, bishop Thauszy probably did not want to openly confront the Habsburg court, as he was one of the main supporters and beneficiaries of Maria Theresa's policy.¹⁰⁰ In this light, it was by no means an accident that both Franz Thauszy and the local authorities in Senj tried to solve the problem internally.

On 11 September 1762, the Domazetovich family decided to underwrite the expenses of the investigation and awaited the committee's arrival.¹⁰¹ Two days later, they sent another letter to the papal legate to express their anxiety over the fairness of the investigation. They disapproved of the roles played by Karl Vukassovich, the vicar and Chiolich's cousin in the investigation and requested that the committee be allowed to interrogate civil witnesses in order to ensure the integrity of the enquiry. Furthermore, they asked for half of the bishop's revenues to be distrained and demanded that the members of the committee visit the Island of Krk.¹⁰²

Georg Malenich finally arrived in Senj on 19 November 1762,¹⁰³ where he was probably not received enthusiastically. The Domazetovich family urged that a swift verdict be reached by the court and the clerics in Senj wanted their bishop back in the diocese as soon as possible. Malenich interrogated witnesses both in Senj and in Vienna and tried to arrange a visit to the Island of Krk; however, he was denied entry by the Venetian authorities. He completed the investigation on 18 March 1763 and then probably traveled to Zagreb to finalize the documentation in a more tranquil environment before he had to send it to Rome. Meanwhile, Cardinal Cavalchini, rather impatiently, asked the papal legate about the verdict, and to emphasize the importance of the matter he added that the Pope himself was very interested in the outcome of the case.¹⁰⁴ A little more than a week later Cavalchini sent another urgent letter, indicating that the legate's mediation was of essential importance since both Maria Theresa and the Pope were eager to learn the final verdict in such a significant case.¹⁰⁵

99 Molnár, "A zágrábi püspökség," 110.

100 Maria Theresa appointed him as *supremus comes* of Zagreb County. Gözsy, "Exemplum praelucere," 82.

101 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 341.

102 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 341–42.

103 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 344.

104 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 346. See also: Kerckselich, *Annae*, 451.

105 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 346.

The verdict

The documentation finally arrived in Rome, where both Georg Wolfgang Chiolich and Anna Domazetovich were questioned. In 1763, the Holy See pronounced its verdict and cleared bishop Chiolich of all charges.¹⁰⁶ Not long after this, however, either on 2 December 1763 or 3 January 1764,¹⁰⁷ the bishop of Senj–Modruš suddenly died.¹⁰⁸ His body was not taken home but was buried in Rome in the Church of the Gesù.¹⁰⁹ Besides the official documents and letters from the investigation, Balthasar Kerceselich also mentioned the verdict and Chiolich's death in his account, however his source, by his admission, was mere gossip. Kerceselich refers to the Pope's personal decision to release Chiolich and his belief in his innocence. As for his sudden death, he mentions the widely rumored possibility of poisoning. He also claims to know that Chiolich, the "first and last baron" of his family, amassed a fortune of almost 50,000 Forints in his life.¹¹⁰

For the Domazetovich family, the exculpation of the bishop was a complete defeat, partly because they had to pay all the expenses¹¹¹ and because Anna had to stay in Rome for months during the trial, which was also very costly for the family. The compensation they had hoped for (for the corruption of a minor) would have covered their expenses, but after the verdict, they had to face both financial and moral losses due to the shame of an illegitimate child in a wealthy patrician family.

The verdict had grave consequences. In 1769, Anka, reduced to poverty, sent an appeal to the court for assistance; however, she could not count on the monarch's sympathy. Maria Theresa allegedly told Manzador Pius, who succeeded Chiolich, that she never believed the accusations against the old bishop. He would have never done anything like this as a young man—so why would he have done it as an old man? What is more, she wanted to erase the memory of the trial and thought that the best place for Anka's would be a house of correction. It is important to note here that Maria Theresa's (alleged) opinion is hardly compatible with Balthasar Kerceselich's account.¹¹²

Based on the documents we have from the investigation, it would have been impossible to administer justice in the case; however, the Domazetovich family must

106 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 82.

107 Bogovič, "Čolič, Juraj Vuk"; Viczián, "Chiolich György Farkas"; Lentić-Kugli, "Portreti senjsko-modruških," 194; Ljubovič, "Senjski uskoci," 79.

108 Kerceselich, *Annuae*, 466.

109 Bogovič, "Čolič, Juraj Vuk."

110 Kerceselich, *Annuae*, 467.

111 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 341–43.

112 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 83–83; Kerceselich, *Annuae*, 467.

have been aware of the negative consequences should they lose, and thus, I would argue that they were probably convinced of the bishop's guilt. If they aimed to preserve the family's dignity, they could have accepted the "scapegoat" named by the bishop of Senj–Modruš; however, Anna's family was determined to sustain their belief that he had indeed committed the crime he was accused of.¹¹³

Despite the scarcity of sources, another important question must be considered if we are to understand the career and character of Georg Wolfgang Chiolich more thoroughly. Not only was he tried for corruption of a minor, but, as mentioned earlier, Balthasar Kerceselich also accused him of peculation and wrote suspiciously about the fortune he had accumulated by the time of his death.¹¹⁴ Though he was never accused of anything formally (as in the case of alleged immorality), it is known that after his death his brother Johann argued with the Hungarian Royal Chamber, which contended that the diocese would be entitled to the capital (a sum of 12,000 Forints) left by Chiolich.¹¹⁵ He reasoned—since it was raised by Georg Wolfgang Chiolich and other relatives—that the family should dispose of the money¹¹⁶ instead of the new bishop of the diocese, which Tihamér Vanyó described as the poorest of all the Hungarian Catholic dioceses.¹¹⁷ This debate was by no means unique in the eighteenth century; however, here both the Chamber and the potential heirs strove to obtain the greatest possible sum of money from the deceased prelate's legacy.¹¹⁸

All in all, the question I put forward in my introduction remains: why did a Roman Catholic prelate aim to obtain a secular aristocratic title? I would argue that Kerceselich's account might throw some light on this. He claims that the bishop was an ambitious man who won his high rank and positions through flattery and who probably valued power above anything else. Chiolich's efforts matched the policy of Maria Theresa, so he could easily win support in Vienna. Kerceselich highlights that during his time in office, Chiolich's most difficult task was to weather the constant conflicts with the clergy, the representatives of secular power and local citizens, which he solved mostly by bribery and by exploiting the power he could exert via his position and prestige.¹¹⁹ In doing so, he must have enjoyed the benefits of his great

113 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 334–37.

114 Kerceselich, *Annae*, 467.

115 ÖStA FHKA NHK Kamerale Ungarn, Fiskalitäten und Verlassenschaften (Fasz. 13.) Sub. 13.2. 1765. 557. Krt. Nr. 11. fol. 98.

116 ÖStA FHKA NHK Kamerale Ungarn, Fiskalitäten und Verlassenschaften (Fasz. 13.) Sub. 13.2. 1765. 557. Krt; ÖStA FHKA NHK Kamerale Ungarn, Geistlichkeit (Fasz. 3.) Subdivision 3.4. (1763–1767) krt. 91.

117 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 81.

118 Hermann and Jakab, "Bevezető," 16–18.

119 Vanyó, *A bécsi pápai követség*, 81. See also: Kerceselich, *Annae*, 388–89.

power and prestige both as a prelate and as a secular aristocrat.¹²⁰ His aims probably coincided with the objectives of the Viennese court, which in the eighteenth century strove to choose prelates from aristocratic families; or, the other way round, if a mere member of the gentry won a higher-ranking ecclesiastical position, gave them aristocratic status.¹²¹ The scandal surrounding Chiolich may have been embarrassing for both the Pope and the Viennese court, so although he was not formally convicted in any forum, his career as an exemplary prelate and a local potentate who effectively represented the will of the Viennese court ended in failure.

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Finanz- und Hofkammerarchiv (FHKA)

NHK Kamerale Ungarn, Fiskalitäten und Verlassenschaften Finanz- und Hofkammerarchiv, Neue Hofkammer und Finanzministerium, Allgemeine Abteilungen, Kamerale Ungarn, Fiskalitäten und Verlassenschaften
NHK Kamerale Ungarn, Geistlichkeit

120 Considering Stephan Ladislaus Luzsénszky's case, it is possible that Chiolich was unable to win the baronial title together with his relatives for financial or other reasons. On the other hand, because the extinction of the male line of the family was expected with his passing, he could have conferred his title on another relative. However, even if he intended to do so, it is possible that he was prevented by the trial. I am grateful to Nóra Nagy for this idea.

121 Forgó, "Korszakváltás – elitváltás?" 78, 88. See also: Temesváry, "Öt erdélyi püspök rangemelésé," 254–84.

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