

## Christianization in Early Medieval Transylvania. The Oldest Church in Transylvania and its Interpretation. Edited by Daniela Marcu Istrate, Dan Ioan Mureșan, and Gabriel Tiberiu Rustoiu.

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This volume, published under the auspices of Brill Publishers, offers a selection of studies that strive to discuss the earliest history of Christianity in Transylvania.<sup>1</sup> Most of the papers were written by Romanian authors, while the rest were penned by Hungarian and Serbian researchers. In 2011—an archaeological sensation in recent decades in Romania—an excavation led by Daniela Marcu Istrate revealed the remains of the church located west of St Michael’s Cathedral in Alba Iulia, which had presumably stood on the territory of a former Roman fortification from the mid-tenth century until the latter half of the eleventh century. This discovery has given new impetus to the academic discourse concerning the early history of Christianity in Transylvania.

The volume consists of the works of twenty authors. Four studies discuss archaeological matters, nine examine historical issues, and one paper outlines a constructional and re-constructional topic. The volume is a work of a high standard, including several images, charts, and maps that contribute to the understanding of the written text by experts from various disciplines.

In her opening study, Daniela Marcu Istrate, head of the aforesaid excavation, offers a thorough presentation of the uncertainties related to the early history of Christianity in Transylvania, the natural features and the architectural characteristics

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of Alba Iulia—the latter rooted in Antiquity—, the society of the city, as well as the church buildings discovered in the vicinity of St Michael's Cathedral (“From the Greek Bishop Hierotheos to the Latin Bishop Simon: The Churches in Alba Iulia and the Controversies Related to the Beginnings of the Diocese of Transylvania”). With the help of the tombs found in the area, Marcu Istrate convincingly dates the existence of the church to the period between the mid-tenth and mid-eleventh century, identifying the building as a Greek-cross plan church with four pillars and Byzantine features. The author outlines the controversy over the identification of the church, firmly opposing Miklós Takács's view, who linked it to Latin Christianity. Marcu Istrate argues that the Catholic cathedral was clearly built after the demolition of the Greek-cross plan church, which had probably been connected to the mission of Hierotheos.

Florin Curta formulates a different view in his study, focusing on the relations between the region of Southern Transylvania and Bulgaria (“Bulgaria beyond the Danube: Water under the Bridge, or Is There More in the Pipeline?”). With the help of the (partially Bulgaria-related) ninth- and tenth-century finds discovered in the Stația de Salvare cemetery in Alba Iulia, the author strives to identify the ‘Bulgaria beyond the Danube’ mentioned in connection with the siege of Adrianople in 813. He argues that if a relationship existed with Southern Transylvania, its traces must also show among the examined finds—the church found in 2011 can also be interpreted in this context. Instead of linking the church to written sources (including those related to the mission of Hierotheos), Curta examines the urban water pipe segments (ceramics) typical of the cities in the region. Such segments were also found in Alba Iulia, indicating that the settlement may have been an outpost in the direction of the Great Hungarian Plain, serving as the residence of a Bulgarian lord, later dismantled due to the war between Byzantium and the Kievan Rus and the activities of St Stephen.

The study authored by Horia Ciugudean, Aurel Dragotă, and Monica-Elena Popescu analyses the ninth–tenth-century findings discovered in the aforementioned Stația de Salvare cemetery, a key factor with regard to the dating of the church excavated in 2011 (“The Transylvanian Cradle: The Funeral Landscape of Alba Iulia in the Light of »Stația de Salvare« Cemetery [9<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> Centuries]”). This cemetery is one of the most crucial tomb finds in Transylvania, whose research, having started in the early twentieth century, has gathered momentum mainly in recent decades. The authors' analyses, focusing on various criteria, are thorough works in which the text and the high-standard charts mutually support each other. The examined cemetery is a good example of the co-habitation and joint development of different peoples, as graves related to Hungarians also appear beside those of the Bulgarian population of the Mures Valley from the first half of the tenth century onwards. However,

according to the authors' reconstruction, the presence of Slavic and Romanized (!) populations can also be presumed outside the ancient fortress, over whom control exercised by the Bulgarian elite was replaced by Hungarian rule in the 900s.

The last archaeological study, related only tangentially to the topic of the volume, was penned by Călin Cosma ("Byzantine Bronze Reliquary Crosses with Embossed Figures Discovered in Romania"). Based on his catalogue and typology of the surviving fifty-three crosses with figures, the finds can be dated mainly to the tenth and eleventh centuries. The place and date of the crosses' creation and the site where they were found can be linked to the then-political goals of Byzantium and the progress of the conversion to Christianity.

Tudor Sălăgean's work is the first historical study in the volume, focusing on the tenth-century history of Transylvania, striving to give some context to the mission of Hierotheos in light of the most recent archaeological results ("From *Terra Ultrasilvana* to *Regnum Erdeelw*: Notes on the Historical Evolution of Transylvania in the 10<sup>th</sup> Century"). However, instead of a moderate summary of the available sources and the relevant Romanian and Hungarian literature, Sălăgean has penned a rather confused study on the topic, whose approach and set of tools may be considered outdated. Sălăgean uses the accounts given by Anonymus and the Illuminated Chronicle with no more than minimal criticism, overlooking pieces of Hungarian literature more recent than the works of Gyula Kristó. Sălăgean's position is also confused as regards the church excavated in Alba Iulia in 2011: without any justification, he rejects Kristó's views on the Catholic episcopal seat moving from north to south, and he links the destruction of the Greek-cross plan church to the pagan revolt of 1046, albeit admitting that we have no knowledge of any events that may have taken place in Transylvania in connection with the rebellion. Overall, the author argues that after defeating the pagan Gyula the Younger, St Stephen not only recovered his maternal heritage but also *re-established* the Diocese of Transylvania.

Much more considerable professional guidance is provided for understanding historical problems—also burdened by political controversy—in the historiographic work authored by Jan Nicolae on the eighteenth-century 'discoverer' of Hierotheos (Hagiography and History in Early Medieval Transylvania: from the Byzantine Bishop Hierotheos [10<sup>th</sup> Century] to the German Historian Gottfried Schwarz [18<sup>th</sup> Century]). The Lutheran bishop-scholar, who lived between 1707 and 1788, penned his work on the early history of the conversion to Christianity in Hungary in the late 1730s from an Eastern perspective, considering the mission a complete success. The analyses of the responses given to Schwarz's work make it clear that while his theory was well received among Protestants and the late-eighteenth-century Romanian historians in Transylvania, it was rejected by the Jesuit historians of Hungary: they even put the existence of Hierotheos into question.

In a work that re-evaluates the ecclesiastical and political career of Patriarch Theophylact, Dan Ioan Mureşan focuses especially on the foreign relations and Christian missions of the Byzantine Empire (“Patriarch Theophylact, the Horses, and the Hungarians: The Religious Origins of the Byzantine Mission to Tourkia”). The author’s key result is a novel dating of Hierotheos’s mission in Transylvania: he argues that Bulcsú converted to Christianity in 943 for political reasons, that is, to reinforce the peace between Hungary and Byzantium and that the Gyula may have visited Constantinople as early as around 946. According to Mureşan’s noteworthy argument, the patriarch may have been a suitable mediator between the empire and the Hungarians, who were considered to be equestrian people, partly due to his well-known passion for horses.

Alexandru Madgearu examines the development of church organisation in the Lower Danubian region against the backdrop of the reinforcement of the Byzantine power from the mid-tenth century until the early eleventh century (“Ecclesiastical Consequences of the Restoration of Byzantine Power in the Danubian Region”). The author touches on several church organisation-, foreign policy-, and military history issues in connection with the early history of Hungary. However, not all of them are closely related to the topic of the volume. According to Madgearu, Hierotheos carried out his proselytising activities in the Maros–Körös interfluvium instead of Transylvania, as the archaeological finds indicate that Byzantine relations are concentrated in this region. The author endorses the position that the territorially based Latin and Greek church organisations functioned in parallel within the kingdom of St Stephen.

In the first study of a volume penned by a Hungarian author, Gábor Thoroczkay stresses that Hungarian Christianity has both Western and Eastern roots, and while the former is more important, the latter is also noteworthy (“Some Remarks on the Church History of the Carpathian Basin during the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Centuries”). He presents the sources of the mission of Hierotheos and strives to provide guidance for the political landscape of the region in the era concerned. Albeit earlier, Thoroczkay, too, was more inclined to consider that the church excavated in the 1970s was the first Latin cathedral dating back to the mid-eleventh century; now, in the light of the new archaeological results, he accepts the possibility that the church was built in Byzantine style in the tenth century. Thus, it cannot be ruled out that the church can indeed be linked to the activities of Hierotheos. It was built for the Slavs of Alba Iulia and the Hungarians who migrated to the settlement in the tenth century.

Éva Révész examines the spatial extent and timescale of the activities of Hierotheos and his successors (“Gyula’s Christianity and the Bishopric of the Eastern Mission”). According to the author, it is of particular importance that four more people appeared as metropolitans of Turcia in the church of Greek Rite. Révész

argues that this indicates the functioning of the Eastern Rite church organisation. In her opinion, the activity of the bishop of Turcia is also demonstrated by the fact that the Greek monasteries founded early on continued to function until the late eleventh century, since the operation of the Greek bishop, who ordained and supervised the Greek priests, was the condition of the continuous existence of the church. According to the author, Hierotheos's successors carried out their activities through missions within the Latin church organisation, presumably with the Greek Rite monasteries as bases. Based on Bulgarian and Serbian models, Révész argues that the bishop of Turcia may have also been the head of an important Greek monastery.

Boris Stojkovski provides an overview of the Greek Rite monasteries that operated in Hungary in the eleventh to fourteenth centuries ("The Byzantine Monasteries of Medieval Hungary Revisited"). The study offers an up-to-date, comprehensive overview of the monasteries in medieval Hungary, albeit without an examination of the actual subject matter of the volume, that is, the church of Alba Iulia and the early church history of Transylvania. Thus, the study might rather have fitted at the beginning of the historical part of the volume as an introduction of a sort, outlining the role of Greek Rite Christianity in medieval Hungary.

Şerban Turcuş strives to present the eleventh-century Hungarian state and church against the backdrop of contemporary German and Vatican political thought ("The Hungarian Kingdom between the Imperial Ecclesiology of Otto III and the Pontifical Ecclesiology of Gregory VII"). The author believes that the Hungarian state and church organisation were initiated by Emperor Otto III and supported by Pope Sylvester. However, the Hungarian historical literature attempts to belittle their significance and exaggerate the role of St Stephen. On several occasions, Turcuş accuses the Hungarian researchers of basing their theories on late medieval chronicles and pieces of hagiographic literature instead of using contemporary sources. At the same time, at the end of his study, Turcuş himself relies on a document issued by the Holy See in the early twentieth century in an attempt to demonstrate the dependence of the medieval Hungarian church, clearly exiting the theoretical context of the period under examination. Other than repeatedly reprimanding Hungarian historiography, Turcuş ignores the Hungarian literature almost completely and blatantly disregards the results of Hungarian work regarding both the comprehensive church history research and critical source analysis. His approach and style hinder academic discussion—or any discussion, for that matter—and one might (rightly) find them provocative in a volume aiming at the shared cultivation of the historical heritage of Transylvania.

The study penned by Adinel C. Dincă and Mihai Kovács examines the foundation and early history of the Latin Diocese of Transylvania, as well as its place in the Hungarian and regional church organisation ("Latin Bishoprics in the 'Age of Iron'

and the Diocese of Transylvania”). The authors stress that the Diocese of Transylvania was one of the easternmost dioceses not only of the Hungarian Kingdom but also of Latin Christianity as a whole, and thus, it maintained significant cultural relations with Eastern Christianity. Dincă and Kovács firmly reject the view that the territorially based Greek and Latin Rite church organisations would have operated in parallel in eleventh-century Hungary. Regarding the issue of Hierotheos, the authors prefer to abstain. In agreement with the results of the Hungarian medieval research, they date the foundation of the Latin rite Diocese of Transylvania to the first decade of the eleventh century and derive its unique name, referring to the area, from the function related to missionary activities, emphasising that such proselytising bishoprics existed throughout Europe in the early phase of Christianisation.

Nicolae Călin Chifăr and Marius Mihail Păsculescu provide an overview of possible ways to reconstruct the church of Alba Iulia (“The 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup>-Century Pillared-Church in Alba Iulia: Reconstruction Proposals”). The authors stress that the discovered remnants allow various building types to be outlined, and the Greek-cross plan church is just one of the possibilities. They juxtapose their observations in Alba Iulia with similar churches found throughout the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary. The authors also emphasise that neither the quantity nor the quality of the finds allow for the presentation of a final reconstruction model. The abundance of images and the high-quality graphic models included in the study not only illustrate the chapter but also provide enough guidance for those unfamiliar with architectural history to follow the author’s line of thought.

Overall, on various academic levels, the studies published in the volume examine several aspects of the controversial issues associated with the early history of Christianity in Transylvania. Some of the issues that are covered are rather problematic and difficult to support with sources. It is unfortunate that no more Hungarian experts authored papers for inclusion in such a representative volume, as this would have increased its versatility and enabled the presentation of the results of Hungarian historiography concerning the early history of Transylvania more efficiently to an international readership.

