

‘SEDE VACANTE EPISCOPI ARMENORUM TRANSYLVANIAE.’  
THE QUESTION OF THE ARMENIAN CATHOLIC (UNIATE)  
EPISCOPATE IN TRANSYLVANIA IN THE FIRST HALF  
OF THE 18<sup>th</sup> CENTURY\*

Kornél NAGY

**Abstract**

The first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century is one of the most exciting periods in the history of Transylvania. The wars of liberation to terminate the Ottoman Turkish rule (1686–1718), the integration of the Transylvanian Principality into the Habsburg Empire, after 150 years of relative independence, brought about significant political and social changes. Prior to these changes, the process of Counter-Reformation in the Hungarian Kingdom’s eastern and north-eastern provinces (like Transylvania) was getting increasingly underway. This paper argues that the problem of the Armenian Catholic (Uniate) Episcopacy in Transylvania should be, in fact, analysed and researched in this church-historical context. Because of the religious and political persecutions of secular authorities, Apostolic Armenians escaped from Moldavia and Poland to Transylvania between 1668 and 1672. Their church union with Rome, declared in 1689, was closely related to Bishop Oxendio Virziresco’s (1654–1715) pastoral activity in Transylvania. However, after Bishop Oxendio Virziresco’s death in 1715, the Armenian Catholic Episcopacy remained vacant. Therefore, serious conflicts broke out regarding the vacancy of the Armenians’ Episcopacy and its ecclesiastical jurisdictions between the Armenians and Roman Catholic Bishops in Transylvania. The renovating Roman-Catholic Episcopacy in Transylvania left no stone unturned to integrate the Armenian Catholic Episcopacy into the Roman Catholic Church in dogmatic as well as canonical aspects. Therefore, the main point of this brief study is to shed light on the church-historical background of this conflict, relying upon newly discovered and studied archival sources kept in Budapest, Alba Iulia (Gyulafehérvár, Romania), Rome and Vatican City, as well as critically analysing a handful of secondary literature.

**Keywords:** Armenian Catholics, Transylvania, Episcopacy, Roman Catholic Church, the Apostolic Holy See

The problem of the creation of the Armenian Catholic Episcopate in Transylvania in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century is a barely explored area of research from the church-historical point of view. Generally, one of the greatest challenges in researching the history of the Armenian Catholic Church in Transylvania is the

\* Scholarly investigations on the subject/theme of the present study were conducted in Rome and Vatican City thanks to the Count Klebelsberg Kunó Scholarships granted in the years 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2018, to whom I wish to express my deepest gratitude and thanks for the support provided.

fact that the majority of manuscript documents written in Armenian, Italian and Latin languages are preserved in various locations, such as Rome, including Vatican City, and Alba Iulia (Gyulafehérvár, Romania). Furthermore, the secondary literature on the subject, written by scholars of Armenian origin from Hungary and Transylvania, is extraordinarily meagre. Most of the 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century research, despite some exceptions, is rather tendentious and, thus, generally obsolete.<sup>1</sup> This secondary literature claims that the Armenian Catholic Episcopate and diocese of Transylvania existed since the establishment of Armenian colonies in Transylvania in 1668. Most researchers have uncritically accepted this claim as a historical fact. The main purpose of my very brief essay, therefore, is to bring this problem to the forefront of scholarly attention and express my modest reservations on the issue as well as re-examine it from a church-historical point of view.<sup>2</sup>

Generally, the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century is one of the most exciting periods in the history of the Transylvanian church. The wars of liberation that terminated the Ottoman Turkish domination, the integration of the Transylvanian Principality into the Habsburg Monarchy centred in Vienna after its almost one-and-a-half-century long independence, brought about significant political and social changes in Transylvania. This exciting period presented serious challenges to the Catholic (Latin Rite) Church in Hungary and Transylvania. Prior to these major changes, the process of Counter-Reformation (in other words, the Catholic Renewal or Catholic Reform) in the Hungarian Kingdom's eastern and northern regions was under-way, becoming increasingly important: eventually the Orthodox Ruthenians in Upper Hungary and Romanians in Transylvania united with the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>3</sup> Roman Catholic bishops,

<sup>1</sup> C. LUKÁCSY, *Historia Armenorum Transsylvaniae e primordiis gentis usque nostram memoriam e fontibus authenticis et documentis antea ineditis elaborata*, Vienna, 1859, pp. 19, 73-102; GY. MERZA, *Az örmény püspökség* [History of the Armenian Catholic Episcopate in Transylvania], Kolozsvár, 1902; GY. MERZA, *Az örmény betelepülés története Magyarországon és a szamosújvári örmény-katholikus püspöki, illetőleg vikáriusi szék örmény püspökség* [History of the Armenians' Colonisation in Hungary and the Armenian Catholic Episcopate's and Vicariate's See in Armenopolis/Gherla], Vác, 1913; G. ÉBLE, *A szamosújvári Verzár család* [History of the Verzár/Virziresco Family in Armenopolis/Szamosújvár], Budapest, 1915, pp. 5-17.

<sup>2</sup> G. PETROWICZ, *La chiesa armena in Polonia e nei paesi limitrofi. Parte Terza: 1686-1954* (*Studia Ecclesiastica*, 17; *Historica*, 10.), Rome, 1988, pp. 166-178; B. KOVÁCS, *Über Rom nach Siebenbürgen. Der armenische Missionar Minas Barun und die Siebenbürgische armenische Kirche in den ersten Jahrzehnten des 18. Jahrhunderts*, in *Zeitschrift für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, 29/1 (2006), pp. 18-24; K. Nagy, *Az elképzelt "Aranykor". Az erdélyi örménykatholikus (unitus) egyház a 18. században* [The Imagined Golden Age: The Armenian Catholic (Uniate) Church in Transylvania in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century], in *Történelmi Szemle*, 61/2 (2019), pp. 267-268, 271-279.

<sup>3</sup> A. HODINKA, *Munkácsi görög-katholikus püspökség története* [History of the Ruthenian Greek-Catholic Episcopate in Mukačevo], Budapest, 1909, pp. 262-264, 272-287; G.M. MIRON, *Biserica greca-catolică din Transilvania. Cler și enoriași (1697-1782)* [The Romanian Greek-Catholic Church in Transylvania. Clergy and Parishes, 1697-1782], Cluj-Napoca, 2004, pp. 37-45, 65-72; T. VÉGHSEŐ, "...Mint igazi egyházi ember." *A történelmi Munkácsi Egyházmegye görög katolikus egyházának a létrejötte és 17. századi fejlődése* ['Like a True Man of Church.' The Birth

greatly supported by the authorities of the Apostolic Holy See in Rome, aimed at re-organising the Roman Catholic Church’s functioning as well as the religious daily life of the Catholic faithful in Hungary and Transylvania. Seats of the abandoned dioceses, after 150 years of Ottoman occupation and almost 110 years of strong pressures due to the Protestant reformation pursued by the Princes of Transylvania (1601-1713), re-appeared and were on their way to being filled. It is in this context that the problem of the Armenian Catholic Episcopate in Transylvania in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century should be viewed as well as analysed and researched, taking into consideration this church-historical dimension.<sup>4</sup>

Religious and political persecutions by secular authorities forced members of the Armenian Apostolic (*arāk’elakan*) Church in the Moldavian Principality and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (*Rzecz Pospolita Obojga Narodów*) to flee to Transylvania in 1668 and 1672.<sup>5</sup> Soon, in 1684 to be precise, Catholic missions were dispatched to the Armenians living in Transylvania, whose aim was to create a Church Union, and whose initiator was the Armenian Catholic Archiepiscopate in Lviv (formerly *Lwów*, *L’vov*, *Lemberg*, now in Ukraine) led by the coadjutor of the archbishop – Bishop Deodat Nersesowicz (1644–1709) – and Archbishop Vardan Hunanean (1644–1715) with the Apostolic Holy See’s approval.<sup>6</sup> The Archbishop’s justification for uniting them with Rome was his claim that Lviv had ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the Apostolic Armenians

and Development of the Historical Greek Catholic Diocese of Mukačevo in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century], (*Collectanea Athanasiana*, 1; *Studia*, 4), Nyíregyháza, 2011, pp. 121, 140-143; Sz. TERDIK, *Görögkatolikus püspöki központok Magyarországon. Művészet és reprezentáció* [Greek-Catholic Episcopal Centres in Hungary. Art and Representation], (*Collectanea Athanasiana*, 6; *Ars Sacra Byzantino-Carpathiensis*, 1), Nyíregyháza, 2014, pp. 131-184; Zs. SZIRTES, *A románok vallási uniója Rabutin főparancsnok szemével: Nagyszegi, Sztojka és a protestáns elit 1701-ben* [The Church Union of the Romanians in Transylvania from General Rabutin’s Point of View: Nagyszegi, Sztojka, and the Protestant Élite in 1701], in D. DIÓSI – J. MARTON (eds), *Catholice reformare. A katolikus egyház a fejedelemség korában* [Catholice reformare. The Roman Catholic Church During the Period of the Transylvanian Principality], Budapest – Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca, 2018, pp. 343-381.

<sup>4</sup> K. NAGY, *The Church-Union of the Armenians in Transylvania (1685-1715)*, (*Academic Studies*, 81), Göttingen, 2021, pp. 13-14.

<sup>5</sup> APF (= Archivio storico della Sacra Congregazione per l’Evangelizzazione dei Popoli o de Propaganda Fide, Roma/Rome, Italy); SC (= Scritture riferite nei Congressi) Fondo Armeni, Vol. 1, fols 525r-526v; APF SC Fondo Moldavia, Vol. 1, fols 155r-156v; AAV (= Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Città del Vaticano/Vatican City), Archivio della Nunziatura Apostolica in Varsavia, Vol. 98, fols 641r-644v.

<sup>6</sup> APF Acta SC (= Acta Sacrae Congregationis), Vol. 54, fol. 207r-v; APF SOCG (= Scritture Originali riferite nelle Congregazioni Generali), Vol. 492, fols 310v, 313r-v; APF Lettere SC (= Lettere e Decreti della Sacra Congregazione), Vol. 73, fol. 252r-v; APF Lettere SC, Vol. 74, fol. 19r-v. The Catholic missions among the Armenians in Transylvania were directly co-ordinated by the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith (*Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*), the Apostolic Holy See’s Missionary Institute. This Congregation was founded by the Bull called *Inscrutabili divinae providentiae*, promulgated by Pope Gregory XV (1621–1623) on 6<sup>th</sup> January, 1622. APF Collegio Urbano, Vol. 1, fols 1r-27v.

living in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Moldavia before the Church Union established by the Armenian Archbishop Nikol Thorosowicz (1603–1681) in 1630.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, according to the Archbishop, the Armenians who moved to Transylvania could not subtract themselves from this spiritual leadership because they emigrated from such regions – namely Moldavia and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth – that belonged to the Armenian Catholic (Uniate) Archbishop’s ecclesiastical jurisdiction.<sup>8</sup>

This church union was closely related to Oxendio Virziresco’s (1654–1715) pastoral and missionary activity in Transylvania (1685–1715). After all, the appearance of the missionary Oxendio Virziresco, born in Moldavia in 1685 and educated at the Urban (Urbanian) College<sup>9</sup> (*Collegio Urbano*, *Collegium Urbanum*, *Dpratur Urbanean*) in Rome, was due to the Armenian Catholic Archbishop’s request to Rome from his seat in Lviv.<sup>10</sup> Due to Virziresco’s pastoral activity and efforts, the Armenians in Transylvania declared effectively a church union with Rome in Lviv in mid-February 1689 when they made a confession of faith (*confessio/professio fidei Catholicae*) in the presence of the Armenian Catholic Archbishop Vardan Hunanean (1644–1715).<sup>11</sup> Therefore, Oxendio Virziresco was nominated and consecrated by the Apostolic Holy See as the Apostolic Vicar and Catholic (Uniate) bishop of the Armenians in Transylvania in 1690. Thus, in 1690 the Armenians in Transylvania were removed from the jurisdiction of the Armenian Catholic Archbishopric in Lviv and placed within the Apostolic Holy See’s competence. At the same time, Oxendio

<sup>7</sup> G. PETROWICZ, *L’unione degli armeni in Polonia con la Santa Sede, Parte Secunda (1624-1681)*, (OCA, 135), Rome, 1950, pp. 131-160; K. NAGY, *Lembergben kezdődött. Az örménykatolikus egyház születése* [It Began in Lviv/Lemberg. The Birth of the Armenian Catholic Church], (*Collectanea Athanasiana*, 1, *Studia*, 12), Nyíregyháza, 2020, pp. 53-74.

<sup>8</sup> APF Acta SC, Vol. 53, fol. 248r; APF SC Fondo Armeni, Vol. 3, fols 380v-381r; APF SC Fondo Moscovia, Polonia e Rutheni, Vol. 2, fol. 195r-v; AAV Segreteria di Stato, Polonia, Vol. 101, fols 498r-499v.

<sup>9</sup> The Urban College, the Seminary of Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith in Rome, was founded by Pope Urban VIII (1623–1644) with his Bull entitled *Immortalis Dei Filius* on 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1627. See on this: APF Collegio Urbano, Vol. 1, fols 103r-120v, 131r-139v.

<sup>10</sup> APF Acta SC, Vol. 51, fols 114r-v, 232r-v, 255r-v; APF Acta SC, Vol. 55, fols 60r-v; APF SOCG, Vol. 490, fol. 110r-v; APF SOCG, Vol. 491, fols 12r-v, 13v; APF SOCG, Vol. 532, fols 456r-457r; APF Lettere SC, Vol. 70, fols 53r-v, 54r, 58v; APF Lettere SC, Vol. 76, fols 90v-91r; APF SC Fondo Armeni, Vol. 3, fols 417r, 434r-v, 435v, 462r-v, 468r-469v, 488r, 490r, 498r-v; APF SC Fondo Armeni, Vol. 4, fols 13r-v, 374r-375v; APF Collegio Urbano, Vol. 1, fol. 268r; APF Collegio Urbano, Vol. 3, fol. 472r-v; AAV Archivio della Nunziatura Apostolica in Vienna, Vol. 196, fols 219r-220r.

<sup>11</sup> APF Acta SC, Vol. 59, fols 165r-169v; APF SOCG, Vol. 504, fols 103r, 104r, 105r; APF CP (= Congregazioni Particolari), Vol. 29, fols 610r-v, 644r, 645r, 647r-v, 648r-v; APF SC Fondo Armeni, Vol. 4, fols 82r-83v; Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Roma/Rome Fondo Austria, Historia, Vol. 155, fols 81r-v; ELTE EKK (= Eötvös Lorand Tudományegyetem, Egyetemi Könyv- és Kézirattár/Roland Eötvös State University’s Library and Archive, Budapest, Hungary) Res Transylvanica, Historia, Vol. 522, fols 96r-v, 137r-v, 173r-v; PL (= Prímási Levéltár/Hungarian Primate’s Archive, Esztergom, Hungary), AEV (= Archivum Ecclesiasticum Vetus) Sub Primate Széchenyi, No. 273/2.

Virziresco was consciously appointed as a titular bishop (*in partibus infidelium*) of Aladia in Hibernia by the Apostolic Holy See and not as a mere diocesan bishop.<sup>12</sup> In making this decision, Rome likely took the Hungarian Catholic Church’s interests into consideration, as the latter intended to restore the non-functioning Roman Catholic Episcopate and Diocese in Transylvania.<sup>13</sup> In other words, there had never been an independent Armenian Catholic Episcopate or Diocese in Transylvania and the problem of the Armenian Catholic Episcopate emerged from this very event.

After Bishop Oxendio Virziresco’s death in 1715, his bishopric office remained vacant.<sup>14</sup> However, in his will, written to the Apostolic Holy See’s authorities in 1715, Oxendio Virziresco indicated as his successor and bishop of the Armenians in Transylvania the person of Step’anos Step’anosean Rōšk’ay (*Stefan Stefanowicz Roszka*) (1670–1739), the titular bishop of Hymeria, who had served as an archiepiscopal coadjutor in Lviv since 1718.<sup>15</sup> Although the Apostolic Holy See dealt directly with bishop Rōšk’ay’s appointment, no final decision was reached for lack of exact information.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, his person was not acceptable for the Armenian community of Transylvania, for bishop Rōšk’ay was a member of the Armenian community in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, rather than Transylvania.<sup>17</sup>

It is worth mentioning that after bishop Oxendio Virziresco’s death, the representatives of the Armenians in Transylvania consulted each other about Virziresco’s succession. However, bogged down in discussions about the personalities involved, they did not agree upon the nomination of the new titular bishop.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, two other candidates, namely Elia Smirnayec’i and Yovhannēs Kaffayec’i, were suggested by Rome, but soon the Apostolic Holy See withdrew their candidacy without any reasons. This confusion or disagreement played into the hands of the Roman Catholic Episcopate in Transylvania in the 1710s.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>12</sup> APF Acta SC, Vol. 60, fols 14r-19v; APF SOCG, Vol. 506, fols 63r-64r; APF SOCG, Vol. 507, fols 87r-88v; APF CP, Vol. 29, fols 612r-613r, 630r-631r; APF Lettere SC, Vol. 79, fol. 123r-v; APF SC Fondo Armeni, Vol. 4, fols 220r-221v; ELTE EKK Coll. Hev. (= Collectio Hevenesiana), Cod. 15, pp. 248-252; ELTE EEK Coll. Hev. Cod. 16, pp. 32-34; ELTE EKK Coll. Hev. Cod. 20, pp. 77-80, 81-84; ELTE EKK Coll. Hev. Cod. 29, p. 346.

<sup>13</sup> APF Acta SC, Vol. 61, fols 84r-87v; APF SOCG, Vol. 510, fols 97r-98r; APF SOCG, Vol. 512, fols 180r, 181r; APF CP, Vol. 29, fols 617v, fol. 636r.

<sup>14</sup> APF Acta SC, Vol. 84, fols 23r-24v; APF Acta SC, Vol. 85, fols 169r-171v; APF Lettere SC, Vol. 104, fols 57r-58v, 231v; APF SC Fondo Armeni, Vol. 6, fols 544r-545v.

<sup>15</sup> APF Acta SC, Vol. 80, fols 178r-182r; APF Acta SC, Vol. 85, fols 170r-v, 437r-v, 582r, 587r-589r; APF Acta SC, Vol. 86, fols 75r-76v; APF SOCG, Vol. 573, fols 365r-v, 366r-368r, 370r-v; APF SOCG, Vol. 587, fols 47r-51r; APF SOCG, Vol. 600, fols 550r-552v, 553v; APF Lettere SC, Vol. 101, fols 169v-170v; APF SC Fondo Armeni, Vol. 5, fols 588r, 642r-643v, 721r-v; APF Fondo di Vienna, Vol. 43, fol. 43r-v.

<sup>16</sup> APF Acta SC, Vol. 86, fols 102r-103v.

<sup>17</sup> APF SOCG, Vol. 600, fols 509r-510r.

<sup>18</sup> APF SOCG, Vol. 601, fol. 268r.

<sup>19</sup> APF Acta SC, Vol. 86, fols 102r-103v; APF SOCG, Vol. 608, fol. 435r-v.

Serious conflicts broke out because of the vacancy of the Armenian Catholic bishop's office and its ecclesiastical jurisdiction between the Armenians and Roman Catholic bishops in Transylvania.<sup>20</sup> The Roman Catholic Episcopate in Transylvania, then in the full fervour of a renovating spirit, left no stone unturned to integrate the Armenians into the Roman Catholic Church in dogmatic as well as canonical aspects. In other words, the Roman Catholic bishop intended to obtain full ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the Armenians in Transylvania.<sup>21</sup>

There were also fears within the Roman Catholic Episcopate in Transylvania that the catholicised (Uniate) Armenians and Romanians would erect an independent bishopric or a diocese in this territory, with its own ecclesiastical jurisdiction. These fears were more or less thoroughly justified. The Greek Catholic (*Uniate*, *Unitus*) Romanians in Transylvania, against the Roman Catholic Episcopate's will and harsh protests, managed to attain the creation of their own diocese and episcopate with a centre of Făgăraş (Fogaras, now in Romania), from the authorities of the Apostolic Holy See and the Viennese Imperial Court, in 1721.<sup>22</sup> However, unlike the catholicised (Greek Catholic) Romanians, the Armenians in Transylvania did not form a large community.<sup>23</sup> This facilitated the Roman Catholic Episcopate's meddling in the internal affairs of the Armenian Catholic Church without any obstacles in Transylvania.

The main aim of the Roman Catholic Episcopate appears to have been the full submission of the Armenians in Transylvania to the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>24</sup> For this reason, the Roman Catholic bishops in Transylvania in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century continuously accused Catholic Armenians of pursuing heretical and schismatic customs when conducting their holy liturgies, albeit without any concrete evidence. For example, in 1719, Bishop György (Georgius) Mártonffy (1664–1721) sent documents, composed in Latin, to the Apostolic Holy See in Rome, in which he listed twelve points of the Armenians' (alleged) heretical errors and abuses in Transylvania.<sup>25</sup> These documents

<sup>20</sup> APF Acta SC, Vol. 74, fol. 55r; APF SOCG, Vol. 535, fols 1r-3v; APF SOCG, Vol. 633, fols 314r-315r; APF SC Fondo Armeni, Vol. 7, fol. 467r; APF SC Fondo Ungheria e Transilvania, Vol. 3, fols 46r-52v.

<sup>21</sup> APF Acta SC, Vol. 91, fols 491r-502v; APF Acta SC, Vol. 92, fols 58r-65r; GYFL (= Gyulafehérvári Főegyházmegyei Levéltár/The Archiepiscopate's Archive in Gyulafehérvár, Alba Iulia – Gyulafehérvár, Romania) I/4 (= Canonica Visitationes), Vol. 3, fols 115v-123r.

<sup>22</sup> APF Acta SC, Vol. 86, fols 231r-234v; APF Acta SC, Vol. 87, fols 141r-143v, 207r-v; APF Acta SC, Vol. 89/I, fols 4r, 179r-v; APF Acta SC, Vol. 90, fols 677v-679v; APF SOCG, Vol. 605, fols 317r-334v; APF SC Fondo Greci di Croazia, Dalmazia, Schiavonia, Transilvania ed Ungheria, Vol. 1, fols 224r-233v; APF SC Fondo Ungheria e Transilvania, Vol. 4, fols 86r-v, 95r-96v; ELTE EKK Coll. Hev. Cod. 8, p. 61; ELTE EKK Coll. Kapr (= Collectio Kaprinayana), B (= Második sorozat/Second Series), Cod. 20, pp. 201-205.

<sup>23</sup> APF Acta SC, Vol. 83, fols 679r-680v.

<sup>24</sup> APF Acta SC, Vol. 89/I, fols 79r-81v.

<sup>25</sup> APF Acta SC, Vol. 89/I, fols 109r-114v, 156r-158v, 178r; APF SOCG, Vol. 617, fols 324r, 325r, 328v, 329v; APF Lettere SC, Vol. 108, fols 42v, 45v-46v, 47v, 48v, 49v, 94r-95v, 147v,



highlighted, for example, the Armenians’ refusal to accept the teachings of the Fourth Ecumenical Council (Chalcedon, 451 AD). Roman Catholic bishops in Transylvania regarded the Armenian church as an illegitimate corpus and a hotbed of heresy in their own diocese.<sup>26</sup> The main purpose of the Roman Catholic bishops was to discredit Catholic Armenians and their bishopric office in Transylvania.<sup>27</sup>

Roman Catholic bishops’ accusations brought against the Armenians in Transylvania proved to be false. In light of this, the Apostolic Holy See sent out so-called “Apostolic visitors” to examine and supervise the Armenians’ religious customs in Transylvania in the 1720s and 1730s.<sup>28</sup> These apostolic visitors were all Armenian Catholic priests educated in the already mentioned Urban College in Rome. Generally, they rendered account of continuous pressures on the Armenians in Transylvania exercised by the Roman Catholic Episcopate.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, in their reports addressed to the Apostolic Holy See, these apostolic visitors also emphasised that Roman Catholics forced the Armenians to follow the Latin rite in their liturgies instead of the Armenian Catholic rites.<sup>30</sup> As a solution, they proposed the Apostolic Holy See to nominate and ordain a titular bishop for the Armenians in Transylvania because the vacancy of the Armenian Catholic bishop would cause the complete assimilation of the Armenians with Roman Catholics.<sup>31</sup>

Prior to the apostolic visitors’ activity, the Armenians in Transylvania in 1736 appealed to the Viennese Imperial Court for a bishop’s nomination.<sup>32</sup> At the same, taking into consideration the Roman Catholic Episcopate’s interest, the Armenians in Transylvania stressed that their plea was strictly confined to appointing a titular bishop subjected to the Apostolic Holy See directly and not as a diocesan bishop. In other words, they wished to create an independent Armenian Uniate Episcopate or Diocese in Transylvania.<sup>33</sup>

414v; APF SC Fondo Armeni, Vol. 7, fols 39r, 40r-41r; ELTE EKK Coll. Hev. Cod. 26, pp. 265–274; PL AEV Sub Primate Keresztély, No. 477.

<sup>26</sup> APF Acta SC, Vol. 89/II, fols 345r-346v; APF Acta SC, Vol. 90, fols 205r-208v; APF Acta SC, Vol. 91, fols 11v-12r; APF SOCG, Vol. 617, fols 320r-321r; APF SOCG, Vol. 628, fol. 78r-v; APF SC Fondo Armeni, Vol. 7, fol. 42r; GYFL I/4, Vol. 3, fols 113r-114v.

<sup>27</sup> APF SOCG, Vol. 617, fols 319r-v, 329r-v; APF SC Fondo Armeni, Vol. 7, fol. 62r.

<sup>28</sup> APF Acta SC, Vol. 99, fol. 534r; APF Acta SC, Vol. 102, fol. 362r; APF SOCG, Vol. 623, fols 273r-277v; APF Lettere SC, Vol. 135, fols 237r-238r, 238r-v; GYFL I/4, Vol. 3, fols 99r-104v, 107r-v, 108r-111v.

<sup>29</sup> APF Acta SC, Vol. 103, fols 481v-483v.

<sup>30</sup> APF SOCG, Vol. 623, fols 273r-277v; APF SC Fondo Armeni, Vol. 7, fols 80r-81v, 285r-v; APF SC Fondo Armeni, Vol. 9, fols 595r-v and 596r-v; GYFL I/4, Vol. 3, fols 119v-121r.

<sup>31</sup> APF SOCG, Vol. 670, fol. 291r-v; APF SOCG, Vol. 670/A, fols 23r-v, 24r-v, 25r-v, 26v; APF SOCG, Vol. 673, fols 193r, 194r; APF SOCG, Vol. 677, fols 78r-v, 81r, 79r, 80v; APF SOCG, Vol. 681, fols 240r, 243v, 241r-242r.

<sup>32</sup> APF Acta SC, Vol. 99, fol. 491r; APF SOCG, Vol. 652, fols 198r-211v; APF Lettere SC, Vol. 143, fol. 248r-v; APF SC Fondo Armeni, Vol. 10, fols 29r-30r, 30v.

<sup>33</sup> APF SOCG, Vol. 691, fol. 291r-v.

Surprisingly, the Viennese (Imperial) Court supported the Armenians' plea. Emperor Charles VI of Habsburg (1711–1740), after a long council, appointed Michál Minas Theodorowicz (1689–1760), the Armenian Uniate parish priest of Gherla (Armenopolis, Hayak'alak', Szamosújvár; present-day Romania), and alumnus of the Seminary called the Armenian College<sup>34</sup> (*Collegium Armenum*) in Lviv, as the (Uniate) bishop of the Armenians in Transylvania.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the Viennese Court called upon the Apostolic Holy See for the confirmation of Michál Theodorowicz's nomination as a titular bishop.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, this step on the part of the Viennese Imperial Court, interfered with the Roman Catholic Episcopate's interest in Transylvania.<sup>37</sup> From the Episcopate's point of view, the territory of the diocese in Transylvania should function as just one Catholic Episcopate, and not more.<sup>38</sup> Albeit the Roman Catholic Episcopate paid no attention to the fact that the Romanian Greek Catholic Episcopate had been functioning against its will in Transylvania since 1721.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, the Roman Catholic Episcopate in Transylvania started 'lobbying' against Michál Theodorowicz's nomination at the Apostolic Holy See.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, Michál Theodorowicz's candidacy for the bishopric office was overturned because the representatives of the Armenian Catholic Church in Transylvania did not accept his person as a would-be bishop.<sup>41</sup> The major objection was that Michál Theodorowicz was born in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and not in Transylvania. Consequently, the Armenians in Transylvania were divided on this issue.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, after five years of hard work, the Roman Catholic Episcopate's efforts were crowned with success in 1741. Prior to the successful lobbying against Michál Theodorowicz's nomination as a titular bishop pursued by the Roman Catholic Episcopacy in Transylvania, the Apostolic Holy See had already remonstrated with the Viennese Imperial Court against meddling in the internal affairs of the Roman Catholic Episcopate.<sup>43</sup> The Apostolic Holy See strongly supported the Roman Catholic Episcopate in Transylvania and was careful to

<sup>34</sup> The Armenian College in Lviv was founded by the Apostolic Holy See in 1664. Its first rector was the Italian-born Theatine father and missionary Clemente Galano CR (1611–1666). See on this: APF Acta SC, Vol. 33, fols 150r–154r; APF CP, Vol. 64, fols 41r–47v; APF CP, Vol. 133, fols 270r–310v; APF SC Fondo Armeni, Vol. 1, fols 13r–18v; APF Collegi Vari, Vol. 2, fols 2r–23v.

<sup>35</sup> APF SOCG, Vol. 708, fol. 377r–v; APF Lettere SC, Vol. 135, fols 238v–239v; APF Lettere SC, Vol. 143, fols 215v–216r.

<sup>36</sup> APF SOCG, Vol. 691, fols 274r–v, 275r–v.

<sup>37</sup> APF Acta SC, Vol. 105, fols 63v–65r; APF SOCG, Vol. 708, fols 374r–375v.

<sup>38</sup> APF Acta SC, Vol. 110, fols 190v–191v.

<sup>39</sup> APF CP, Vol. 100, fols 94r–98v; APF Lettere SC, Vol. 99, fol. 107r–v; ELTE EKK Coll. Kapr. B, Cod. 20, pp. 206–212.

<sup>40</sup> APF SOCG, Vol. 691, fol. 275r–v; APF Lettere SC, Vol. 143, fols 280v–282r.

<sup>41</sup> APF Acta SC, Vol. 107, fols 300r–302r; APF SOCG, Vol. 708, fols 364r–366r.

<sup>42</sup> APF SOCG, Vol. 708, fols 379r, 380r–381r; APF Lettere SC, Vol. 147, fols 239v–241v.

<sup>43</sup> APF SOCG, Vol. 708, fols 389r–390v.



take its views vis-à-vis the Armenian question into consideration.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the Apostolic Holy See admonished the Viennese Imperial Court very emphatically to exercise only secular and not religious authority over the Armenians in Transylvania. Additionally, a significant change occurred in the Viennese Imperial Court with the death of the Emperor Charles VI in 1740, who had strongly supported the Armenian Catholic bishop's appointment in Transylvania.<sup>45</sup> His successor, Queen Maria Theresa of Habsburg (1740–1780), on the contrary, minimised the problem of the Armenian Catholic Episcopate. Therefore, the Armenian Catholic church remained without a real shepherd or a spiritual leader in Transylvania in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>46</sup>

To sum up, archival documents unanimously indicate that there had never been an independent Armenian Catholic Episcopate or diocese in Transylvania. The documents presented here talk about a mere titular bishopric's office without a diocese subjected to the Apostolic Holy See directly, which had remained vacant because of the Roman Catholic Episcopate's successful protests in Transylvania.<sup>47</sup> It appears that there has been much misinterpretation of archival documents in the secondary literature, particularly that written by 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century scholars of Armenian origin, assimilated to the Hungarian culture in Transylvania and of Catholic faith. Their purpose was to justify the Armenians' exclusive right to erect their own Episcopate in Transylvania, and by doing so they created a pious legend (or myth) which highlighted the foundation of the Armenian Catholic Episcopate in Transylvania as a part of the glorious past of their history. Yet, as this paper argues, the situation was much more complex, involving tensions both within the Armenian community of Transylvania itself and between it and the Roman Catholic Episcopate in Transylvania, the central authority of the Apostolic Holy See in Rome and, not least, the Viennese Imperial Court. It is my hope that this brief study emphasised these nuances and will serve to raise further research interest in the history of the Armenian Catholic Diocese in Transylvania on a new scholarly basis.

<sup>44</sup> APF SC Fondo Armeni, Vol. 10, fols 299r, 377r-v.

<sup>45</sup> APF SOCG, Vol. 708, fol. 368r-v.

<sup>46</sup> APF Acta SC, Vol. 111, fols 331r-335v; APF SOCG, Vol. 708, fols 367r, 369r-370v; APF Lettere SC, Vol. 149, fol. 140v.

<sup>47</sup> APF Acta SC, Vol. 112, fols 44r-v, 424r-425r; APF Acta SC, Vol. 114, fol. 384r; APF SOCG, Vol. 708, fols 385r-v, 387r-v; APF SOCG, Vol. 710, fol. 148r-v; APF SOCG, Vol. 713, fols 382r-v, 383r-v, 384r-v, 387v.

