

# Oláh Miklós, Nicolae Valahul, Mikuláš Oláh

Nicolaus Olahus

DATE OF BIRTH 10 January 1493  
PLACE OF BIRTH Cibinium (Hermannstadt, Nagyszeben, Sibiu)  
DATE OF DEATH 15 January 1568  
PLACE OF DEATH Tyrnaviae (Tyrnau, Nagyszombat, Trnava)

## BIOGRAPHY

Although there has long been uncertainty about Nicolaus Olahus' mother tongue, recent research suggests that he was either bi- or trilingual. While most of his works were written in Latin, Hungarian and German *epistulae* have also survived, and his surname 'Valahus' implies a Romanian ethnic origin. He was raised in the court of King Vladislas II of Hungary (1490-1516), and left the country following the 1526 Battle of Mohács, escorting Mary of Hungary to Brussels.

After becoming the queen's secretary, he was also made regent of the Low Countries. During his Brussels years, he maintained extensive correspondence with Erasmus of Rotterdam, and enjoyed the friendship of the most prominent humanists of his age. In 1542, he moved from the service of Mary to that of Ferdinand I (1527-64), and returned to Hungary. First, he became chancellor, then Bishop of Zagreb from 1543, Bishop of Eger from 1548, and finally Archbishop of Esztergom from 1553 until his death. He was also Comes of Hont County from 1560, and royal governor from 1562 to 1568. After returning to Hungary, he appears to have adopted a more active politico-religious role, rather than engaging in literary pursuits. He assumed the mission of subduing the spread of the Protestant Reformation in Hungary, which led him to publish Peter Canisius' *Catechismus minor* in the translation by Nicolaus Telegdy in 1562. He also dedicated considerable sums of money to the development and innovation of Catholic education, founding the Jesuit College in Trnava in 1558, the predecessor of the university established in 1635 by Petrus Pázmány.

Olahus' complete correspondence is not yet accessible, though its publication (now in preparation) is expected to shed ample light on his literary and political relationships between 1542 and 1568. Olahus' system of patronage is a similarly important field of research, as he is known to

have launched the careers of numerous politico-religious personalities by supporting their studies and later granting them an ecclesiastical benefice or a post at the chancellery. Among them were Nicolaus Telegdy, Antonius Verantius, Johannes Listhius and Nicolaus Istvánffy. His work at the chancellery was also significant: it was thanks to his reforms that the office attained a form that remained unchanged until 1690.

One of the works for which Olahus is known is *Hungaria, sive de originibus gentis, regni Hungariae situ, habitu, opportunitatibus* ('Hungary, or on the origins of the Hungarian people, the location, condition and advantages of the Kingdom of Hungary'), a paean for Olahus's homeland, written in Brussels in 1536. While the Ottomans occasionally appear in this work, often as aggressors, they are not demonised. Opposition between Christians and Muslims is not a point of main attention, even though the work was written only ten years after the Battle of Mohács.

#### MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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#### WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

### *Epistolae familiares N. Olahi ad amicos; Codex epistolaris*, 'Private letters of Nicolaus Olahus to his friends'

DATE After 22 August 1538

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Latin

#### DESCRIPTION

This volume, also known as *Codex epistolaris*, which was compiled by Olahus himself, contains a selection of 611 letters written by and to him between 1527 and 1538, together with poems in commemoration of the death of Erasmus (Ipolyi, pp. 581-95). It comes to 582 folios in the manuscript, and 622 pages in the edition by Ipolyi.

Political topics frequently occur: almost every second letter refers to attacks by the Ottomans and battles with them, including the Battle of Mohács and the siege of Vienna. Olahus repeatedly emphasises the importance of Christian leaders uniting against the Ottomans, and he urges noblemen, bishops and the pope himself to come together.

From the end of 1530 Olahus begins to urge Christian powers to unite under the leadership of King Ferdinand. He regards disunity as the most serious problem, and encourages all Christians to work for harmony.

#### SIGNIFICANCE

While the collection reveals the mind of a leading humanist, it is only a subsidiary resource for Christian attitudes towards Muslims, because the majority of Olahus' information about the Ottomans and their movements was derived from other works.

#### MANUSCRIPTS

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