

# Papal Indulgences and the Conversion of Schismatics in Late Medieval Transylvania (c.1350–c.1450)

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*This article explores the self-representations of marginality found in the indulgence petitions addressed by Transylvanian supplicants to the papal chancery during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. As one of Hungary's border provinces, Transylvania was located on the eastern frontier of late medieval Latin Christendom. Although Transylvanian Catholics often expressed a sense of marginality in their petitions to the pope, this sentiment was not primarily defined by the petitioners' distance to the Apostolic see; rather, it was described in relation to the Greek Orthodox Christians in Transylvania and, later, to the approaching Ottoman Turks. To illustrate this point, the article presents three case studies of indulgence petitions submitted by Transylvanian supplicants between 1350 and 1450, highlighting how the petitioners' discourse about marginality changed over the course of this period. In addition, this article emphasizes the role attributed by petitioners to papal indulgences in converting the 'schismatics' in Transylvania to the Latin faith.*

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## INTRODUCTION

As the easternmost province of the kingdom of Hungary, Transylvania was positioned at the edge of late medieval Latin Christendom. The official Transylvanian ecclesiastical hierarchy was part of the Catholic Church, but the region also encompassed many Greek Orthodox

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communities, referred to by Latin sources as the ‘schismatics’ (*scismatici*). They were subject to conversion attempts led by the papacy and the Hungarian royal authorities, particularly during the second half of the fourteenth century. This article explores the issue of self-perceived marginality among Transylvanian Catholics during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, based on their indulgence requests addressed to the papal chancery and on the indulgence letters issued by the papacy in response. These types of petitions were one of the most common forms of communication between centre and periphery within the late medieval Catholic Church; they thus provide interesting insights into the ways in which petitioners portrayed and perceived themselves in relation to the central authority of the church.<sup>1</sup>

Although Transylvanian Catholics belonged to the official church of their realm, a sense of marginality was often expressed in their petitions to the pope. However, this sentiment was not primarily defined in spatial terms, emphasizing the petitioners’ distance from the Holy See; rather, it was linked to the presence of Greek Orthodox communities in Transylvania. Prior to the 1420s, Transylvanian supplicants almost always described their marginality as proximity to the ‘schismatics’, whom they depicted as stubborn and violent. Over the first half of the fifteenth century, a gradual shift in discourse can be noticed, as Transylvanian Catholics increasingly started to represent their marginality in relation to the Ottoman Turks. Their requests to the pope highlight the struggles faced by Transylvanian churches; the relationship between marginality, indulgences and devotion; and the perceived role of papal indulgences in the conversion of Greek Orthodox Christians to Catholicism.

## THE MIXED CONFESSIONAL LANDSCAPE OF MEDIEVAL TRANSYLVANIA

Medieval Transylvania was organized as a voivodeship whose governor, the voivode, was directly appointed by the king of Hungary. The Catholic diocese of Transylvania was one of the largest in the kingdom and consisted of thirteen archdeaconries. The local episcopal

<sup>1</sup> This idea has been brilliantly illustrated by the collection of papers in Gerhard Jaritz, Torstein Jørgensen and Kirsi Salonen, eds, *The Long Arm of Papal Authority: Late Medieval Christian Peripheries and their Communication with the Holy See*, CEU Medievalia 8 (Budapest, 2005).

see was in Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia), and its bishop was under the jurisdiction of the archbishop of Kalocsa.<sup>2</sup> The political organization of the area did not fully coincide with the ecclesiastical one, and although the jurisdiction of the bishopric mostly overlapped with the territory of the voivodate, it also included several other territories in northern Hungary, such as the archdeaconries of Szatmár (Satu Mare) and Ugocsa.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, certain parts of southern Transylvania, which were inhabited by Saxon colonists, had a special ecclesiastical status and were exempt from the authority of the Transylvanian bishop. The provostship (chapter) of Hermannstadt (Sibiu) and the chapter of Burzenland (Țara Bârsei) were placed directly under the jurisdiction of the archbishop of Esztergom, whose see was located north-west of Buda. Given the great distance to their bishop, the deans of these chapters were granted quasi-episcopal powers.<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this article, I will take into consideration examples from both the diocese of Transylvania and from the exempt territories of the Transylvanian Saxons.

While the Latin church had a well-documented presence in Transylvania, the religious life of the Greek Orthodox communities is less understood. Several churches, monasteries and parochial networks are known, but the existence of a stable episcopal see in the area is uncertain for this period.<sup>5</sup> The confessional differences in the region were linked to its ethnic diversity: the Greek Orthodox Christians in Transylvania and eastern Hungary were mostly Vlachs (Romanians), Ruthenians and Serbs; while the Catholic population mainly comprised Hungarians, Saxons and Székelys. However, there are many notable examples of Greek Orthodox Christians converting to

<sup>2</sup> The most recent monograph about the ecclesiastical organization of the diocese of Transylvania is Adinel-Ciprian Dincă, *Instituția episcopală latină în Transilvania medievală (sec. XII/XII–XIV)* (Cluj-Napoca, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> In the late thirteenth century and during most of the fourteenth, the northern part of the diocese was subject to jurisdictional disputes between the bishop of Transylvania and the bishop of Eger: *ibid.* 51, 211–12.

<sup>4</sup> Although published more than a century ago, the most comprehensive work on the ecclesiastical organization of the Transylvanian Saxons remains Friedrich Teutsch, *Geschichte der evangelischen Kirche in Siebenbürgen*, 2 vols (Hermannstadt, 1921).

<sup>5</sup> For a brief English-language introduction to the church life of the Romanian Greek Orthodox communities in Transylvania, see László Makkai, 'Transylvania in the Medieval Hungarian Kingdom (896–1526)', in *idem* and András Mócsy, eds, *History of Transylvania*, 1: *From the Beginnings to 1606*, transl. Péter Szaifkó et al., East European Monographs 581 (New York, 2001), 347–606, at 567–87.

Catholicism, especially among the lay elites,<sup>6</sup> and some sources also allude to possible instances of Catholic conversions to Eastern Christianity, although these cases remain poorly documented.<sup>7</sup> Hungarian and Romanian historians have sometimes had divergent views about the proportion each confession represented in the overall population of medieval Transylvania, and the debate has been fuelled not only by the scarcity of statistical sources, but also by the different geographical definitions used by scholars who have made population estimates.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, Greek Orthodox Christians remained the largest religious minority in late medieval Hungary, and converting them to Catholicism was an important challenge for both the papacy and the royal authorities.<sup>9</sup> This concern reached its peak during the reign of Louis I (1342–82). Some coercive measures were taken against the Greek Orthodox clergy in parts of Hungary,<sup>10</sup> while ordinary individuals were usually promised various concessions in exchange for converting, such as tithe exemptions and new church

<sup>6</sup> A useful review of several examples involving Romanian nobles from Transylvania, Banat and Maramureş can be found in Marius Diaconescu, 'Les implications confessionnelles du Concile de Florence en Hongrie', *Mediaevalia Transilvanica* 1 (1997), 29–62, at 57–61.

<sup>7</sup> Adrian Andrei Rusu, 'Preoţi români ortodocşi din districtul Haţegului în secolul al XV-lea', *Mitropolia Banatului* 32 (1982), 644–53, at 646.

<sup>8</sup> For example, the estimates given by the two major English-language syntheses of Transylvanian history might be contrasted. On the one hand, the Hungarian historian László Makkai suggested that roughly fifty per cent of Transylvania's population consisted of Hungarians and Székelys, while Vlachs formed about twenty-five per cent, and the remaining twenty-five per cent were Saxons, Serbs and Ruthenians. In this estimate, the author included only the territory of the voivodate of Transylvania: Makkai, 'Transylvania', 577. On the other hand, the Romanian historian Ioan-Aurel Pop concluded that between sixty and sixty-five per cent of Transylvania's inhabitants were Greek Orthodox Christians (Vlachs, Serbs and Ruthenians), while the remaining thirty-five to forty per cent were Catholics (Hungarians, Saxons and Székelys). However, he took into account both the territory of the voivodate and 'the neighbouring regions to the west and north': Ioan-Aurel Pop, 'Transylvania in the 14th Century and the First Half of the 15th Century (1300–1456)', in idem and Thomas Nágler, eds, *The History of Transylvania, 1: Until 1541*, transl. Bogdan Aldea and Richard Proctor, 2nd edn (Cluj-Napoca, 2018; first publ. 2003), 247–98, at 268–9.

<sup>9</sup> Pál Engel, *The Realm of St Stephen: A History of Medieval Hungary, 895–1526*, transl. Tamás Pálosfalvi (London, 2001), 172. For an interesting insight into the policy of the Avignon papacy regarding missionary work, see also James Muldoon, 'The Avignon Papacy and the Frontiers of Christendom: The Evidence of Vatican Register 62', *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae* 17 (1979), 125–95.

<sup>10</sup> Engel, *Realm of St Stephen*, 172; Ioan-Aurel Pop, *Din mâinile valahilor schismatici: românii şi puterea în Regatul Ungariei medievale (secolele XIII–XIV)*, 2nd edn (Cluj-Napoca, 2017; first publ. 2011), 422.

buildings.<sup>11</sup> In this effort, Louis employed the support of the Franciscans, who undertook missionary work from several of their monasteries established across eastern Hungary.<sup>12</sup> The conversion campaigns have drawn the attention of several historians and theologians, although their interpretations of them have varied. Some scholars have viewed these measures as the systematic persecution of the Greek Orthodox Christians in Hungary,<sup>13</sup> while others have adopted a more nuanced position, highlighting the limited and uncertain application of the coercive measures, the benefices enjoyed by the newly converted, or the religious tolerance of Catholic landowners towards their Greek Orthodox serfs, who were allowed to observe their faith provided they fulfilled their economic obligations.<sup>14</sup> Apart from a few cases of mass conversions,<sup>15</sup> the missionary campaigns overall were ineffective, and they were eventually abandoned during the reign of King Sigismund of Luxembourg (1387–1437), who was a supporter of the reconciliation between the Latin and Greek churches.<sup>16</sup> Individual conversions were more common among the lay elites, for whom the new faith

<sup>11</sup> Viorel Achim, 'Considerații asupra politicii față de ortodocși a regelui Ludovic I de Anjou, cu referire specială la chestiunea dijmelor', in Ovidiu Cristea and Gheorghe Lazăr, eds, *Vocația istoriei: prinos profesorului Șerban Papacostea* (Brăila, 2008), 69–79, at 72–8.

<sup>12</sup> Viorel Achim, 'Les unités territoriales de l'ordre franciscain dans l'espace roumain aux XIVe–XVe siècles', in Maria Crăciun and Ovidiu Ghitta, eds, *Ethnicity and Religion in Central and Eastern Europe* (Cluj-Napoca, 1995), 24–30, at 25–7.

<sup>13</sup> Ioan Lupăș, *Viața religioasă a românilor ardeleni* (Sibiu, 1918), 22, 47; Ștefan Lupșă, *Catolicismul și românii din Ardeal și Ungaria până la anul 1556* (Cernăuți, 1929), 64–82; Zenovie Păclișanu, 'Ungaria și acțiunea catolică în Orient', *Revista Istorică Română* 14 (1944), 180–97, at 183–5, 192; Ioan-Aurel Pop, 'Ethnie et confession. Genèse médiévale de la nation roumaine moderne', in Nicolae Bocșan, Ioan Lumperdean and idem, eds, *Ethnie et confession en Transylvanie (du XIIIe au XIXe siècles)* (Cluj-Napoca, 1996), 5–60, at 27–8; Pop, *Din mâinile valahilor schismatici*, 422–3.

<sup>14</sup> István Juhász, 'A középkori nyugati misszió és a románság', *Az Erdélyi Tudományos Intézet évkönyve* (1942), 171–99, at 179–80, 184–5; Adrian Andrei Rusu, 'Nobilimea românească și Biserica în secolul al XV-lea: exemplul hațegian', in Marius Diaconescu, ed., *Nobilimea românească din Transilvania/Az erdélyi román nemesség* (Satu Mare, 1997), 131–51, at 133; Makkai, 'Transylvania', 584–7; Achim, 'Considerații', 70–1.

<sup>15</sup> For example, see the mass conversions in the region of Medgyes (Medieș): Francisc Pall, 'Românii din părțile sătmărene (ținutul Medieș) în lumina unor documente din 1377', *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie din Cluj* 12 (1969), 7–35, at 28–32.

<sup>16</sup> The only notable exception would be the mission of Jacob de Marchia, which took place between 1435 and 1439. As one might expect, no conversion campaigns are attested in the first decade following the Florentine Union: Diaconescu, 'Les implications confessionnelles', 32.

brought the prospect of social ascent.<sup>17</sup> In some areas of Transylvania, the conversions gave birth to unique forms of devotion, which incorporated elements of both Latin and Slavonic rite.<sup>18</sup> While previous contributions have largely debated the political and religious marginality of the Greek Orthodox Christians in the kingdom, this article will examine the idea of marginality as experienced by the Catholic communities in Transylvania, analysing the language of indulgence petitions from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

#### PAPAL INDULGENCES IN MEDIEVAL TRANSYLVANIA

An indulgence was a partial or total reduction of penance granted by a bishop for performing various pious acts. The remission might be expressed in days, years or quadragenae (units of forty days), or a combination of these. Papal indulgences were typically considered the most valuable, as they provided more days of pardon. Starting with the classic works of Henry Charles Lea and Nikolaus Paulus,<sup>19</sup> medieval indulgences have sparked the interest of church historians in relation to various research problems, such as devotional practices, the concept of crusade, and the causes of the Reformation. Although the local particularities of the phenomenon in Transylvania and eastern Hungary have not yet been fully clarified, a number of studies have made significant contributions in this direction. Katalin Erős has recently completed a valuable PhD dissertation analysing the various types of indulgence grants and their relation to piety in medieval Hungary.<sup>20</sup> Other notable contributions include Jan Hrdina's studies discussing the papal indulgences received by Central European churches during the Great Western Schism (1378–1417), which also

<sup>17</sup> Viorel Achim, 'Catolicismul la românii din Banat în Evul Mediu', *Revista istorică* 7 (1996), 41–55, at 44; Rusu, 'Nobilimea românească', 144; Ioan Drăgan, *Nobilimea românească din Transilvania între anii 1440–1514* (Bucharest, 2000), 259.

<sup>18</sup> Rusu, 'Nobilimea românească', 144–5.

<sup>19</sup> Henry Charles Lea, *A History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences in the Latin Church*, 3: *Indulgences* (Philadelphia, PA, 1896); Nikolaus Paulus, *Geschichte des Ablasses im Mittelalter*, 3 vols (Paderborn, 1922–3).

<sup>20</sup> Katalin Erős, 'Búcsúk és búcsúlevelek a késő középkori Magyarországon' (PhD thesis, Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest, 2019).

contain a review of Transylvanian examples.<sup>21</sup> Most recently, the indulgences of the Marian churches in Hungary have been analysed by Karen L. Stark, who notes their significance for practices of Marian devotion.<sup>22</sup>

In a paper published at the turn of the twenty-first century, Viorel Achim identified an interesting problem regarding the relation between indulgence petitions and missionary work in eastern Hungary.<sup>23</sup> Achim examined an indulgence request addressed in 1421 to the papal chancery by petitioners from Belényes (Beiuş), a Hungarian town in the diocese of Várad (Oradea), which bordered the diocese of Transylvania to the west. Belényes formed the centre of a domain owned by the bishop of Várad, and the town's inhabitants were mainly Hungarian, but the surrounding estate included eighty-three villages of Greek Orthodox Vlachs. In their petition, the townspeople of Belényes depicted themselves as a Catholic enclave surrounded by Vlachs, whom they labelled as 'pagan', an equivocal description which might have equally hinted at their rustic life and their lax ecclesiastical organization.<sup>24</sup> The supplicants pointed to their recent efforts at converting the Vlachs to Catholicism, which, in their view, made the local church worthy to receive an indulgence of eight years and eight quadrageses at the feast of Corpus Christi.<sup>25</sup> The indulgence was depicted as a means to support the Catholics in their missionary endeavour, so that the Vlachs would be converted more quickly.<sup>26</sup>

Viorel Achim asked whether the supposed conversion accomplishments were real, or just a persuasive strategy used by the petitioners to

<sup>21</sup> Jan Hrdina, 'Pe drumul mântuirii: indulgențe papale în Ungaria și Transilvania în vremea Marii Schisme Apusene (1378–1417)', *Revista Ecumenică Sibiu* 1 (2009), 47–70; idem, 'Papal Indulgences During the Era of the Great Western Schism (1378–1417) and the Cultural Foundation of Their Reception in Central Europe', in Veronika Čapková, ed., *Processes of Cultural Exchange in Central Europe, 1200–1800* (Opava, 2014), 345–87, at 382–5.

<sup>22</sup> Karen L. Stark, 'The Garden Watered by the Virgin Mary: The Marian Landscape of Medieval Hungary (1301–1437)' (PhD thesis, Central European University, Vienna, 2022), 203–11, esp. 207–8.

<sup>23</sup> Viorel Achim, 'Convertirea la catolicism a românilor din zona Beiuşului în două documente din anul 1421', *Mediaevalia Transilvanica* 5–6 (2001–2), 83–95.

<sup>24</sup> '[I]nter eos sunt octuaginta tres villae de paganis sive Valachis': Aloysius L. Tăutu, ed., *Acta Martini PP. V (1417–1431)*, 2 vols (Rome, 1980), 1: 446 (no. 181). The text of the document has also been reproduced in Achim, 'Convertirea', 94.

<sup>25</sup> Tăutu, ed., *Acta Martini PP. V*, 1: 446 (no. 181).

<sup>26</sup> '[U]t praedicti pagani eo citius convertantur ad fidem catholicam': ibid. See also the comments in Achim, 'Convertirea', 88.

gain indulgences from the pope. By surveying complementary sources, he concluded that systematic missionary work had not taken place in the area and that any alleged conversions were, at most, isolated cases.<sup>27</sup> Although the townspeople of Belényes only received two years and two quadrages of pardon,<sup>28</sup> the example still raises interesting questions about the self-representations of marginality among Catholics in eastern Hungary. Viorel Achim focused on the petitioners' exaggeration of their own merits, but their sense of being surrounded appears as an equally striking element of discourse. As illustrated below, this idea is also present in petitions from the diocese of Transylvania and from the exempt ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Transylvanian Saxons. The narrative devices used by petitioners to construct this image will be further explored in the next sections, by discussing similar examples.

Before moving forward, however, an additional question might be addressed: did Transylvania's marginal position within the Catholic Church and its confessional particularities make any difference to the reception of indulgences by Transylvanian Catholics? I would argue that, in the mixed confessional landscape of late medieval Transylvania, papal indulgences had a twofold role. On the one hand, they supported churches in areas with large numbers of Greek Orthodox Christians by encouraging donations from parishioners and prompting collective forms of devotion. On the other hand, papal indulgences could be used to reward Greek Orthodox Christians who agreed to convert to Catholicism, while also stimulating church attendance among them. Since many rural settlements lacked parish churches,<sup>29</sup> rewarding attendance was important in areas where a clerical hierarchy had not been previously well-established. Although the effectiveness of indulgence grants as incentives for conversion and church participation is questionable, they were nevertheless seen as tools for accomplishing these goals, both by the central and the local actors involved in these missionary efforts.

Across the late medieval period, Transylvanians obtained various types of papal indulgences. Most commonly, these were indulgences for visiting and financially supporting those churches close to Greek

<sup>27</sup> Achim, 'Convertirea', 88–93.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 94; compare also Tăutu, ed., *Acta Martini PP. V*, 1: 447 (no. 181a).

<sup>29</sup> László Makkai estimates that only one in three or one in four Transylvanian villages had its own church: Makkai, 'Transylvania', 576–7.

Orthodox communities, whose violence Transylvanian petitioners sometimes complained about. As in other parts of Europe, alms collected from distributing papal indulgences helped fund the construction of and repairs to church buildings.<sup>30</sup> One might assign equal importance to the indulgences issued for the churches of the newly converted, which served as a sign of a thriving religious life. Catholics could also occasionally obtain individual remission of penance if they were involved in local conversion actions. Other indulgences, issued at the request of the king, encouraged particular forms of devotion in the area, such as public prayers for the king's victory against the neighbouring Greek Orthodox states and for the successful conversion of the 'schismatics'.<sup>31</sup>

#### SIGNALLING MARGINALITY IN INDULGENCE PETITIONS

Papal indulgences could be obtained by addressing a written request to the pontifical chancery and by paying a fee. Approved petitions were recorded in a series of registers known as *Registra Supplicationum*, the earliest of which is dated 1342.<sup>32</sup> The oldest Transylvanian indulgence petitions included in the *Registra* date from the middle of the fourteenth century. Most of them are known only by their register copies, with very few examples surviving in original form or as notarial confirmations. For the kingdom of Hungary, the earliest surviving originals date from the 1480s, and several notarial confirmations issued for Transylvanian petitioners are known from the beginning of the sixteenth century.<sup>33</sup> In most cases, the individuals petitioning the pope were prominent members of their community, such as the parish priest or the landowner who acted as the patron of the local church. The papal

<sup>30</sup> Nikolaus Paulus, *Indulgences as a Social Factor in the Middle Ages*, transl. John Elliot Ross (New York, 1922), 23.

<sup>31</sup> A notable example from the reign of Louis I can be found in Augustin Theiner, ed., *Vetera monumenta historica Hungariam sacram illustrantia*, 2: *Ab Innocentio Papa VI usque ad Clementem Papam VII, 1352–1526* (Rome, 1860), 27 (no. 44). The other types of indulgences are exemplified over the next sections.

<sup>32</sup> Leonard E. Boyle, *A Survey of the Vatican Archives and of its Medieval Holdings* (Toronto, 1972), 151–2. For an overview of the editions of the supplications addressed by Hungarian petitioners, see Bálint Lakatos, ed., *Regesta supplicationum, 1522–1523, A VI: Adorján pápa uralkodása alatt elfogadott magyar vonatkozású kérvények*, Collectanea Vaticana Hungariae 16 (Budapest, 2018), 269–71.

<sup>33</sup> For the list of surviving originals and notarial confirmations, see Lakatos, ed., *Regesta supplicationum*, 30–1.

letters issued as a result would sometimes recycle narrative elements of the initial petitions, which can prove useful in reconstructing the text of the supplications in cases where the register copies have been lost.

Transylvanians would often invoke their marginal position within the church as an argument for obtaining indulgences from the pope, sometimes requesting more days and years of remission than normally granted. Nevertheless, the borders of Latin Christendom were not usually described by petitioners in direct relation to the papal Curia, in terms of their geographical distance to the Apostolic see. Instead, they appeared as a mixed religious space, a grey area where Catholicism was not fully prevalent, and Christians 'lived among the schismatics'. Marginality was in that sense mainly linked to the idea of disunity. References to Transylvania's geographical remoteness to the Apostolic see are more frequent in requests for *confessionalia*,<sup>34</sup> whenever the supplication was made by someone else on the beneficiary's behalf, to justify why he or she could not come to the papal Curia personally.

The representations of marginality also had a social component. Greek Orthodox communities were often portrayed as violent, and petitions alluded to social tensions with the Catholics. This stereotypical portrayal often appeared in relation to the Vlachs and has been noted in other sources of the period as well.<sup>35</sup> As a result, missionary work served not only the salvation of souls, but was also a factor of social disciplining. During the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, whenever the 'schismatics' were mentioned in indulgence petitions, references to conversion efforts were generally made as well, although additional details were seldom given. It is worth stressing that the descriptions mostly addressed local realities, such as the Greek Orthodox Christians residing close to the petitioner's town or village; references to the Orthodox states bordering Transylvania are less frequent.

The tone of the supplications started to change during the first half of the fifteenth century, as Transylvanian Catholics began to describe their marginality in relation to the growing presence of the Ottoman

<sup>34</sup> *Confessionalia* were privileges which allowed the beneficiary to choose his or her confessor freely, instead of having their confessions heard by the local parish priest. These privileges would sometimes authorize the chosen confessor to grant the beneficiary a plenary indulgence: Paulus, *Geschichte des Ablasses*, 2: 124.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Adrian Magina, 'Răufăcători sau ... schismatici? Statutul ortodocșilor bănățeni în jurul anului 1400', in Dumitru Țicu and Ionel Căndeș, eds, *România în Europa medievală: între Orientul bizantin și Occidentul latin* (Brăila, 2008), 283–91.

Turks.<sup>36</sup> In comparison to the cruelty of the Turks, the descriptions of Transylvanian Vlachs and other ‘schismatics’ began to soften. The focus of the petitions was placed on the foreigners’ intrusion into the Christian universe, and while the ‘schismatics’ did not completely disappear from view, they were no longer the main cause of complaint. This observation is consistent with the fact that religious proselytism towards the Greek Orthodox Christians in Hungary saw a decline in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century, during the reign of Sigismund of Luxembourg, when the stern conversion policy adopted by his predecessor, Louis I, was abandoned. Sigismund’s support for reuniting the Latin and Greek churches was also closely tied to his vision for strengthening defences against the Ottomans.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the status of the Greek Orthodox clergy in Hungary improved following the settlement of many Serbs in the kingdom after the advances of the Ottomans in the Balkans.<sup>38</sup> Naturally, the decree of union between the two churches adopted by the Council of Florence in 1439 also played a role in changing the discourse noticeable in the petitions.

The image of Hungary as the gateway of Christendom in relation to the pagans,<sup>39</sup> and later as the bulwark of Christendom in relation to the Ottoman Turks, was also present in other Hungarian diplomatic sources of the Middle Ages,<sup>40</sup> so it is not surprising to find it in indulgence petitions as well. In comparison to this, however, the discourse on the Greek Orthodox Christians living within the borders of the kingdom was more nuanced. Transylvanian Catholics were forced to live together with the ‘schismatics’, while the Ottoman Turks were seen as an outside danger; therefore, the ‘schismatics’ had to be

<sup>36</sup> On the image of the Turks in Hungarian petitions, see also Kornél Szovák, ‘Partes Ungarie ... satis occupate cum Turcis: A magyarországi török-kérdés a 15. századi pápai kérvénykönyvekben’, in Péter Tusor, idem and Tamás Fedeles, eds, *Magyarország és a római Szentszék II. Vatikáni magyar kutatások a 21. században*, Collectanea Vaticana Hungariae 15 (Budapest, 2017), 89–105.

<sup>37</sup> Liviu Pilat and Ovidiu Cristea, *The Ottoman Threat and Crusading on the Eastern Border of Christendom during the 15th Century*, East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450 48 (Leiden, 2018), 80.

<sup>38</sup> Magina, ‘Räufcätöri’, 291; Sima M. Ćirković, *The Serbs*, transl. Vuk Tošić (Malden, 2004), 115.

<sup>39</sup> Nora Berend, ‘Hungary, “the gate of Christendom”’, in David Abulafia and Nora Berend, eds, *Medieval Frontiers: Concepts and Practices* (Abington, 2016), 195–215.

<sup>40</sup> On the use of this concept in medieval Hungary, see Paul Srodecki, *Antemurale Christianitatis: Zur Genese der Bollwerksrhetorik im östlichen Mitteleuropa an der Schwelle vom Mittelalter zur Frühen Neuzeit*, Historische Studien 508 (Husum, 2015), esp. 88–103, 163–216.

converted, while the Turks were hopefully to be defeated. To illustrate all this, the sections that follow will present three case studies of Transylvanian indulgence requests that communicate marginality in relation to the Greek Orthodox Christians. These were selected because more information is known about the petitioners, and because their language reflects how patterns of representing marginality changed between the 1350s and the 1450s.

#### THE CASE OF NICOLAUS LACKFI'S TRANSYLVANIAN CHURCHES

The first example features Nicolaus (Miklós) Lackfi, a Hungarian noble serving as count of Zemplén, who participated in several military campaigns during the reign of Louis I.<sup>41</sup> The Lackfis were one of the wealthiest and most influential noble families in Hungary during the Angevin period.<sup>42</sup> Although the family had Transylvanian origins and owned several properties in the area, they had settled outside the voivodate by the middle of the fourteenth century, as they ascended into the political hierarchy of the kingdom and obtained more central estates, either by royal donation or by purchase.<sup>43</sup> Nicolaus was the son of Lack (László) and had seven brothers.<sup>44</sup> His father had gained prominence at the royal court as count of the Székelys between 1328 and 1344, and his brothers occupied various military and administrative offices in the kingdom.<sup>45</sup> Most notably, Nicolaus Lackfi's elder brothers, Stephanus (István) and Andreas (András), served as voivodes of Transylvania and held other high dignities throughout their careers.<sup>46</sup> One of Nicolaus's younger brothers, Dionysus (Dénes), became a

<sup>41</sup> János Karácsonyi, *A magyar nemzetségek a XIV. század közepéig*, 3 vols (Budapest, 1900–1), 2: 173–4. He should not be confused with his nephew, Nicolaus Lackfi the Younger, who served as voivode of Transylvania for a short time (1367–8), until his death in a military campaign in Wallachia: András Kovács, 'Voievozii Transilvaniei în perioada 1344–1359', in Dumitru Țicu and Rudolf Gräf, eds, *Itinerarii istoriografice: studii în onoarea istoricului Costin Feneșan* (Cluj-Napoca, 2011), 37–65, at 51.

<sup>42</sup> Engel, *Realm of St Stephen*, 182.

<sup>43</sup> Marius Diaconescu, *Structura nobilimii din Transilvania în epoca angevină* (Cluj-Napoca, 2013), 291–3.

<sup>44</sup> See the family tree in Karácsonyi, *A magyar nemzetségek*, 2: 171.

<sup>45</sup> Diaconescu, *Structura nobilimii*, 293.

<sup>46</sup> Stephanus was voivode between 1344 and 1350, and Andreas held the office between 1356 and 1359: Karácsonyi, *A magyar nemzetségek*, 2: 173; Kovács, 'Voievozii Transilvaniei', 46–7, 60–1.

Franciscan friar and rose to the rank of archbishop of Kalocsa, which he held from 1350 to 1355.<sup>47</sup>

Although Nicolaus's career was not as outstanding as those of his brothers, he had gained the trust of Louis I as a military leader. He probably started his service as a knight at the royal court during the 1330s or 1340s, and became count of Zemplén around 1347.<sup>48</sup> He was present in the Hungarian campaigns in Naples (1350) and Lithuania (1351–2).<sup>49</sup> In 1356, Nicolaus was sent by the king to help Pope Innocent VI regain control over the Papal States, and he spent about two years leading the Hungarian troops in that campaign.<sup>50</sup> The proximity to the papal Curia provided Lackfi with an opportunity to make several requests to the pope, which the pontifical chancery in Avignon recorded in February 1358. Lackfi was mainly concerned with his family's estates in eastern Hungary and the condition of their churches. One of their domains, largely inhabited by Vlach serfs, was located in the county of Arad, at the border between the dioceses of Transylvania and Csanád (Cenad), in a region that might be considered marginal, not only in relation to the Apostolic see, but also in connection to the local ecclesiastical geography.

Among other privileges, Lackfi requested two sets of indulgences from the pope: one set for the parochial churches he had recently built for his converted Vlach serfs,<sup>51</sup> and a second one for several other churches under his patronage across Hungary.<sup>52</sup> The first group consisted of four churches: All Saints' Church in Szádvár, St Mary's Church in Aruahigh, and St Michael's and St Nicholas's churches in Szentmiklós.<sup>53</sup> Lackfi had built and endowed them with his own resources, which, along with his successful conversion efforts, must have been regarded as a great act of piety at the papal court.<sup>54</sup> The need

<sup>47</sup> Karácsonyi, *A magyar nemzetségek*, 2: 174.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 173–4.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 174.

<sup>50</sup> Antal Pór, *Nagy Lajos, 1326–1382* (Budapest, 1892), 338–41.

<sup>51</sup> Ștefan Pascu, ed., *Documenta Romaniae Historica*, C: *Transilvania* [hereafter: DRH C], 11: 1356–1360 (Bucharest, 1981), 235 (no. 226); Aloysius L. Tăutu, ed., *Acta Innocentii PP. VI (1352–1362)* (Roma, 1961), 206–7 (no. 112a).

<sup>52</sup> DRH C, 11: 237 (no. 227).

<sup>53</sup> All three settlements are now extinct. Szentmiklós may have been divided split into two parts, explaining the need for two separate parish churches: see DRH C, 11: 236 (no. 226) and nn. 5–7.

<sup>54</sup> '[D]e bonis a Deo sibi collatis edificari fecerit et bonis propriis dotaverit easdem': DRH C, 11: 235 (no. 226).

for a new foundation suggests that the villages had probably lacked their own devotional spaces previously. Although the churches had presumably been founded before Lackfi departed Hungary, they were yet to be assigned a bishop. Since they stood on the border between the dioceses of Transylvania and Csanád, Lackfi solicited permission to choose which diocese each church would belong to, but the pope passed the decision on to the archbishop of Kalocsa, whose final verdict is unknown.<sup>55</sup>

In his petition, Lackfi described the four churches as 'situated on his land, in the middle of the Vlachs, among violent people, some of whom have been recently converted to the Catholic faith' [author's translation].<sup>56</sup> The papal indulgences were meant to stimulate devotion among the new Catholics (*ad plebis devotionem augmentandam*), so that they would not return to their old ways. Accordingly, religious conversion was seen as an instrument of social disciplining, and the new faith created communal order where previously it had been absent. It is worth mentioning that Lackfi alluded to the idea of marginality only when referring to the churches of the converted Vlachs, while the other group of churches, for which he had formulated a separate indulgence request, did not enjoy any special description, although some of them were also situated in eastern Hungary.

For each church, Lackfi requested five years and five quadrages of remission, which were meant to reward visits during the major Christian feasts of the year. However, his request was only partially fulfilled due to prevailing chancery practices, which limited the typical value of papal indulgences at that time.<sup>57</sup> The pope issued the two sets of indulgences, but their value was only one year and one quadrage for the churches of the converted Vlachs, and one hundred days for Lackfi's other churches.<sup>58</sup> Lackfi did not, therefore, receive anything more than petitioners from other parts of Latin Christendom would normally have received. The difference in value between the two indulgences suggests the importance the papal chancery accorded to the recently converted communities. At the same time, it was usual for bishops to issue more days of remission at the consecration of a new

<sup>55</sup> DRH C, 11: 237–8 (no. 228).

<sup>56</sup> '[I]n terra sua, in medio Olachorum, inter naciones protervas, quarum aliquae de novo sunt ad fidem catholicam conversi': DRH C, 11: 235 (no. 226).

<sup>57</sup> Paulus, *Geschichte des Ablasses*, 3: 150.

<sup>58</sup> DRH C, 11: 235–7 (nos 226 and 227).

church, compared to the number of days typically offered on other occasions.<sup>59</sup> The papal indulgences might have also been a way of instilling into the new Catholics basic teachings about sin and penance. Annually, there were fifteen feast days when the indulgence could be obtained, which made it a possible tool to encourage church attendance among villagers.

#### THE CASE OF ST MARY'S CHURCH IN KRONSTADT

The second example involves the Saxon town of Kronstadt (Braşov), a key economic centre of Transylvania. Kronstadt was a free royal town on the south-eastern border of Transylvania, part of the chapter of Burzenland, which fell under the direct jurisdiction of the archbishop of Esztergom. The local church, today known as 'The Black Church' (*Die Schwarze Kirche*; *Biserica Neagră*), was devoted to St Mary and received several papal indulgences in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Most of these were obtained by the local parish priests. At that time, the main church building was still under construction, and alms collected from indulgences were one of the funding sources of the project. Construction started in the second half of the fourteenth century, possibly during the 1380s, and lasted for about a century.<sup>60</sup> The church is now considered the largest Gothic church in south-eastern Europe.<sup>61</sup>

In December 1399, the urban community of Kronstadt obtained two indulgence letters from Boniface IX. Unfortunately, both the original petitions and the register copies are lost, as only one supplication register is known for the pontificate of Boniface IX, dated 1394. However, the overall tone of the petitions can be inferred from the text of the final papal letters, which contain references to the religious conversions happening in Transylvania. The first letter, issued on 15 December 1399, granted four years and four quadragesimes of remission to individuals involved in converting the local Greek

<sup>59</sup> Paulus, *Geschichte des Ablasses*, 3: 226.

<sup>60</sup> Irina Băldescu, *Transilvania medievală: topografie şi norme juridice ale cetăţilor Sibiu, Bistriţa, Braşov, Cluj* (Bucharest, 2012), 260; Daniela Marcu-Istrate, *Church Archaeology in Transylvania (c.950 to c.1450)*, East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450 84 (Leiden, 2022), 20.

<sup>61</sup> Marcu-Istrate, *Church Archaeology*, 20.

Orthodox Christians to Catholicism.<sup>62</sup> The beneficiaries of the indulgence were supposed to provide support to those wishing to convert, in the form of teachings, good words and their own pious example.<sup>63</sup> The second letter, dated 29 December 1399, rewarded visits and alms to the town's parochial church, granting an indulgence *ad instar* whose value was equivalent to the indulgence received by visiting St Mary's Church in Aachen.<sup>64</sup> It was one of the numerous indulgences of this type issued by Boniface IX, presumed to be plenary.<sup>65</sup> Since Aachen was a popular pilgrimage site among Catholics in Hungary, it is not surprising to see the community of Kronstadt choosing it as a reference point for their own indulgence. Hungarian royalty also favoured this pilgrimage destination, and King Louis I had even built a royal chapel there.<sup>66</sup>

Both letters referred to the coexistence between the Catholics and the 'schismatics', describing the city of Kronstadt as being 'situated at the borders of Christianity (*in confinibus christianitatis*), where large numbers of Greeks, Vlachs, Bulgarians, Armenians and other infidels, having a certain church for their use and cult, live together and coexist with the faithful who reside there'.<sup>67</sup> The wording is similar in both

<sup>62</sup> Franz Zimmermann, Carl Werner and Georg Müller, eds, *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen* [hereafter: UB Siebenbürgen], 3: 1391 bis 1415 (Hermannstadt, 1902), 246–7 (no. 1445).

<sup>63</sup> '[I]nfideles ipsos in huiusmodi eorum proposito et desiderio assiduis informationibus bonorumque verborum exemplis conservare et quotidie confortare eisque subveniendi vestrumque ad hoc pium et fructuosum praestando auxilium et favorem studeatis, ut per hoc infideles ipsi valeant et debeant huiusmodi eorum desiderium et propositum feliciter adimplere vosque per haec et alia bona quae domino inspirante feceritis possitis ad aeternae felicitatis gaudia pervenire': UB Siebenbürgen 3: 247 (no. 1445).

<sup>64</sup> Vilmos Fraknói, ed., *Monumenta Vaticana Historiam Regni Hungariae illustrantia*, series 1 [hereafter: MVH/1], 4: *Bullae Bonifacii IX. P. M., pars altera: 1396–1404* (Budapest, 1889), 163 (no. 208).

<sup>65</sup> Diana Webb, 'Pardons and Pilgrims', in Robert N. Swanson, ed., *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merits: Indulgences in Late Medieval Europe*, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 5 (Leiden, 2006), 241–75, at 257.

<sup>66</sup> Enikő Csukovits, 'Cum capsă ... cum bacillo. Középkori magyar zarándokok', *Aetas* 9 (1994), 5–27, at 7.

<sup>67</sup> '[I]n oppido de Corona seu vulgariter Brascho nuncupato, Strigoniensis diocesis, in confinibus christianitatis situato, in quo tam Grecorum, Walachorum, Bulgarorum, Armenorum quam aliorum infidelium multitudo quandam ecclesiam in oppido praedicto pro eorum usu et cultu eorum habentium una cum Christi fidelibus inibi degentibus habitat et moratur': UB Siebenbürgen 3: 247 (no. 1445), 15 December 1399. Author's translation.

letters, with only slight differences.<sup>68</sup> The unnamed church mentioned in the pope's letters was most likely a late fourteenth-century Greek Orthodox church on the site where St Nicholas's Church now stands in Șcheii Brașovului.<sup>69</sup> It was a wooden church devoted to St Mary, and its existence has been documented archaeologically.<sup>70</sup> Although the letters suggest that the Greek Orthodox church was located within the perimeter of the town, it was in reality serving the inhabitants of 'Bulgaria' (Belgerei, Șchei), a nearby village located in the western suburbs of Kronstadt (now part of the town), which is thought to have had a mixed population of Romanians and Slavs.<sup>71</sup>

The four groups acknowledged in Boniface's letters – Greeks, Vlachs, Bulgarians and Armenians – were broadly defined as 'infidels', but not every term necessarily had an ethnic meaning attached to it. A 'Greek' could be any Orthodox Christian in Transylvania or in the neighbouring states, regardless of his or her ethnicity. The 'Bulgarians' probably referred to the South Slavic immigrants in Belgerei, who lived together with the Vlachs, but the term might also allude to the presence of Bogomilism among them. The Armenian communities in Transylvania were largely involved in trade, and local fourteenth-century sources even mention the existence of an Armenian bishop in southern Transylvania, placed under the authority of the archbishop of Esztergom, but little is known about the diocese, its parishes or its relation to the other ecclesiastical structures in Hungary.<sup>72</sup>

Overall, Boniface's letters evinced an optimistic tone about the alleged religious conversions taking place in the region, describing

<sup>68</sup> 'Cupientes igitur, ut ecclesia Marie Virginis opidi de Corona, vulgariter Brascho nuncupati, Strigoniensis diocesis, in confinibus christianitatis situati, ubi tam Grecorum, Walachorum, Bulgarorum, Armenorum, quam aliorum infidelium multitudo, quondam ecclesiam in eodem opido pro eorum usu et cultu eorum habentium, unacum Christifidelibus in eodem opido degentibus habitat et moratur ... congruis honoribus frequentetur': MVH/1 4: 163 (no. 208), 29 December 1399.

<sup>69</sup> Candid Mușlea, *Biserica Sf. Nicolae din Șcheii Brașovului, I: 1292–1742* (Brașov, 1943), 48–9.

<sup>70</sup> Luminița Munteanu and Mariana Beldie Dumitrache, 'Rezultatele cercetărilor arheologice la Biserica Sf. Nicolae din Șcheii Brașovului – etapa 1975', *Revista Muzeelor și Monumentelor: Monumente Istorice și de Artă* 45 (1976), 52–6, at 53–4.

<sup>71</sup> Latin sources refer to the village as 'Bulgaria', German sources use the name 'Belgerei', while 'Șchei' is the Romanian variant: Băldescu, *Transilvania*, 223. These toponyms suggest the presence of South Slavic immigrants from the Balkans, but the origins of the village's inhabitants have been widely debated by historians for more than a century: see Mușlea, *Biserica*, 15–29.

<sup>72</sup> Miklós Gazdovits, *Az erdélyi örmények története* (Cluj-Napoca, 2006), 290–5.

them as voluntary acts, in which the Catholics' role was only supportive, as opposed to actively missionary. The indulgence issued on 15 December 1399 mentioned the infidels' desire to convert to Catholicism and the necessity to prevent any changes of mind among them;<sup>73</sup> while the second letter appears to suggest that some conversions had already happened.<sup>74</sup> The letters pointed to rebaptizing the converted, an idea promoted by Franciscan missionaries in Hungary, who saw any baptism performed by the Greek Orthodox clergy as null.<sup>75</sup> It should be borne in mind, however, that a convent of Franciscan friars would only be founded in Braşov at the beginning of the sixteenth century.<sup>76</sup>

This type of discourse started to change in the first half of the fifteenth century, as the town gained an increasingly significant strategic position in defending the southern border of the kingdom against the Ottoman Turks. In 1422, following the Turkish invasion of Burzenland in the previous year, the parish priest of Kronstadt complained in a petition to the pope about the destructions caused by the Turks in Burzenland, but still kept the reference to the 'schismatics'.<sup>77</sup> At that time, the political and military context in south-eastern Europe had reached a difficult point, and the Turkish raid of 1421 caused long-lasting effects on the town's population and its hinterland, as many individuals were either killed or captured, and their houses destroyed.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>73</sup> '[Q]uamplures de huiusmodi et alii infidelibus pro tempore advenientibus gratia divina inspirati se ad fidem praedictam convertere et veteri sorde et macula in sacro fonte baptismatis mundari desiderant et proponunt laudabiliter permanere et, nisi in huiusmodi eorum pio proposito et desiderio laudabili conserventur et assiduis instructionibus, auxiliis et favoribus confortentur, de totali huiusmodi desiderii et propositi omnium ipsorum collapsu verisimiliter formidetur': UB Siebenbürgen 3: 247 (no. 1445).

<sup>74</sup> '[I]n quaquidem ecclesia quamplures de infidelibus huiusmodi se ad sanctam fidem catholicam convertentes, veteri sorde et macula lavari cupientes, sacro lavantur baptisate': MVH/1 4: 163 (no. 208).

<sup>75</sup> Şerban Papacostea, 'La fondation de la Valachie et de la Moldavie et les Roumains de Transylvanie. Une nouvelle source', *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire* 17 (1978), 389–407, at 404–5.

<sup>76</sup> Adrian Andrei Rusu et al., *Dicţionarul mănăstirilor din Transilvania, Banat, Crişana şi Maramureş* (Cluj-Napoca, 2000), 81.

<sup>77</sup> Pál Lukcsics, ed., *XV. századi pápák oklevelei* [hereafter: Lukcsics], 1: V. Márton Pápa (1417–1431) (Budapest, 1931), 134 (no. 532).

<sup>78</sup> Gustav Gündisch, 'Siebenbürgen in der Türkenabwehr', *Revue roumaine d'histoire* 13 (1974), 415–43, at 419–21; Tamás Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács: A History of Ottoman-Hungarian Warfare, 1389–1526*, *The Ottoman Empire and Its Heritage: Politics, Society and Economy* 63 (Leiden, 2018), 68–70.

In the priest's petition, Kronstadt was described as 'barely a day away from the parts of the infidels', a position which made it vulnerable to foreign attacks.<sup>79</sup> The term 'infidels' referred to the Turks that had just attacked in 1421, while the one-day distance hinted at the town's position in relation to Wallachia, through which the Ottoman troops had invaded Transylvania. Once again, the large numbers of Vlachs, Armenians, Bulgarians and Greeks in the region were mentioned, but their presence appeared rather peripheral among the complaints of the priest.<sup>80</sup>

By 1450, when the southern border of Transylvania had suffered even more as a result of the Turkish raids, their violence had become the central element of discourse in the petitions, and the 'schismatics' were no longer mentioned.<sup>81</sup> In that timeframe, Burzenland had experienced two more Turkish invasions (1432, 1438) and possibly other small-scale raids, although, in the meantime, the town's fortifications had been visibly improved to better withstand the Ottoman pressure.<sup>82</sup> The 'schismatics' would make a reappearance in a papal indulgence letter received in 1474, but they were once again mentioned alongside the Turks, who were portrayed as the main enemy.<sup>83</sup> In comparison to them, the presence of the 'schismatics' appeared rather innocuous. The re-emergence of the Greek Orthodox Christians in the language of the petitions might, however, be linked to the revival of Catholic proselytism in Hungary during the reign of King Matthias Corvinus (1458–90).<sup>84</sup>

<sup>79</sup> '[A] partibus infidelium per unam vix dietam distat et nuper omnibus tam ecclesiis quam etiam habitationibus ipsius opidi per infideles desolatum fuit': Lukcsics 1: 134 (no. 532).

<sup>80</sup> '[I]n quo quidem opido tam Walachorum, Armenorum, Bulgarorum et Grecorum, quam aliarum infidelium copia unacum Christianis in eo degentibus morari solebat': Lukcsics 1: 134 (no. 532).

<sup>81</sup> Lukcsics 2: 275 (no. 1097).

<sup>82</sup> Markus Peter Beham, 'Kronstadt in der "Türkenabwehr" (1438–1479)', *Zeitschrift für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde* 32 (2009), 46–61, at 48–50.

<sup>83</sup> '[I]n confinibus christianitatis et in metis infidelium terrae Valachie situatum est, in quo quidem opido tam Valachorum, Armenorum, Bulgarorum et Grecorum, quam aliorum infidelium copia una cum ipsis christianis in ipso oppido degentibus morari solet ... etiam ab ipsis saevissimis Turchis crucis Christi inimicis totaliter combustum, desolatum et annihilatum': UB Siebenbürgen 7: 33–4 (no. 4029).

<sup>84</sup> Drăgan, *Nobilimea românească*, 102.

THE CASE OF KLEINENYED

The final example involves an indulgence petition addressed on behalf of the Catholic community in Kleinenyed (Sângătin),<sup>85</sup> a village in the chapter of Mühlbach (Sebeş), under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the bishop of Transylvania.<sup>86</sup> In one petition recorded on 13 July 1433, an indulgence letter was requested for those who would visit the local hospital and its nearby church, dedicated to the Holy Cross and to saints Cosmas and Damian, respectively.<sup>87</sup> The petitioner was only identified as 'Johannes, son of Balthasar', but a different register record from the same month revealed that he was serving King Sigismund of Luxembourg as secretary (*notarius*).<sup>88</sup>

The supplicant was a Transylvanian Saxon from Kleinenyed, later ennobled by King Sigismund in 1435.<sup>89</sup> According to the royal charter he received on that occasion, Johannes was part of the king's itinerant court and had served him over the years in Germany, Lombardy and Italy.<sup>90</sup> It was in this context that he reached the papal chancery with his indulgence request in 1433, as King Sigismund was present in Rome that year to be crowned emperor.<sup>91</sup> When Johannes became a noble, the king bestowed upon him and his family the estate of Szentjánoshegy (Nucet) in the county of Alba, and later sources identify him as 'Johannes Zaaz of Szentjánoshegy' or 'Johannes Zaaz of Enyed'.<sup>92</sup> 'Zaaz' was a Hungarian sobriquet meaning 'the Saxon', hinting at

<sup>85</sup> In Latin sources, the village was simply identified as 'Enyed'; for this reason, it has sometimes been confounded with the present-day town of Aiud (Enyed, Grossenyed): see Géza Antal Entz, 'Erdélyi', in Ernő Marosi, ed., *Magyarországi művészet, 1300–1470 körül*, 2 vols (Budapest, 1987), 1: 683–93, at 692; Ileana Burnichioiu, 'Biserica mică a cetății Aiudului în surse din secolul al XIX-lea', *Annales Universitatis Apulensis, Series Historica* 10/1 (2006), 7–23, at 17–18.

<sup>86</sup> Georg Müller, *Die deutschen Landkapitel in Siebenbürgen und ihre Dechanten, 1192–1848*, Archiv des Vereins für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde 48 (Hermannstadt, 1934), 49.

<sup>87</sup> Lukcsics 2: 87 (no. 203); Giorgio Fedalto, ed., *Acta Eugenii Papae IV (1431–1447)* (Rome, 1990), 127 (no. 206).

<sup>88</sup> Lukcsics 2: 113 (no. 284).

<sup>89</sup> For his diploma of nobility, see UB Siebenbürgen 4: 567–8 (no. 2227). For a brief biography of the petitioner, in the context of his church patronage in Mühlbach, see Gustav Gündisch and Theobald Streitfeld, 'Der Umbau der Mühlbacher Marienkirche im 15. Jahrhundert und seine geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen', in Gustav Gündisch et al., eds, *Studien zur Siebenbürgischen Kunstgeschichte* (Bucharest, 1976), 60–80, at 75–8.

<sup>90</sup> UB Siebenbürgen 4: 567 (no. 2227).

<sup>91</sup> Gündisch and Streitfeld, 'Umbau der Mühlbacher Marienkirche', 75.

<sup>92</sup> For example, see UB Siebenbürgen 5: 21–2, 44–6, 363 (nos 2329, 2358, 2359 and 2802).

the bearer's ethnic background.<sup>93</sup> Later in his career, he became the royal judge of Mühlbach and Hermannstadt.<sup>94</sup> One of his younger brothers, Georgius, studied canon law at Bologna, and became parish priest in Mühlbach.<sup>95</sup>

The wording of Johannes's petition is interesting, as it differentiates between the two elements defining Transylvanian marginality. According to it, the inhabitants of Kleinenyed lived 'amid the schismatics and close to the border of the Turks'.<sup>96</sup> The distinction is similar to the one found in the petition made by the parish priest of Kronstadt in 1422. Thus, while Transylvanian Catholics lived *among* the schismatics (*in medio Scismaticorum*), they were sharply separated from the Turks by a border (*meta*). Transylvania's border with Wallachia was understood as a border with the Turks, because the political events in the neighbouring voivodate were influenced by the intrusions of the Ottomans, who would promote their favourable voivode to the throne and proceed to invade Transylvania through Wallachia.<sup>97</sup> At this point, there was no mention of religious conversions anymore, which likewise illustrates the shift in discourse taking place in the 1420s and 1430s, against the troubled political and military background of those years.

## CONCLUSION

The cases outlined above suggest that Transylvanian supplicants viewed receiving papal indulgences as a form of devotion to the same extent that other Christians in the Latin church did. However, apart from their traditional devotional significance, the grants acquired additional meaning within the regional context marked by confessional differences. Some petitioners regarded papal indulgences as a way of rewarding Catholics engaged in conversion attempts directed at the local Greek Orthodox Christians, even though the extent and success of these initiatives were sometimes exaggerated. The indulgence grants were also described as a potential means to encourage church attendance among the new converts, or finance the reparation of churches

<sup>93</sup> Victor V. Vizauer, 'Ethnic Nicknames (Sobriquets) in Transylvania during the 13th–14th Centuries', *Acta Musei Napocensis* 54 (2017), 17–39, at 25.

<sup>94</sup> Gündisch and Streifeld, 'Umbau der Mühlbacher Marienkirche', 76.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 77.

<sup>96</sup> '[I]n medio Scismaticorum et prope Turcorum metas': Lukcsics 2: 87 (no. 203).

<sup>97</sup> Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 77–8.

that were struggling in the border regions affected by Ottoman raids. Requesting indulgences at the papal chancery was an occasion for interaction with the central authority of the church, and the supplications illustrate how marginality was articulated and used as an argumentative strategy in relation to the papacy. Most petitions were addressed by supplicants far from socially marginal in their own worlds, such as powerful barons and prosperous urban communities. In their accounts, the borders of Christianity were described as an area where Catholics were forced to coexist with the 'schismatics' or endure the cruelty of the Turks. The function of these descriptions as rhetorical devices does not, however, diminish their authenticity, as the representations of marginality were undoubtedly shaped by the various challenges faced by Transylvanian churches. Thus, they provide valuable insight into how Transylvanian petitioners represented and understood themselves as part of Latin Christendom.