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ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS REGARDING THE PHRASE
RELIGIO ROMANA IN A TRANSYLVANIAN DOCUMENT
DATED 6 JUNE 1574

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Abstract: After studying a Latin record issued on 6 June 1574 (referring to the Transylvanian Romanians), the specialists expressed different opinions regarding the expression *romana videlicet seu graeca religio*, i.e. “Roman or Greek religion” (which seems to be a nonsense, because “the Roman religion” is the Catholic and “the Greek religion” is the Orthodox denomination). The author believes that the issuer of the 1574 document only transposed into Latin a phrase commonly used in the Romanian Transylvanian environment, so that the “Romanian religion” became practically naturally, in Latin, *religio romana*, all the more so as we are dealing with an internal document, not intended for the Holy See or for other foreign institutions, where it may have created confusion. The matter of this unusual document is far from being settled, as the arguments raised are probably insufficient or not eloquent enough. However, they are just as consistent as those that suggest an interpretation based on the alleged Catholicism of the Romanians. Consequently, we consider that in the current stage of our knowledge it is plausible to believe that in the document of 1574 *religio romana sive greca* means “Romanian or Greek religion.”

Key Words: Orthodox Romanians, Catholic, Protestant, *religio romana*, Transylvania, ethnonyms, ethnicity, early modern times

Introduction

On 6 June 1574, Stephen Báthory, prince of Transylvania (and king of Poland after 1576), issued in Alba Iulia a document (known to Romanian historiography for more than a century) whereby “Friar Christopher (Hristofor), the priest” was appointed *episcopum Valachorum presbyterorum transsilvanensium, romanam videlicet seu graecam religionem profitencium* (“bishop of the Wallachian Transylvanian priests who follow the Roman, that is, the Greek faith”).¹ This unusual phrase, “the Roman, that is, the Greek faith” is repeated in the text, so we are not dealing with a mistake: *ita tamen ut ipse religionem romanam sive grecam illis quibus interest, libere profiteri ac erudire...* (“so that he, freely, to those interested in professing and practicing the Roman or Greek religion...” or *universis et singulis discretis kalugeris, presbyteris walachis ac alterius cuiusvis status et condicionis hominibus grecam, ut premissum est, seu romanam religionem profitentibus* (“to each and all of the wise monks, Wallachian priests or people of any other condition and station, who profess the Greek or, as stated before, Roman faith.”)² The historiography regarding the phrase in question and the message of this document has been surveyed relatively recently, an endeavor which therefore need not be repeated.³ Nevertheless, we must point out that there are basically two schools of thought: one initiated by Nicolae Iorga, who proposed the translation “Romanian or Greek religion” (both terms applied to the Eastern faith of the Transylvanian Romanians) and restricted the scope to the Orthodox faith, and another, which firmly associates the adjective *romana* with Catholicism, especially (according to Canon Augustin Bunea) in its “Uniate” form, later known as Greek-Catholic faith (in other words, the document refers to two distinct denominations of the Transylvanian Romanians). In this second case, Bishop Christopher (Hristofor) would have had jurisdiction over both Orthodox and Uniate Romanians.⁴ Both interpretations continue to raise serious doubts, and the matter is far from being settled. However, a new analysis of the terms in the text, of the meaning of the ethnic and confessional notions featured therein, as well as of the historical context of the second half of the 16th century might lead to some partial conclusions.

The Ethnic Name of Romanians during the 16th Century. General Approach

Let us begin by looking at the ethnic designation likely to be applied to the Romanians in this official text from the second half of the 16th century. Today it is generally known that throughout their history, from the completion of their ethno-genesis (8th–9th centuries) and until the 19th century (in some cases, even until today), the Romanians had two

ethnonyms, namely *rumân/român* (Romanian) and *vlah/valah* (Wallachian, circulating in a variety of forms).⁵ There are almost no cases in which the two distinct forms are featured in the same document. The former name is the one that the Romanians used for themselves, while the second is the name given to them by foreigners. Similar cases are found in the history of nearly all peoples. Without getting in too much detail—the matter has been long cleared by historians—we shall merely take note of the fact that both names applied to the Romanians are related to the ancient Romans (continuing with the peoples descended from them) and to their language (continued in the form of the Romance languages). In other words, both ethnonyms indicate (by their very form) the Roman origin of the Romanians and the Latin roots of their language. In medieval texts, that is, in the texts that predate the 16th century, when the Romanian language began to be more frequently used in cultural works and in official documents, the terms usually employed to designate the Romanians and their language were derived from the ethnonym “Wallachian.” In other words, in both narrative and documentary medieval sources the Romanians were referred to as Wallachians (*blachi, blaci, blachos, valachi, volochi, wlochi, Walachen, olachi, ulah, ilac, iflac*, etc.), regardless of whether we are dealing with the language of religion, of culture, or of the official documents (Latin, Slavonic, Greek), with Oriental languages or with the European vernacular languages which became written languages earlier than Romanian (Italian, German, French, Spanish, etc.). After the 16th century, the two names (Wallachian and Romanian) operate in parallel, the former being dominant in foreign sources and the latter in the domestic ones. Until the 19th century, with the exception of a very small number of learned individuals, the Romanians living north of the Danube River never knew they were being given another name apart from that of Romanian, with a few variants of its own. In other words, the ethnonym Wallachian used by other people was completely unknown to them. The same fully applies to the Romanian language, which the Romanians called Romanian, while foreigners called it Wallachian (in a great variety of forms).

The Names Given (in the Latin Records) to the Denominations

When it comes to the faith(s) of the Romanians, things are a bit more complicated and follow a different rule than the one operating in the case of the ethnonym and of the language. Today, when we speak about the main Romanian denomination (but not about their religion), we simply designate it as Orthodox. In other words, the Romanians are (mostly) Christians of the Orthodox denomination (the phrase “Orthodox religion” is erroneous in keeping with the precise terminology of today). The designation “Orthodox” (“Orthodox faith”) applied to the Eastern rite has

been in use since the Renaissance and the Reformation (Counter-reformation), that is, since the 16th century (more precisely, since the Council of Trent). Until then, in Latin sources we find other designations, such as *religio (fides, secta) graeca* or *greca*, sometimes *ruthenica*. In Western sources, of Catholic extraction, they often referred to the Eastern faith as “schismatic,” its followers “separated” from Rome. More often than not, the term “schismatic” was used in a pejorative or demeaning sense. Sometimes, the Romanian confession was also referred to as “the Wallachian faith/cult,” also in a pejorative sense. In Latin texts, the Western faith was usually called *religio (fides) romana*, the “Roman faith,” even at a time when the pope resided in Avignon. Of course, there were exceptions. For instance, some Latin sources refer to the Western faith (the Latin rite) as “Orthodox.” Thus, on 28 October 1364, when Hungarian King Louis I confirmed an older document granted to the Saxons of Braşov (Kronstadt), the sovereign stated that the Bosnian heretics and Patarenes were erring in regard to the “Orthodox” faith (in the sense of “true” or “canonical”), referring, of course, to Catholicism (*in regno nostro Bozne innumerabilis multitudo hereticorum et patarinorum pululasset in errorem fidei orthodoxe*).⁶ The same phrase occurs in a document issued by the same king on 25 August 1366.⁷ Furthermore, on 22 September 1365, Louis I stated that all of his subjects must serve God “under the sign on one and the same orthodox faith (*sub unius eiusdemque fidei orthodoxe karactere, supremo omnium famulentur creatori*).”⁸ Here the “Orthodox faith” is Catholic or Western, and not Eastern or Byzantine. In a similar fashion, during the Middle Ages in the West the name “Christian faith” applied almost exclusively to the Catholic confession. Thus, a document dated 5 December 1377 and issued by Pope Gregory XI indicates that, in the Kingdom of Hungary, the ecclesiastical tithe was not to be paid by cardinals and by the masters, preceptors, and friars of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem (Hospitallers) and of the Teutonic Order of St. Mary, “who are fighting against the enemies of the Christian faith” (*qui contra hostes fidei christiane exponunt*).⁹ As a general rule, however, the Western faith is almost invariably called *fides* or *religio romana*. Still, starting with the 16th century, following the Reformation and the gradual rise of the modern nations, things change and become more complicated.

The External Discovery of the Inner Name of Romanians

The same 16th century saw another significant change in the perception of ethnicity, which also applied to the Romanians. Thus, the humanist scholars who referred to their contemporary countries and nations using the ancient names of Greek and Roman classicism, in the fashion of the Renaissance, nevertheless gradually turned towards the proper names actually used by the peoples of that time, namely, of the 15th

and 16th centuries. Thus, Bulgaria and Serbia are referred to as *Moesia* (*Inferior* and *Superior*, respectively), Hungary is *Pannonia*, Transylvania, Moldavia and Wallachia are *Dacia*, the European part of Turkey is *Romania*, but they knew that, even if the old names were still in use, the people living there were no longer Moesians, Pannonians or Huns, Dacians or Romans, but rather Bulgarians and Serbs (Slavs), Hungarians, Romanians, Turks and Hellenes, etc. In other words, the names of the peoples and of their languages, as inherited from ancient times or as they were known and used outside the respective communities, are presently paralleled by the updated versions, namely, by the names used by the very peoples in question. A few examples come to illustrate the manner in which this process occurred in the case of the Romanians, in the 16th century. As early as the late 15th century, Nicolaus Machinensis, bishop of Modrussa (Dalmatia, today Croatia), the legate of Pope Pius II in Hungary, knew not only that the Romanians were of Roman extraction, but also that they called their language “Roman” rather than “Wallachian”: “...Upon meeting with foreigners and trying to start a conversation, they ask them whether they speak the Roman language” (*...Cum ignotis congressi dum linguae explorant commercium, an Romane loqui norint interrogant*).¹⁰ In other words, the bishop of Modrussa was telling the educated circles that the Romanians did not call their language Wallachian, but rather Romanian, which, in Latin, could only be rendered as *romana*. A similar assertion is made by the envoy and diplomat Tranquillo Andronico (1490–1571), a supporter of the Venetian Alvise Gritti, who said that the Romanians “still call themselves Romans” (*...Et nunc se Romanos vocant*),¹¹ naturally meaning Romanians. Another secretary of Alvise Gritti, one Francesco della Valle of Padua (died after 1545)¹², after having talked to some Romanians, indicated that “in their language they call themselves Romans, as they say that in olden times they came from Rome” (*si dimandano in lingua loro Romei, perche dicono esser venuti anticamente da Roma*); the Paduan author states the same thing about their language, which the Romanians do not call Wallachian (*valacca*), but Roman (*Sai tu Romano?*).¹³ Even more eloquent is the testimony of a Transylvanian called Johannes Lebel (circa 1490–1566), the father of Transylvanian Saxon historiography, who states that the name *Valachus* is given to Romanians by foreigners, but they are in fact “Roman Italians” (*Romanenses Italiani*), calling themselves precisely that in the popular language (*Romuini*)¹⁴, that their language is Roman and that they have kept for themselves the name Roman, which accurately designates them (*Solo Romanos nomine, sine re, representantes*).¹⁵ Another humanist, who took up residence in Transylvania, the Dalmatian (Hungarized Croat) Antonius Verancsics or Verantio/ Wrancius (1504–1573), bishop of Alba Iulia – Weissenburg in German and Gyulafehérvár in Hungarian – (he would later become cardinal and viceroy of Habsburg Hungary, under the successor of Ferdinand I), also states that “the Wallachians call themselves Romans” (*Valacchi, qui se Romanos nominant*)

and provides an example: “When they ask somebody whether they can speak Wallachian, they say: do you speak Roman? and <when they ask> whether one is Wallachian they say: are you Roman?” (*Interrogantes quempiam an sciret Valacchice: scisne, inquit, Romane? et an Valachus esset: num Romanus sit? quaerunt*).¹⁶ Similar statements are made by the Pole Stanislaw Orzechowski, who commented on the events of 1552 (he says that Romanians are the descendants of Roman Italians, that in their language they call themselves *Romini*, from *Romanis*, and in Polish they are called *Wloszy*, meaning *Italici*)¹⁷; by the Frenchman Pierre Lescalopier, who traveled across Transylvania in August of 1574 (according to him, the Romanians see themselves as the true successors of the Romans and they call their language *romanechte*, that is, *romain*=Roman)¹⁸; by the anonymous author of a 1587 description of Moldavia, dispatched there as a missionary (these people prefer the name *Romano*, believing that they are descended from the *Romani* and call themselves *Romani*).¹⁹ Two other testimonies, this time domestic (just like that of Lebel the Saxon), are quite significant. One belongs to the Hungarized Saxon humanist Gaspar Helth (Heltai) (died around the year 1579). He states that in Transylvania the descendants of the Romans are the Wallachians (*az Oláhok*), who refer to themselves as Romans (*Románusok*).²⁰ The second testimony, originating in the Transylvanian princely circle, belongs to Wolfgang Kowachoczy, the humanist chancellor of Stephen Báthory (prince of Transylvania and king of Poland). In a text written in the form of a dialogue and printed in Cluj (*Klausenburg, Kolozsvár*) in 1584, the fictional character *Philodacus* (he who loves the Dacians) states that once Transylvania was inhabited by Romans and that “our Wallachians, who even nowadays usually claim to be Romans” (*Valachi nostri, qui se nunc etiam vulgo Romanos venditant*) are in fact a remnant of the Roman population (*eorum reliquiae*).²¹

These testimonies—selected from among many similar ones—indicate that among the elites of the year 1574 (when the aforementioned document was issued), scholars, humanists and even political figures, both foreign and Transylvanian, brought forth arguments in favor of the Roman origin of the Romanians. As also indicated above, such statements date from far back in time, starting around the end of the Romanian ethnogenesis and intensifying during the Renaissance. But why are the testimonies of the 16th century so important for the matter at hand? In fact, they bring an element of novelty by asserting publicly and repeatedly—and not in an isolated fashion, as before—the fact that the Romanians use for themselves the name Romanian, a name which gradually made its way into the collective consciousness. Thus, in many Latin texts (but also in Italian, German ones, etc.), the Wallachians are beginning to be referred to as Romanians (as they actually called themselves), under the only ethnonym suitable for the language of Cicero, that of *Romanus* (*Romani*), while the Romanian language also began to be mentioned under the name used by the Romanians, namely, *Romana*

(*Romanesca*). Of course, especially in the vernacular languages attempts were made to approximate the actual Romanian pronunciation, such as *Romuini* or *Romanechte* or *Rominest*, but the dominant forms remained the Latin ones derived from *Romanus*. Consequently, there is no doubt that, mostly beginning with the 16th century, the Wallachians are referred to as *Romani* and their language as *romana*.

The Role of the Protestant Reformation in Emphasizing Ethnicity

After the middle of the 16th century, the bipolar denominational structure of Transylvania (Orthodox and Catholics) experiences a remarkable diversification.²² At the risk of somewhat simplifying things, we could say that the nearly all of the former Catholics embraced Protestantism, largely in keeping with their ethnic origin and territorial distribution. Thus, the Germans (Saxons) became Lutheran, (most of) the Hungarians converted to Calvinism, the Szeklers remained largely Catholic and the Romanians themselves remained, with few exceptions, Orthodox. This is the reason why the denominations of Transylvania, especially in the secular language and in the public perception, acquire an ethnic dimension and even ethnic names. For instance, the protocols of the Transylvanian Diet convened at Turda (*Thoreburg*, *Torda*) in June 1564 state the following: "Because between the superintendents²³ and the priests of the churches of Cluj—that is, Hungarian—and of Sibiu (*Hermannstadt*) —that is, Saxon—there have been all sorts of polemical exchanges, debates, arguments and differences of opinion in matters of religion, but especially on the issue of the Eucharist,²⁴ in order to eliminate the differences, appease both parties and bring peace to all inhabitants in the land, it has been decided that henceforth both parties shall be allowed to profess and practice both the Sibiu religion and understanding of the faith and the Cluj one, but no priest from a royal town or from a town in the plains, or from any village, shall be allowed to forcefully persuade the people to follow the religion and understanding of the faith of the Cluj church."²⁵ We clearly see how, in the country assembly (a central institution of the state), the Calvinist faith (with its various trends) was called "Hungarian," and the Lutheran one was deemed "Saxon." In other words, the official designation of the religious denominations was made on an ethnic basis. In the 17th century, following the rise of Calvinist princes, the identification of the Hungarian nation with the Calvinist faith became even more obvious. Thus, the denominations of Transylvania came to be defined in national terms, although not in an absolute manner and not always.

Despite certain fluctuations, for a long time in Transylvania Calvinism would be deemed the Hungarian faith and Lutheranism the German (Saxon) one. Ethnic pride also became manifest: in 1556, after the

Austrians were driven away, Francis David became the bishop of both the Hungarian Lutheran Church and of the Saxon one; the Saxons, most of whom lived in a clearly delineated linguistic and religious enclave of their own, felt threatened by the philo-Hungarian David (born to a German father!) and elected a Saxon bishop (Matthias Hebler); in 1559, the same Francis David, upon his “resignation” as Lutheran bishop (in the meantime he had embraced Calvinism), calls himself “bishop of the Hungarian churches.” Certain commentators consider that the Lutheran Hungarians were likely to be nationally assimilated by the Saxons and were saved by the “Helvetic orientation” (Calvinism), which from the very beginning focused on promoting the national values and language.²⁶ At that time in Transylvania, therefore, we see a certain consolidation of ethnic identities, drawing on the tradition of the medieval elite categories partially adapted to the modern circumstances by way of ideas such as the common origin, language, denomination, etc.

The Eastern “Religion” and the Romanian Ethnicity

In the present context, it would be important to see what happened in the 16th century with the “religion” of the Romanians, tacitly allowed but never officially recognized. This state of affairs continued during the period of the Reformation, when Transylvania became the country of “three nations and four religions” (which did not include the Romanians and their Eastern or Orthodox faith). We shall not get here into details regarding the status of the Orthodox denomination in Transylvania, focusing instead on the names given to Orthodox believers in secular texts and to Romanians in religious texts. As the Romanians had long been identified with the Orthodox faith (they were practically the only Orthodox believers in the Principality of Transylvania, whose territory and population had doubled since the time of the voivodeship), starting with the 16th century and in the same national spirit the name “Wallachian” became synonymous to “Orthodox” (meaning of the Eastern or Byzantine faith), so that by saying Romanian one said Orthodox and the other way around. Orthodoxy increasingly came to be defined as the “Romanian religion (law).” A decision of the county assembly (diet) of 1555 makes a distinction between “Christians” and “Wallachians”: a Christian peasant can be extradited based on the oaths of seven Christian witnesses, and a Romanian one based on the oaths of three Christians or of seven Romanians.²⁷ Beyond the manifest discrimination, we notice that here the Catholics, called “Christians,” are set against the Orthodox, referred to as “Romanians” (Wallachians). In other words, a religious designation (“Christians”) is used alongside an ethnic one (“Romanians”) in order to highlight a social-political or judicial distinction (privileged-underprivileged). In this precise case, however, the text does not employ the name

“Romanian,” but rather that of “Wallachian.” Nevertheless, we see that the Orthodox subjects, instead of being referred to as “schismatic,” for example, are designated using their ethnic name. Then let us see how the Romanians are mentioned in the Romanian religious texts of the 16th century. Today we know for a fact that in all surviving Romanian texts from the 16th century onwards, the name “Wallachian” (under all of its variants) used in the documents written in other languages was invariably translated as “Romanian” (*român/rumân*). During the second half of the 16th century, the Braşov (Kronstadt) printing press of Deacon Coresi issued nine books in the Romanian language: *Întrebare creştinească* (Christian query) in 1559 (maybe a reprint of the lost Sibiu Catechism of 1544), *Faptele apostolilor* (Acts of the Apostles) in 1563, *Tălcul evangheliilor* (The meaning of the Gospels) in 1564, *Psaltirea* (Psalter) in 1570, *Carte de învăţătură* (Book of learning) in 1581.²⁸ In the epilogues to Coresi’s prints (which are original texts and not translations from other languages) we see that the Romanians and their language are referred using the endonyms *rumân/rumânească*. Furthermore, in Deacon Coresi’s Romanian edition of *Faptele apostolilor* (Acts of the Apostles, Braşov, 1563) we read the following: “... and the custom said what we should not get and do, we who are Romanians.”²⁹ This of course raises the question of what “Romanians” were there at the time of the apostles. The answer came from the original texts and from a comparison with other translations, which served as source material for the Romanian version: the Slavic texts speaks of *rimleanini*, while the Latin phrase is *quum simus Romani*.³⁰ Therefore, the “Romanians” in *Faptele apostolilor* (Acts of the Apostles) are actually the ancient Romans. In the second half of the 16th century, the Latin *Romanus* was also translated as “Romanian.” The last Protestant initiative regarding printing in Romanian is related to the name of Bishop Michael (Mihai) Tordaş (the Calvinist superintendent of the Romanians) who, with the support of Sigismund Báthory (a Catholic), printed a version of the Old Testament known as *Palia de la Orăştie* (1581–1582), the work of Coresi’s son, Şerban, and of Deacon Marin. In the preface to the *Palia* the dominant forms are *român* and *românesc* (*rumâni* is used only once). The very day the *Palia* was completed (14 July 1582), Michael Tordaş sent a Latin encyclical letter to his flock, encouraging them to read in the Romanian language (*Encyclica episcopi Valachici in Transsilvania*). His message is in fact the Latin version of the last part of the prologue to the *Palia*: *...Ego, Tordas Mihaly, electus in Transsilvania Romanorum Episcopus ... in lingua Romana ... in linguam Romanam vertimus, et eos vobis, fratribus Romanis, ita legendos donamus ... confratribus Valachis ... confratribus Romanis*.³¹ We see that the superintendent (as the Transylvanian officials called him) and bishop (as he was mainly known and seen by the Romanians) Michael Tordaş called himself “bishop of the Romans,” called his language and that of his flock “Roman,” addressed the believers with the formula “Roman brothers (brethren),” etc., indicating that at the time there was perfect synonymy

between the Latin term *Romanus* and the Romanian one *român/rumân*. In the present context, the most important thing is that the bishop of the Romanians in Transylvania (who were as saw themselves as overwhelmingly Orthodox) was referred to in a Latin text as *episcopus Romanorum*, which clearly means “bishop of the Romanians.” Also, in the same text the Romanians are called both *Valachus* and *Romanus*, indicating that the two had become fully synonymous and it had recently become customary to use them concomitantly.

In light of the above, we could argue that at that time, both the Romanian and the foreign elites (humanists, travelers—clergymen, military men, merchants) believed that the Romanians were descendants of the Romans who had evolved on the territory of former Dacia. As the Romanians also used an endonym that was nearly identical to the Latin name *Romanus*, many found it natural to refer to them in Latin texts as Romans (*Romani*). Of course, the document of 1574 mentioned above does not come from a humanist or from a Romanian environment, being issued by the princely chancellery of Alba Iulia. It can be assumed that such an official institution had to use a precise terminology and that the phrase “Roman faith” had a single, consecrated meaning. The issue is all the more complex as the conjunction *seu* (*sive*) can only play a copulative rather than a disjunctive role here, joining two synonymous notions. The presence of the adverb *videlicet* (meaning “that is” or “undoubtedly”) clearly indicates what the author wanted to say: the “Roman” faith was one and the same with the “Greek” one, or the “Roman faith” was also “Greek,” there being no question of a “Roman faith” different from the “Greek faith.”

For a short period of time during the second half of the 16th century (between 1566 and until shortly after 1582), the Transylvanian Romanians had a dual ecclesiastical hierarchy: the old, traditional Orthodox one and a new Reformed (Protestant) one.³² We know that, under the aegis of the Protestant authorities (and especially of the Diet), there were three Romanian Reformed bishops (Calvinist and therefore designated as superintendents by the authorities): George (Gheorghe) of Sângeorz, Paul (Pavel) of Turdaș (also Hungarized as Tordași) and Michael (Mihai) of Turdaș.³³ During roughly the same time, after a short period of confusion (until 1571), the traditional Romanian Orthodox bishops (metropolitans) were Eftimios (Eftimie), Christopher (Hristofor) and Gennadios (Ghenadie) (1571–1585).³⁴ There are credible reasons to believe that, during the two decades prior to the installation of a Protestant hierarchy for the Romanians, efforts had been made to convert to Protestantism those Romanians who were Catholic (Protestantism was initially seen as an attempt to reform Catholicism and was implicitly meant to attract the Catholics). We must therefore assume that, especially during the reign of Prince John Sigismund, the few Romanian Catholics who had lived in Transylvania prior to the Reformation had converted to Protestantism (or

indeed to Calvinism, although such distinctions were still marginal at that time). Of course, we cannot fully rule out the possibility of some catholic Romanians still being there in 1574, but Christopher simply could not be the bishop of both Orthodox and Catholic Romanians.³⁵ First of all, as we have already indicated, the Romanians were no longer seen as Catholics by the authorities, even if after 1571 some modest attempts at restoring Catholicism had been made. Secondly, no group of Romanian Catholics had ever been recognized (officially accepted) as a distinct (privileged) entity in Transylvania. The Catholic Romanians were always assimilated into the greater Catholic group and received no individual legal recognition. Thirdly, there are no documents to justify the assumption that in 1574, in Transylvania, there existed a group of Uniate (Greek-Catholic) Romanians, the descendants of those who had experienced the consequences of the Council of Florence (1439). Even if such documents existed, the group in question would not be called “Roman” in the sense of “Catholic.” At that time, the Uniate Byzantines or those who were expected to be Uniate (living in other parts of Europe) were never referred to as “Romans.” Fourthly, at the time of the strict Council of Trent (adjourned in 1564), the Catholic Prince Stephen Báthory could not have placed under Orthodox jurisdiction a hypothetical group of Romanian Catholics. Looking back, we notice that such a thing had never happened in the area of Hungary or Transylvania. The opposite did occur, in the sense that in the Kingdom of Hungary and the neighboring areas groups of Orthodox (Byzantine) believers, deemed converted to Catholicism in one manner or another, were placed under the authority of Catholic prelates. Still, on no occasion whatsoever was a Catholic or Uniate community placed under Orthodox authority. In fact, on 14 November 1574 Bishop Christopher was in Braşov, probably on the way back from the Romanian Orthodox Metropolitan See of Târgovişte (the capital city of Wallachia), where he had been ordained. This makes him a conventional Orthodox clergyman, while the prince (voivode) of the country was a Catholic. Therefore, despite the authentic rapprochement between Orthodoxy and Catholicism during the reign of Prince Stephen Báthory,³⁶ the only valid assumption is that the phrase *religio romana* refers to the denomination of the Romanians and that, in this case, the adjective in question—originally ethnic rather than religious—was attached to the respective noun (*religio*), just like in the many cases mentioned above it had been associated to nouns such as “people,” “language,” or “bishop,” with direct reference to the Romanians. Furthermore, as we have already seen, at that time the Lutheran and Calvinist “religions” were also referred to as Saxon and Hungarian, respectively. The fact that in the same document the Romanian ethnic group is designated by two different but synonymous ethnonyms (*Valachus* and *Romanus*) is not in the least surprising and by no means unprecedented, as this was the time when the world was beginning to find out that the Romanians had both an exonym and an endonym.

Consequently, if we accept that the Orthodox Christopher was the bishop of the Romanians belonging to two distinct denominations we run into nearly insurmountable problems, even if the international context was somewhat “unionist,” seeing some Orthodox placed under Catholic jurisdiction, in the framework of the Counterreformation and of the Catholic Reformation. By 1574, the *sui generis* political and religious system of Transylvania, with its “three nations and four religions,” had been fully completed and recognized by Prince Stephen Báthory. The alleged group of Romanians belonging to the “Roman faith” (meaning Catholic, under whatever form) would have belonged to one of the privileged groups, more precisely to the Catholics, and would not have been listed alongside the Romanian “Greek” (Orthodox) subjects, who were not among the “accepted” faiths. We are saying this because, although the prince did pay attention to the Orthodox faith and to the Romanians, appointing (confirming) their bishops (sometimes *durante beneplacito nostro*, “for as long as it pleases us”), the Romanians’ faith was merely allowed to exist (the practices for banning it did not in fact exist) and was deemed of lesser rank.

The Origin and the Name of Romanians as seen at the Princely Court of Transylvania

Of course, it is somewhat unusual that in the princely circles the phrase *religio romana* was given an ethnic meaning. However, throughout the 16th century the princely court and the chancellery of Transylvania had experienced a series of fundamental changes. A Saxon humanist, Leonhard Uncius, poet laureate at the court of Prince and then King Stephen Báthory, used the name Dacia for all three countries—Transylvania, Moldavia, and Wallachia—and spoke about the noble origin of the Romanians, who are descended from the Romans. Consequently, we can say that the Roman origin of the Romanians was being discussed at the princely court (and then at the royal Polish court). This is also illustrated by the aforementioned testimony of Transylvanian Bishop Antonius Verancsics (died in 1573), who resided at Alba Iulia: “The Wallachians, who call themselves Romans.” If a Catholic bishop of Transylvania admitted that the Romanians are Romans, then why would they not also call their faith “Roman,” especially since at that time the Protestant faiths were beginning to acquire an ethnic connotation, being called, as we have already seen, Saxon and Hungarian, respectively? Furthermore, the Transylvanian Wolfgang Kowachoczy, who wrote prior to the year 1584 that the Romanians “usually claim to be Romans,” was chancellor to Stephen Báthory, living at the princely and then at the royal court. Documents such as the one discussed here were drafted by the princely chancellery, led by individuals like Kowachoczy. Thus, the evidence

indicates that around 1570–1590, the elite Transylvanian circles associated with the Báthory family (court, chancellery, Catholic Church) were aware of the idea concerning the Roman origin of the Romanians and of the fact that the Romanians did not call themselves “Wallachians” but rather *Romani* (the only Latin form for the Romanian ethnonym “Romanians”). It must also be noted that the document of 1574 was not an external one, was not meant to travel beyond the borders of Transylvania, to the Holy See or to a royal court where it was likely to cause some confusion. It was addressed to the Romanians, to their bishop, and to some interested local authorities, who knew that the “Greek faith” in Transylvania could only be the “Romanian” one. The situation is identical to that of the “encyclical” letter sent in 1582 by that Romanian Calvinist superintendent, Michael Tordaş who—in one and the same text, as we have seen—calls himself “Wallachian bishop” (*episcopus Valachicus*) and also “bishop of the Romanians” (*episcopus Romanorum*). In 1582 he was operating in the framework of official institutions, just like those who had written about Christopher in 1574. It was therefore fairly natural for the “Greek faith” (Byzantine, that is) to be called, in Transylvania of that time, “Romanian” or “of the Romanians,” through a recourse to the two known ethnonyms (*Valachus* and *Romanus*) applied to the Romanians, in connection to which the educated circles were beginning to learn more and more details.

Conclusions

However, it is perfectly clear that phrases such as *religio romana* or *episcopus Romanorum*, used in connection to the Romanians, were exceptions at the time. In fact, the very endonym “Romanian” remained a rarity and an oddity for foreigners until the 19th century. Nearly all foreigners continued to call the Romanians “Wallachians” and the Romanian Principalities (as well as Romania itself) were called “Wallachia” (or were given other regional names), until the country’s independence was internationally recognized after 1877. However—as the examples above indicate—in the 16th century and especially in its second half, more and more attempts were made at identifying the endonym of the Romanians, in texts produced both inside and outside the area inhabited by them. Such texts explicitly mention the Roman origin of the Romanians, the Latin origin of their language, and the identity between the ethnonyms “Wallachian” and “Romanian.” In Latin texts, the only intelligible rendering of the Romanian endonym was *Romanus*. Consequently, whether nouns or adjectives, words like “Romanian” or “Romanian language” were rendered in Latin as *Romanus*, *romana*. Thus, the people is *Romanus*, the language is *romana*, and the bishops are *Romanorum* (“of the Romanians”). Furthermore, even in the Romanian religious texts (written at that time in Cyrillic script) the Romans are

identified with the Romanians, as we have seen above. These developments could not have remained unknown to the Transylvanian elites or at the court of the Báthory princes. Stephen Báthory and those around him knew the Romanians very well and, in the context of their Counterreformation policies, they freed them from the stifling Calvinist influence by restoring the traditional Orthodox bishops, connected to the metropolitan sees of Wallachia and Moldavia. As natives of the land, they and those around them (including the members of the princely chancellery) knew very well that the Romanians did not call themselves “Wallachians.” They had contacts with the leaders of these Romanians, who were essentially their bishops, monks, and priests. But the latter called themselves and their language Romanian, and their “law” or “religion” was also Romanian. Consequently, we believe that the author of the 1574 document only transposed into Latin a phrase commonly used in the Romanian Transylvanian environment, so that the “Romanian religion” became practically naturally, in Latin, *religio romana*, all the more so as we are dealing with an internal document, not intended for the Holy See or for other foreign institutions, where it may have created confusion. Of course, the matter of this unusual document is far from being settled, as the arguments raised are probably insufficient or not eloquent enough. However, they are just as consistent as those that suggest an interpretation based on the alleged Catholicism of the Romanians. Consequently, we consider that in the current stage of our knowledge it is plausible to believe that in the document of 1574 *religio romana sive graeca* means “Romanian or Greek religion.” Therefore, we believe that Christopher (Hristofor) was what we currently call the Orthodox bishop of the Transylvanian Romanians living on the whole territory controlled by Stephen Báthory.

Notes:

¹ Text translated by Bogdan Aldea

² Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor*, vol. XV/1, Documents and letters from the archives of the Transylvanian towns of Bistrița, Brașov, Sibiu, edited by Nicolae Iorga (București: Atel. Grafice Socec & Comp., 1911), 659–660, doc. no. MCCXXI. Sometimes, in this document, the same word is written in different ways (ex.: *graeca* or *greca*).

³ Alexandru Simon, *Feleacul (1367–1587)* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2004), 124–125 (see also the notes); Alexandru Simon, “La place chrétienne de la foi des Roumains de Transylvanie en 1574,” *Annuario dell’Istituto Romeno di Cultura e Ricerca Umanistica di Venezia*, vol. VI–VII, no. 6–7, (2004–2005): 389–401.

⁴ Alexandru Simon, “La place chrétienne de la foi des Roumains de Transylvanie en 1574,” *Annuario dell’Istituto Romeno di Cultura e Ricerca Umanistica di Venezia*, vol. VI–VII, no. 6–7, (2004–2005): 393–395.

⁵ Ioan-Aurel Pop, *Istoria și semnificația numelor de român/valah și România/Valahia*,

reception speech at the Romanian Academy, delivered on 29 Mai 2013 in public session, with a response by Academician Dan Berindei, Bucharest, 2013, p. 5–29. See also I.-A. Pop, “Kleine Geschichte der Ethnonyme Rumäne (Rumänien) und Walache (Walachei),” I-II, *Transylvanian Review*, vol. XIII, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 68–86 and no. 3 (Autumn 2014): 81–87.

⁶ Ștefan Pascu (ed.), *Documenta Romaniae Historica*, series C. Transilvania, vol. XII (1361–1365) (București: Editura Academiei, 1985), 359, doc. no. 348.

⁷ Ioan Dani, Konrad Gündisch et al., *DRH*, C, vol. XIII (1366–1370) (București: Editura Academiei, 1994), 236, doc. no. 130.

⁸ Pascu (ed.), 445, doc. no. 426.

⁹ Susana Andea, Lidia Gross et al., *Documenta Romaniae Historica*. C-Transilvania, vol. XV (1376–1380) (București: Editura Academiei, 2006), 351–352, doc. no. 218.

¹⁰ Șerban Papacostea, *Geneza statului în Evul Mediu românesc. Studii critice*, enlarged edition (București: Editura Corint, 1999), 245 (book first published in 1988); Adolf Armbruster, *Romanitatea românilor. Istoria unei idei*, second edition, revised and enlarged (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 1993), 64–65 (first edition dated 1973).

¹¹ Armbruster, *Romanitatea românilor...*, 90. Andrei Veress, *Acta et epistolae relationum Transylvaniae Hungariaeque cum Moldavia et Valachia*, vol. I (1468–1540) (Budapest: Typis Societatis Stephaneum Typograficae, 1914), 243.

¹² George Lăzărescu, Nicolae Stoicescu, *Țările Române și Italia până la 1600* (București: Editura Științifică, 1972), 282–285.

¹³ Armbruster, *Romanitatea românilor...*, 90.

¹⁴ Ioannes Lebelius, *De oppido Thalmus. Carmen historicum*, edidit Ioannes Seivert, (Cibinii, 1779), 11–12 (*Idcirco vulgariter Romuini sunt appellati*).

¹⁵ Armbruster, *Romanitatea românilor...*, 95–96.

¹⁶ Antonius Wrancius Sibenicensis Dalmata, “De situ Transsylvaniae, Moldaviae et Transalpinae”, in *Monumenta Hungariae Historica, Scriptores*, II, (Pest, 1857), 134–135. Armbruster, *Romanitatea românilor...*, 100–101, including note 67. Maria Holban (ed.), *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. I (București: Editura Științifică, 1968), 403.

¹⁷ Stephanus Orichovius, “Annales polonici ab excessu Sigismundi”, in Ioannes Dlugossus seu Longinus, *Historiae Polonicae libri XII*, II, Lipsiae, 1711, col. 1555. Armbruster, *Romanitatea românilor...*, 115.

¹⁸ Paul Cernovodeanu, “Călătoria lui Pierre Lescapier în Țara Românească și Transilvania la 1574”, *Studii și materiale de istorie medie*, IV, (București: Editura Academiei R.P.R., 1960): 444. Armbruster, *Romanitatea românilor...*, 127.

¹⁹ Ioan Constantin Filitti, *Din arhivele Vaticanului*, vol. II Documente politice (1526–1788) (București: Tip. Profesională Dimitrie C. Ionescu, 1914), 45. Armbruster, *Romanitatea românilor...*, 131.

²⁰ Heltai Gáspár, *Chronika az Magyaroknak dolgairól* (Claudiopoli, 1575). Armbruster, *Romanitatea românilor...*, 133.

²¹ A. Veress, “Wolfgang Kowachoczy despre Români”, *Revista istorică* (ianuarie-martie 1928): 33–36. Armbruster, *Romanitatea românilor...*, 134–135.

²² See I.-A. Pop, *Biserică, societate și cultură în Transilvania secolului al XVI-lea. Între acceptare și excludere*, (București: Editura Academiei, 2012). I.-A. Pop, *Cultural Diffusion and Religious Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Transylvania. How the Jesuits Dealt with Orthodox and Catholic Ideas*, with a Foreword of Norman Housley, (Lewiston-Queenston-Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2014).

²³ Leaders, acting as bishops, in the early Protestant churches.

²⁴ Sacrament whereby the believers partake of the bread and the wine turned, by the power of the Holy Spirit or Ghost, into the flesh and the blood of the Lord. Martin Luther accepted this sacrament in an almost unchanged form (alongside two others from the existing seven), but the Protestants generally rejected the Eucharist or accepted only the spiritual presence of Christ in it (the Calvinists).

²⁵ Szilágyi Sándor (ed.), *Monumenta Comititalia Regni Transylvaniae*, vol. II (1556–1576) (Budapest: A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Könyvtár és Kiadó Hivatala, 1877), 231–232.

²⁶ Víg B., *Disputele sinodale lutherano-calvino-unitariene în Transilvania secolului al XVI-lea*, doctoral thesis coord. by Prof. Thomas Năgler (Sibiu, 2009), 70–71.

²⁷ David Prodan, *Supplex Libellus Valachorum. Din istoria formării națiunii române*, ediție nouă cu adăugiri și precizări (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1984), 109. Ioan Lupaș, *Documente istorice transilvane*, vol. I (Cluj: Tipografia “Cartea românească”, 1940), 543.

²⁸ Armbruster, *Romanitatea românilor...*, p. 110–111.

²⁹ Armbruster, 111.

³⁰ Armbruster, 111.

³¹ Armbruster, 112–113.

³² See Gheorghe I Moiescu, Ștefan Lupșa, Alexandru Filipașcu, *Istoria Bisericii Române. Manual pentru institutele teologice*, vol. I (–1632) (București: Editura Institutul Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, 1957), 357–369.

³³ Ana Dumitran, *Contribuții la istoria raporturilor etno-confesionale româno-maghiare: Episcopatul românesc reformat din secolul XVI, în Studii și Articole de Istorie*, 2003. https://www.academia.edu/4768382/Episcopatul_romanesc_reformat_din_secolul_XVI-lea.

³⁴ Zenovie Pâclișanu, “Istoria Bisericii Române Unite (Partea I-a, 1697–1751, ediția a II-a),” *Perspective*, no. 65–68, XVII, (July 1994–June 1995): 28–40.

³⁵ It must be said that the lower categories of Transylvanian Romanians—most of them illiterate—failed to grasp such distinctions operated and perceived by the authorities. In other words, most of the Romanians deemed Calvinist by the converted officials saw themselves as identical to the others and continued to identify with the firm tradition of the East.

³⁶ Simon, *Feleacul...*, 125.

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