

# The Church-Union of the Armenians in Transylvania: A Portrait of Uniate Bishop Oxendio Virziresco

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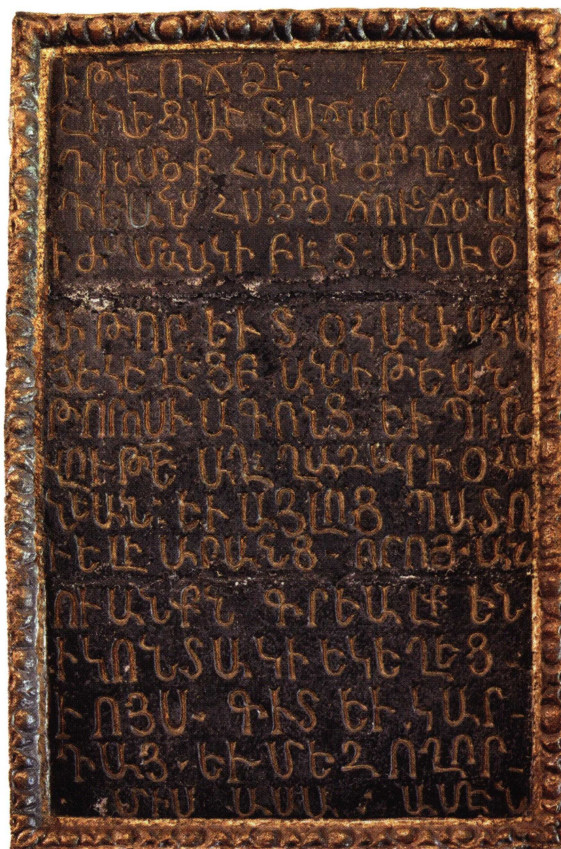
The question of the church-union of Armenians fleeing to Transylvania from a series of pogroms and military campaigns in Poland as well as Moldova between 1668 and 1672 has long been known to Hungarian and international church historiography. The Armenians of Transylvania have themselves borne it in mind, although more often than not inauthentic legends and myths were appended to historical fact. Equally true is the statement that this church-union remained outside the realm of domestic and international research for a long time. The church-union of the Armenians in Transylvania is usually associated with the singular person of Bishop Oxendio Virziresco<sup>1</sup> (1654–1715) and his missionary and organizational operations encompassing some thirty years (1685–1715), largely overlapping with the integration of the Transylvanian Principality into the Hapsburg Empire.<sup>2</sup>

The question arises why scientific research has not yet addressed the question of the union of the Armenians in Transylvania. One manifest reason lies in the fact that the church history of the Armenians in Transylvania has always been treated as a marginal issue by ecclesiastic historiographers. To make matters worse, the vast majority of sources concerning the confessional composition of the Armenians in Transylvania are found not in Hungarian but in foreign archives.

A separate difficulty is raised among the Armenians in Transylvania by the process of the church union itself. Namely, the few and rather outdated writings that are available on the matter have embellished the above process of church history with many myths, which has proved a great obstacle when one tries to subject the issue to thorough and nuanced scientific research. Archival investigations in recent years have, however, clarified once and for all the circumstances under which

the Armenians in Transylvania carried out their church unification.

The question of religious union can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, the Armenian Apostolic Church has, since the 5th to 7th centuries, kept a rather large distance from both Constantinople and Rome, firmly protecting its independence. The controversial Armenian reception of the teachings of the Council of Chal-



1. The memorial tablet for the construction of the Armenian Catholic church in Gheorgheni (1733)





2. Armenian and Latin inscription on the former Elisabethopolis church of the Armenian Catholic Mechitarist Order (c. 1795)

cedon (451), however, raised suspicion within the universal Orthodox Church of the time, leading to the not infrequent accusation that the Armenians fell victim to Monophysitism. From the early Middle Ages, down to the end of the Early Modern Period, many church officials tried to talk the Armenians into an ecclesiastic union, with varying success.<sup>3</sup> Thus the church-union of the Armenians in Transylvania should actually be seen as the early modern version of an early medieval policy of church-union. Furthermore, the problem is made particularly poignant by the historical fact that the Armenians lost their state independence very early on. The term 'Armenia' itself had, by the 14th century, been relegated to the level of a mere geographical denomination. In that fragile historic situation, the significance of the Armenian Apostolic Church increased; after all, that church and its head, the Catholicos embodied the Armenian nation itself and the national consciousness both in the diasporas and in the parent-state territories of Armenia, now under foreign occupation. What is even more, the concepts of church and nation merged nearly inseparably together at the time. Therefore, during the Middle Ages, the Armenians would be rather hostile towards any church negotiation with even the vaguest objective of unification, whether it came from Constantinople or from Rome.<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, the process of church unification which started during the last decades of the 17th century among the Armenians in Transylvania practically coincided with the period of Counter-Reformation or Catholic Revival

in Hungary and Transylvania. Within the southern, northern, and eastern regions of the historic Kingdom of Hungary, the Holy See provided instrumental assistance to the Roman Catholic Church, which achieved spectacular successes. Indeed, the process of re-Catholicization gained new impetus among the Orthodox Romanians in Transylvania and the Ruthenes in Upper Hungary. The latter were substantially supported not only by the apostolic missions and the leaders of the Hungarian Catholic Church but also by the Catholic Hapsburgs. Thus, the church-union of the Armenians in Transylvania is not merely an issue for Armenian Studies but, in fact, a cardinal question of universal missionary history.

For nearly twenty years, the idea of Catholic missions among the Armenians who had found refuge in Transylvania between 1668 and 1672 under the leadership of Moldovan Bishop Minas Tokhatetsi (1610?–1686) could not come on the agenda at all. Although Bertalan Szébellébi (1631–1707), the Roman Catholic Episcopal Vicar in Transylvania and the Observant Franciscans in Şumuleu Ciuc (Csíksomlyó) attempted to convert them to Catholicism, it was to no avail due to the effective resistance of Bishop Minas and the Armenian clergy in Transylvania.<sup>5</sup>

Not until 1683 could the lately converted Armenian Uniate Archbishopric in Lemberg (Łwów, L'vov, Lviv) and the Holy See initiated a Catholic mission among their ranks.<sup>6</sup> Lemberg attempted to support its positions by stating that the Armenians fleeing to Transylvania had always been subject to the ecclesiastic administration of that archiepiscopacy, which lawful right should be enforced even after the religious union that had taken place in the first third of the 17th century. What is more, Archbishop Francesco Martelli (1633–1708), Apostolic Nuncio at Warsaw, and Theatine Fr. Francesco Bonesana CR. (1651–1709), Prefect of the Lemberg-based Armenian College (Collegium Armenum, Collegio Armeno) founded in 1664, also reported to the Holy See that the Catholic mission among the Armenians in Transylvania would be of primary importance.<sup>7</sup> The main co-ordinating body of the Apostolic See, the Sacred (Holy) Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide) did not object to this request or motion.



The officials of the Holy See soon found a person suitable for converting the Armenians in Transylvania. Armenian Uniate Priest Oxendio Virziresco (1654–1715) was the ideal choice: he was a Moldova-born Armenian who had studied at the Urbanian College (Collegium Urbanum, Collegio Urbano) of Sacred Congregation in Rome and spoke many languages fluently, besides his native Armenian.<sup>8</sup> His election was partly motivated by the fact that his family had fled from Moldova to Transylvania back in 1668, together with Bishop Minas. For Oxendio Virziresco, the aim of his mission was simple: to bring about the church-union of the Armenians and organize the Armenian Uniate Church in Transylvania.

Oxendio set out from Rome via Vienna, Warsaw, and Lemberg, and arrived in Transylvania in autumn 1685. Soon he managed successfully to convert many of the Armenians of Gheorgheni (Gyergyószentmiklós).<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the newcomer priest was not unanimously welcomed by the local Armenians as the beginning of his mission was marked by heated conflicts with Bishop Minas and his clergy. It was reported that Oxendio was physically insulted on at least two occasions.<sup>10</sup> Such vehement reactions resulted from the fact that the Armenian priests in Transylvania at the time still vividly remembered the violent and scandal-marred unification of the Armenians of Lemberg under the leadership of Archbishop Nikol Torosowicz (1603–1681).<sup>11</sup>

Within a brief period of time, however, Oxendio stabilized his positions in Transylvania. The fact that he successfully converted his own family played no small role in that. At the very outset of his missionary work, he had realized that a church-union among the Armenians in Transylvania might only prevail if the elderly Bishop Minas and the Armenian clergy were to be won over for the cause.<sup>12</sup> This recognition proved of key importance as Bishop Minas had established a well-functioning church in Transylvania after the Armenians' settlement in 1668.

Be it as it might, his family helped Oxendio contact Bishop Minas. Although the aged bishop would never consent to a church union, in autumn 1686 Oxendio persuaded him to travel to Lemberg in order to negotiate with Vardan Hunanean (1644–1715), Armenian Uniate Archbishop and then Cardinal Opizio Pallavicini (1635–

1700), Apostolic Nuncio at Warsaw. For a long time it was accepted as a historic fact that in Lemberg, due to Oxendio's background operations, Bishop Minas finally consented to the church-union of the Armenian community in Transylvania with Rome, in confirmation of which he was said to have deposited the Confession of Faith (Confessio Fidei) into the hands of Nuncio Pallavicini and Archbishop Hunanean.<sup>13</sup> Subsequently, the bishop left Lemberg and prepared to return to his fold in Transylvania. In December 1686, however, on his way home, he died under unclear circumstances. Recent archival research has meanwhile revealed that Bishop Minas did not proclaim the union; nor did he take the Confession of Faith. Moreover, he did not even meet Nuncio Pallavicini personally. Contemporary documents unanimously confirm that Bishop Minas entered theological debates with Archbishop Hunanean in Lemberg, in defence of the Armenian Apostolic Church's dogma.<sup>14</sup> A report issued by Oxendio in early 1687 even informs us that Bishop Minas passed away not as a Uniate (Catholic) but a faithful Apostolic Armenian Bishop (a heretic, in Oxendio's formulation).<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, the death of Bishop Minas facilitated Oxendio's mission in Transylvania. His strongest adversary was now out of the way, so he could turn to the task of converting the Eastern Armenian Christian population and priesthood, who had lost their spiritual leader. As an



3. The erstwhile Mechitarist monastery in Elisabethopolis





4. Armenian Catholic church in Frumoasa (1762–1785)

early result of his missionary work, February 1689 saw a large delegation arrived in Lemberg, led by three Transylvanian-Armenian priests, namely Elia Mendrul, Vardān Potoczky, and Astuacatur Nigošean. On behalf of the whole Armenian community in Transylvania, the group formally accepted the church-union and placed the Catholic Faith of Confession into Archbishop Hunanean's hands. The Armenians also consented to the church authority of the Armenian Uniate Archbishopric in Lemberg.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, the delegation requested that Archbishop Hunanean and Giacomo Cantelmi (1645–1702), Apostolic Nuncio at Warsaw, intercede with the Holy See's authorities to appoint Oxendio Virziresco as a Uniate Bishop as soon as possible.<sup>17</sup> This petition proved particularly urgent in terms of the church-union because after Bishop Minas's death, Armenian Catholicos Eliazar I (1682–1691) appointed the Polish-

Armenian Theodor Wartanowicz (1652–1700) as an Apostolic Bishop of the Armenians in Moldova and Transylvania.<sup>18</sup> The newly appointed Armenian Apostolic Bishop, however, did not come into his seat; namely, the Armenian Uniate Archbishopric and the Holy See in a joint effort succeeded in hindering Wartanowicz from ever treading on Transylvanian soil.<sup>19</sup>

Still, the church-union of the Armenians in Transylvania remained an imperfect and unelaborated affair. The church-union entered in Lemberg contained a multitude of unanswered questions in itself. The documents attesting the union merely acknowledged the proclamation of the church union and the ecclesiastic legal authority of the Armenian Uniate Archepiscopacy in Lemberg and the Roman Pope's supreme primacy. This act, however, did nothing to settle the Transylvanian-Armenians' recognition of the Eucharist, the Filioque-prayer (Armenian *em yOrduoyñ*), the Purgatory (Armenian *K'awarann*), the doctrines of the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451), the new calendar use, and the legal as well as marital status of converted Armenian priests. In the wake of the church union, therefore, as could be predicted, a whole battlefield of conflicting interpretations would emerge in the forthcoming years.

According to the mainstream scientific opinions, the church union was primarily motivated by the idealistic notion of restoring religious unity. In the act, no role was played by the Viennese Court, the Hungarian Catholic Church, or the Jesuit Order. The Holy See surmised that the church-union might, with the passing of time, foster the restoration of the unity of Christian faith that had characterized the two churches at the dawn of Christianity, during the reign of Pope Sylvester I (314–335) and Saint Gregory the Illuminator (287–325), the Apostle and first Catholicos of the Armenians. In view of the Roman Catholic Church, it was the unworthy and heretic successors of Saint Gregory who had caused the Armenian Apostolic Church's divergence from the once unified Catholic and Orthodox doctrines, moving down the alley of Monophysitic heresy.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the Holy See considered the religious union of the Armenians in Transylvania as a second important milestone after the conversion of the Armenian community in Poland. Namely, the church-unions thus entered could form an important "stepping



stone” for the future unification with Rome of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Armenia proper. Behind the church-union of the Armenians in Transylvania, no economic considerations or objectives may be discerned. After all, Prince Michael I Apafi (1661–1690) had already provided the Armenians with highly favourable economic privileges years before the religious union through his decrees of 1680 and 1681.

The church union in 1689 greatly contributed to Oxendio Virziresco’s appointment by Pope Alexander VIII (1689–1691) as a titular bishop and apostolic vicar of the Armenians in Transylvania on 2 October 1690. A yearly stipend of 100 scudi was granted to him by the Holy See.<sup>21</sup> Concurrently, the Holy See drew the Armenians in Transylvania under its own direct ecclesiastic jurisdiction, in spite of the vehement protestations of the Armenian Uniate Archbishopric in Lemberg.<sup>22</sup> The consecration was held in the Archbishop’s Cathedral in Lemberg on 30 July 1691. The ceremony was celebrated according to Latin and Armenian Uniate rites by Archbishop Vardan Hunanean and Archbishop Antonio Santa Croce (1656–1712), Apostolic Nuncio at Warsaw (later in Vienna).<sup>23</sup> Cardinal Giacomo Cantelmi, former Apostolic Nuncio at Warsaw, had also played an instrumental role in bringing about Oxendio Virziresco’s consecration; in 1689 and 1690, he relentlessly pursued this cause and used effective means of persuasion to convince the influential Cardinals at Holy See to support Oxendio’s appointment.<sup>24</sup>

It was a deliberate decision that the Apostolic See appointed Oxendio as a titular bishop (of Aladia in Ireland). The main reason was that Rome also considered the interests of the Hungarian Catholic Church, with particular regard to the fact that the Hungarian Church was doing everything in its power to restore the shattered reputation of the Roman Catholic Episcopacy in Transylvania, whose seat had been unoccupied since 1601.<sup>25</sup> Another reason was that the missionary reports kept the Holy See well-informed about the position of the Catholics in Transylvania. After the political shift in Transylvania in 1690 (Diploma Leopoldinum), Rome observed the fact that due to the continuing political influence of the Protestants it would be unwise to appoint an openly Catholic bishop to lead the Uniate Armenians

as yet. Among other factors, these explained Oxendio’s appointment as a titular bishop; moreover, he was specifically ordered to act incognito in his Transylvanian community, concealed as an ordinary priest or monk.<sup>26</sup>

As it has been mentioned above, the church-union of the Armenians in Transylvania left a lot of questions open, which led to innumerable tensions and conflicts within the Armenian Church in Transylvania. One reason can be found in the differences between the Latin and the Armenian church traditions. Oxendio Virziresco, once consecrated, strove for an unconditional Latinization, while his priests were converts who had been raised within the cultural ambience of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Oxendio had studied at Urbanian College, where Western theological training was preferred at the time. In spite of his Armenian descent, he had always considered himself a man of the Roman Catholic Church. A crucial constituent of that identity must have been the fact that in Rome, on 9 August 1681, he had been ordained in the Latin rite by Edoardo Cybo (1619–1705), titular Archbishop of Seleucia and then Secretary of the Sacred Congregation.<sup>27</sup> So he would celebrate mass and administer the sacraments in the Latin rite; his missals were also Latin. In contrast, the Armenian priests continued to celebrate mass in the Armenian rite even after the church union. For them, church-union consisted in no more and no less than acknowledging the supremacy of the Roman Pope.

In autumn 1691, a conflict emerged in Bistrița (Beszterce) due to the divergent interpretations of church-union. During his visitations among the Armenians in Transylvania, Bishop Oxendio learnt that most Armenian priests were living in wedlock, whereas he would have considered celibacy preferable for them, too. He therefore accused them of heresy in the court of the Holy See. The clergy tried to defend themselves by claiming that they had married before the church-union, which could not therefore be an obstacle to their practice of priesthood. The question was settled by the Holy See in favour of the priests; still, the atmosphere within the Armenian Uniate Church remained tense. Nay, it was aggravated by the fact that Oxendio’s immediate aides were Polish-Armenians formerly educated in the Armenian College of Lemberg, where they not only



learnt the Latin but also the Armenian Uniate rite extensively. What is more, the Armenian Uniate Church in Poland celebrated mass according to an Armenian rite adapted to Latin standards, while Bishop Oxendio stubbornly insisted on the pure Latin rite. So he came into conflict with his immediate assistants as well.<sup>28</sup>

At the turn of the year 1691 and 1692, another dispute came about between Bishop Oxendio and the Armenian priests in Bistrița. Two converted monks, Vardan Potoczky and Astuacatur Nigoșean, began to preach against the church union among the Armenians of Bistrița. They had namely grown to consider the church union an increasingly disadvantageous process that was beginning to push Armenian identity into the background. Also, while the Armenians had, in 1689, hoped that the church-union, that is, their Catholicization, would broaden their economic privileges, they now found the situation to be just the contrary: after the union, their taxes were repeatedly raised by the secular authorities. This bred dissatisfaction, for which many blamed Bishop Oxendio and the church-union he had brought about. This also came handy for the Protestant elite in Transylvania, for they could now manipulate the Armenians, saying that upon revocation of their Uniate confession, they would second them, were they to ask for an extension of their former economic privileges in the Hapsburg Court in Vienna. The Protestants considered the Armenian Uniate bishop not only a man of Rome but also of Vienna.<sup>29</sup>

The case was eventually settled by Vardan Potoczky, Astuacatur Nigoșean, and their followers revoking the church union. Many of them (some 100 Armenian families) returned to Moldova under the leadership of Astuacatur Nigoșean.<sup>30</sup> The bishop launched an investigation in response, asking for the assistance of the Holy See, the Court in Vienna, and the political elite of Transylvania. But Bishop Oxendio's efforts were in vain. The leading Transylvanian political forces would not aid him, the Viennese Court was taken up by their war of liberation against the Ottoman Turks, while Transylvania is very far from Rome (Holy See). What is more, Michael II Apafi (1672–1713), Prince of Transylvania and Count Miklós Bethlen (1642–1716), Chancellor of Transylvania, sided with the renitent Armenians. Vardan Potoczky and

some 60 Armenian families refusing the church-union moved from Bistrița to Ibașfalău (Ebesfalva; present-day, Dumbrăveni). The Prince Michael II Apafi guaranteed special economic privileges and a free practice of religion for them.<sup>31</sup>

Because of Astuacatur Nigoșean, Bishop Oxendio left for Moldova without any consent from the Holy See, in order to persuade the Armenian monk and his followers to return to Transylvania and the Uniate confession.<sup>32</sup> The bishop's self-styled mission bore no fruit, and upon his return to Transylvania, his reputation was badly damaged. For fairness' sake, Astuacatur Nigoșean also soon came back from Moldova, once again taking up anti-union preaching in Bistrița. This time, the bishop wasted no time in having the renitent priest and his followers arrested by the imperial army. Astuacatur Nigoșean was imprisoned in Sibiu (Nagyszeben) and accused of apostasy. The trial was not concluded because the Armenian priest had died under unclear circumstances in prison before the end of 1693.<sup>33</sup>

In 1697, Bishop Oxendio caused yet another scandal in Bistrița, concerning the interpretation of the church-union. Just as in 1691, he blamed the Armenian priests in Transylvania for most of them living in wedlock in spite of the church-union. Among the main culprits, he named Vardan Potoczky, the apostate of Ibașfalău, and Archdean Elia Mendrul of Bistrița.<sup>34</sup> In return, the accused priests took the issue of the bishop's acting in tyrannical and corrupt ways to the Holy See's authorities and the Armenian Uniate Archbishopric in Lemberg. The claim for corruption derived from the fact that in 1696, Bishop Oxendio had appropriated the property of a recently deceased wealthy Armenian merchant in Transylvania, and within the same year, he had purchased a substantial estate in Gurghiu (Görgényszentimre) for himself.<sup>35</sup> Incidentally, this also raised the attention of the secular authorities in Transylvania. Count István Apor (1638–1704), Treasurer of Transylvania, was particularly outraged as documents attested that there had been a regular delay in the bishop's obtaining the annuity of 100 scudi granted by the Holy See, and hence he had repeatedly begged the treasurer for financial aid.<sup>36</sup> Count Apor wanted to investigate the bishop's new-found wealth and seconded the Armenians in accusing him of fraudulence.<sup>37</sup> In addition, the conflict



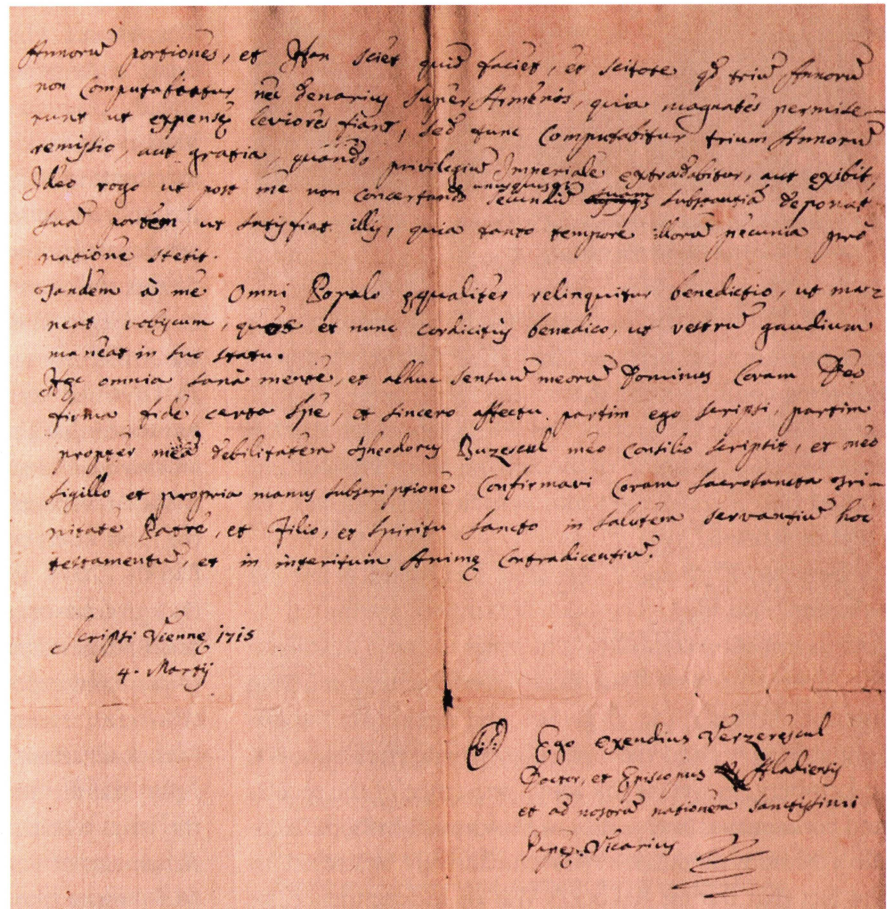
with Elia Mendrul was exacerbated by a problem of corruption. In contrast, the Holy See, the Observant and Conventual (Minorite) Franciscan monks, as well as the Jesuit Fathers stepped up in defence of Bishop Oxendio. Over two years, several investigative bodies were authorized, all of them proving biased and deciding in Bishop Oxendio's favour. Upon this, Elia Mendrul and his followers revoked the church union, most of them, some 400 Armenian families, moving to Moldova.<sup>38</sup>

Soon enough, Elia Mendrul found himself in dire straits. At the end of 1698, the Holy See commissioned an investigative body led by Zsigmond Vizkeleti<sup>39</sup> (1648–1718) and István Halászi<sup>40</sup> (1648–1705), Jesuits Fathers and missionaries in Transylvania, which took a more aggressive approach, aided by the imperial military, to the Armenian communities in Transylvania. Many Armenians were forced to take up the church-union again. In the course of the events, Vardan Potoczky was also arrested in Ebesfalva and sentenced to life imprisonment for apostasy.<sup>41</sup> Not seeing any other way out, Elia Mendrul took his remaining followers out of Transylvania, resettling to Moldova and ultimately revoking his oath of church-union taken in Lemberg, 1689.<sup>42</sup>

The Elia Mendrul case was a turning point in the church history of the Armenians in Transylvania. With the strife settled, the church-union of the Armenians came to full ripeness. Not that Bishop Oxendio had expected his mission to stumble on such extreme conflicts. But this series of obstacles eventually led to the irreversible unification of the entire Armenian community in Transylvania. On the other hand, the population of the Armenians in Transylvania had severely decreased. Their weight within society fell back significantly, primarily because many members of Oxendio's church

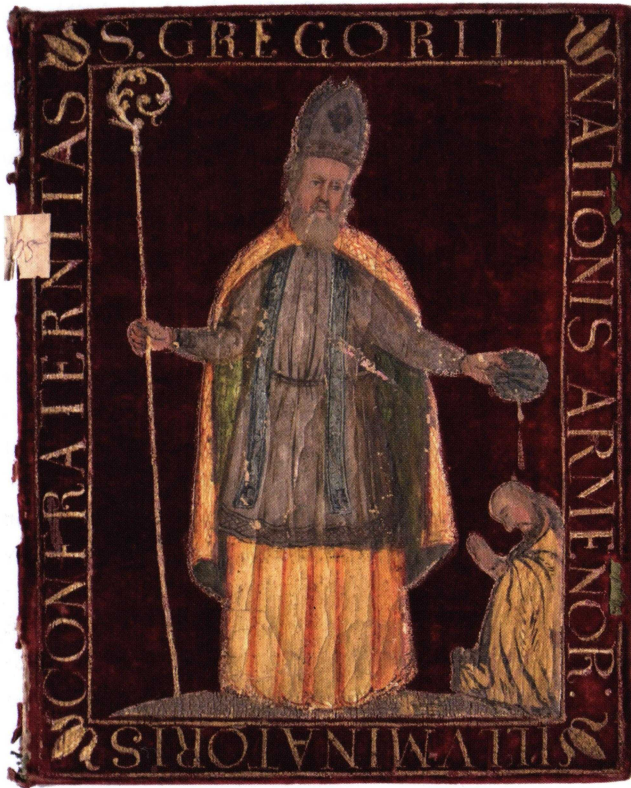
opposition moved back to Moldova between 1691 and 1700. On the whole, however, the tensions paid off for the Uniate Bishop. Although the number of Uniate Armenians in Transylvania had fallen conspicuously, Oxendio could now govern a smaller but confessionally more homogeneous community. Throughout the strife, he had enjoyed the almost incessant support of the Roman Catholic Church, while Elia Mendrul's party had continuously weakened due to many Armenians moving out of or away from the area.

Though Bishop Oxendio was eventually found not guilty of corruption, he would never completely succeed in clearing his name.<sup>43</sup> The shadow of suspicion was cast upon him until his dying days, and after the Elia Mendrul case, the secular elite in Transylvania would never again fully trust the Armenian Uniate Bishop.



5. Copy of Oxendio Virziresco's will and last testament (March 4, 1715) (Armenian Catholic Collective Archive of Armenopolis, 339/b, Box 1)





6. Cover of the deed of foundation of St Gregory the Illuminator's parish society in Elisabethopolis (1729)

Last, but not least, in view of the Elia Mendrul case in particular, it must be stated that after the church-union, the serial conflicts must shatter the formerly held public opinion of both Hungarian and international scholarship that the religious union of the Armenians in Transylvania should have been a calm and peaceful process with no strife or tension.

Between 1700 and 1711, after Elia Mendrul and his followers had fled, Oxendio Virziresco attempted to launch a mission to Moldova in order to (re-)Catholicize the Armenians there. His efforts failed due to conflicting interests between the Holy See, the Apostolic Nunciature at Warsaw, and the Armenian Uniate Archbishopric in Lemberg, as well as the active resistance of the secular and ecclesiastical authorities of Moldova.<sup>44</sup> Bishop Oxendio's Moldovan mission was conclusively shattered by the fact that during Rákóczi's War of Independence, he fell captive to the so-called Rákóczi's soldiers in 1704; after three years' imprisonment in Munkács (Mukacheve,

Mukačevo, now in Ukraine), he was expelled from the country, though he could eventually return to Transylvania in 1709, once the tides of war started to ebb away.<sup>45</sup>

Following the failure of the Moldovan mission, Bishop Oxendio and his aides were constantly afraid that as time passed, the Armenian Catholicos would order Eastern Armenian priests to come to Transylvania in order to reconvert the Uniate Armenians. This fear, apart from two unsubstantial and isolated cases, proved unfounded.<sup>46</sup> Their anxiety was surely heightened by the example of the Uniate Romanians in Transylvania, who were successfully reconverted after the Metropolitans of Bucharest, incited the Patriarch of Constantinople, sent Greek and Roman popes and monks to preach against the Romanian union in Transylvania.

Upon his final return in 1710, Bishop Oxendio focused on the re-organization of the Armenian community in Transylvania. His main task was to build and privilege the estate of Armenopolis. The question of Armenopolis had already plagued him back in the 1690s. Straight after Vardan Potoczky's apostasy trial, the bishop realized that the Armenians in Transylvania could only be kept within the church union in the long run if they were granted privileges. He was also faced with the urgent problem that despite the church union, many Armenians were resettling to Moldova. Therefore, he was planning to bring together the Armenians scattered all over Transylvania into one city. In 1696, he visited Vienna and asked for assistance. He requested that Emperor and King Leopold I (1657–1705) let the fiscal estate of Armenopolis (Gherla, Szamosújvár) to the Armenians at a reasonable price. In order to promote the motion, he contacted Cardinal Leopold von Kollonich (1631–1707), Primate-Archbishop of Esztergom.<sup>47</sup> His background operations yielded dividends fairly quickly; on 20 August 1696, Leopold I approved Bishop Oxendio's request and appointed Armenopolis as the site for a future Armenian settlement.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, because of the Elia Mendrul's affair, Bishop Oxendio's conflict with Treasurer Apor, and the breakout of Rákóczi's War of Independence, the issue would not be concluded until 1712, when the Armenians of Bistrița and the neighbouring villages could finally move into Armenopolis.

Oxendio felt that, due to the obstacles raised by the hostile local authorities, the Armenians could not benefit



from the commercial privileges bestowed upon them by the Transylvanian Prince back in 1680. On 10 November 1711, he wrote a memorandum and submitted it to the Viennese Court, reminding them of the estate of Armenopolis, which he had obtained in 1696. The document was written in Latin and its 14 points requested, among other things, that the Armenians should be exempted from all taxes for three years and placed under the protection of the military commanders in Transylvania. He explained this with the severe damages the Armenians had suffered due to Rákóczi's War of Independence. In effect, the bishop wanted to acquire a so-called Armenian Diploma (Diploma Armenum) for Armenopolis from the secular authorities.<sup>49</sup>

For many months, the memorandum yielded no result. In summer of 1712, therefore, Oxendio went to Vienna in order to obtain privileges for Armenopolis, the largest continuous Armenian settlement in Transylvania just then under construction, as well as to enforce his memorandum.<sup>50</sup>

Bishop Oxendio spent nearly three years in Vienna, but his cause was not moving forward despite innumerable audiences in the Court. This administrative delay, however, took its toll on his health (having passed the age of 60 years, he was no young man any more), which was gradually worn away by so much time spent in uncertainty and frustration. On 7 March 1715, he suddenly collapsed and was transferred to Saint John's Hospital in Vienna. He suffered from high fever, fits of ague, and before the day was out, he lost his consciousness. The hospital leader asked for the help of the court doctor, but the bishop's illness could not be diagnosed.<sup>51</sup>

Bishop Oxendio died three days later, on 10 March.<sup>52</sup> His death was very probably caused by a cerebral haemorrhage.<sup>53</sup> His curious collapse occasioned rumours that the Uniate Bishop might have been poisoned by the Viennese Court, at the instigation of the Hungarian Catholic clergy. This claim was founded on the notion that Bishop Oxendio had too much influence among the Armenians and Catholics of Transylvania. Such supposition and guesswork were probably completely factitious; after all, why should a pontiff be murdered if he has always been a loyal servant of both Catholicism and the Imperial Court throughout his of-

fice? The deceased bishop was buried in Saint Barbara's Church in Vienna.<sup>54</sup>

Shortly before his collapse, the bishop had written a will in which he not only settled the issues of his bequest, but also named his relative, the Polish-Armenian Uniate Stefano Stefanowicz Roszka (1670–1739), Titular Bishop of Hymeria, as his intended successor.<sup>55</sup> His death, however, left the seat of the Armenian Uniate Bishop vacant. While the Holy See negotiated Roszka's Transylvanian tenure on a number of occasions, the Hungarian Catholic Church eventually managed to hinder his appointment.<sup>56</sup> Thus the Uniate Armenians in Transylvania were left without a pontiff.

Bishop Oxendio Virziresco's death in 1715 marked the end of an important period in the history of the Armenians in Transylvania. The archives of the Holy See still house a large number of unpublished documents about the further history of the Armenian Church in Transylvania. The disputes that surrounded the vacant seat of the Armenian Uniate bishop, the tensions concerning church authority, the aggressive enforce-



7. Stephano Stephanowicz Roska (1670–1739), Armenian Catholic provost of Stanisławów was sent on an apostolic visitation to Transylvania in 1729 by Archbishop Tobia Augustinowicz of Lemberg. There he founded several parish congregations (elbayrowi'wn). His signature can be seen on the last page of the deed of foundation of St Gregory the Illuminator's society in Elisabethopolis (1729)



ment of Latinization, as well as the relations with the Uniate Romanian Episcopacy of Făgăraș (Fogaras) installed in 1721, markedly demonstrate that the church-union or Bishop Oxendio's achievements were far from the end of the church-history of the Armenians in Tran-

sylvania. All these separate areas must be subject to further research through the analysis of archival sources in Rome concerning the period following 1715 as well as the introduction of new batches of sources into the research.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The name of the bishop has been handed down to us in many different spellings. This paper keeps the form *Virziresco* as the bishop himself almost invariably signed his letters thus.
- <sup>2</sup> Cf. NAGY, Kornél, "Az erdélyi örményi egyházi unió vitás kérdései (1685–1715)," *Történelmi Szemle*, 51.1 (2009). 91–125; NAGY, Kornél, "The Catholicization of Transylvanian Armenians (1685–1715): Integrative or Disintegrative Model?" in *Integrating Minorities: Traditional Communities and Modernization*, ed. Barszczewska, Agnieszka & Peti, Lehel (Cluj-Napoca, 2011), 33–56; NAGY, Kornél, "Az erdélyi örmények katolizációja, 1685–1715," *Magyar Történelmi Emlékek: Értekezések* (Budapest, 2012).
- <sup>3</sup> See, e.g., GARSOÏAN, Nina, "L'église arménienne et le Grand Schisme d'Orient," *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, 574, *Subsidia Tomus 100* (Lovanii, 1999); DORFMANN-LAZAREV, Igor, "Arméniens et byzantins à l'époque de Photius: Deux débats théologiques après le triomphe orthodoxe," *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, 609, *Subsidia Tomus 117* (Lovanii, 2004), 96–130.
- <sup>4</sup> Cf. MAKSOUDIAN, Krikor H., "Armenian Church, Doctrines and Councils," in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, I (Aachen–Augustinism), ed. STREYER, Joseph R. (New York, 1982), 498–502; PAPADAKIS, Aristeides–MEYENDORFF, John, *A keresztény Kelet és a pápaság felemelkedése*, trans. Bódogh-Szabó, Pál (*Varia Byzantiana – Bizánc Világa*, 6) (Budapest, 2002), 163–174.
- <sup>5</sup> Archivio storico della Sacra Congregazione per l'Evangelizzazione o de "Propaganda Fide", Rome (= APF) Scritture riferite nei Congressi (= SC) Fondo Moldavia Vol. 1, 155r–156v.; *ibid.* Vol. 2, Fol. 41r–46v.; Eötvös Loránd University Book and Manuscript Archive, Budapest (= ELTE EKK) Collectio Hevenesiana (= Coll. Hev.) Cod. 15, p. 248; *ibid.* Cod. 16, p. 33; *ibid.* Cod. 21, pp. 81–82.
- <sup>6</sup> APF SC Fondo Armeni Vol. 3, Fol. 378r–381v.
- <sup>7</sup> APF SC Fondo Moldavia Vol. 2, Fol. 126r–127r., Fol. 134r–135v.
- <sup>8</sup> APF SC Fondo Armeni Vol. 3, Fol. 418r.; see also PETROWICZ, Gregorio, *La chiesa armena in Polonia e nei paesi limitrofi*, III, 1686–1954 (*Studia Ecclesiastica 17 – Historica 10*) (Roma, 1988), 81–82.
- <sup>9</sup> APF SC Fondo Armeni Vol. 3, Fol. 462r–v., Fol. 434r–v., Fol. 498r.; РОШКА́Й, Step'anos, *Žamanakagrut'ivn kam tarekank' ekelec'akank'* [Chronology, or Ecclesiastic Annals] Ašx. Hamazasp Oskean (Vienna, 1964), 185.
- <sup>10</sup> APF SC Fondo Armeni Vol. 3, Fol. 468r–469v.
- <sup>11</sup> For more detail, see PETROWICZ, Gregorio, *L'unione degli Armeni in Polonia con la Santa Sede*, I (1626–1681) (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 135.) (Roma, 1950).

- <sup>12</sup> APF SC Fondo Armeni Vol. 3, Fol. 469v.
- <sup>13</sup> This was not reported until after the death of Bishop Minas, in documents from 1693, 1695, and 1700, which, however, have recently been disproved as unreliable in their information. Cf. APF Scritture Originali riferite nelle Congregazioni Generali (= SOCG) Vol. 537, Fol. 418r–v.; Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Rome (= ARSI) Fondo Austria, Historia, Vol. 155, Fol. 81v.; ELTE EKK Coll. Hev. Cod. 16, p. 32.; *ibid.* Cod. 21, p. 82.; *ibid.* Cod. 29, p. 346.; ELTE EKK Collectio Kaprinayana, A. Cod. 11, p. 112.; MOLNÁR, Antal, *Lehetetlen küldetés? Jezsuiták Erdélyben és Felső-Magyarországon a 16–17. században* (TDI Könyvek, 8) (Budapest, 2009), 222; see also NAGY, Kornél, "Did Vardapet Minas Tokhatetsi, Bishop of the Armenians in Transylvania, Make a Confession of Faith in the Roman Catholic Church in 1686?" *Haigazian Armenianological Review* 31 (2011), 427–442.
- <sup>14</sup> APF SOCG Vol. 532, Fol. 456r–457r.; APF Lettere e Decreti della Sacra Congregazione (= Lettere SC) Vol. 76, Fol. 33r–34r., Fol. 90v–91r.; APF SC Fondo Armeni Vol. 4, Fol. 13r–v., Fol. 374r–375v.; Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Vatican City (= ASV) Archivio della Nunziatura in Vienna (= ANV) Vol. 196, Fol. 219r–220r.
- <sup>15</sup> APF Collegio Urbano Vol. 3, Fol. 472r–v.
- <sup>16</sup> APF Acta Sacrae Congregationis (= Acta SC) Vol. 59, Fol. 165r–169r.; APF SOCG Vol. 504, Fol. 103r.; *ibid.* Vol. 506, Fol. 66r.; APF Congregazioni Particolari (= CP) Vol. 29, Fol. 610r–v., Fol. 630r–631v., Fol. 651r.; APF Lettere SC Vol. 78, Fol. 36v–38r., Fol. 102r–v.; ELTE EKK Coll. Hev. Cod. 15, p. 251.; *ibid.* Cod. 16, p. 34.; *ibid.* Cod. 21, p. 77.; *ibid.* Cod. 21, p. 82.
- <sup>17</sup> APF CP Vol. 29, Fol. 644r., Fol. 645r–646v., Fol. 647r–v., Fol. 648r–v.; NAGY, Kornél, "Two Letters of the Armenians in Transylvania to the Holy See from 1689," *Revista Arhivelor–Archives Review* 86.2 (2009), 226–243.
- <sup>18</sup> APF Acta SC Vol. 60, Fol. 78r–81v.; APF Lettere SC Vol. 79, Fol. 7r–8v., Fol. 22v–23r., Fol. 129r–132r.; APF SC Fondo Armeni Vol. 4, Fol. 51r., Fol. 69r., Fol. 82r–83v., Fol. 86r–87v., Fol. 100r., Fol. 129r., Fol. 174r.; for more detail about Wartanowicz see also PETROWICZ, *La chiesa armena*, 92–93.
- <sup>19</sup> APF Acta SC Vol. 60, Fol. 125r–127v.; APF SOCG, Vol. 507, Fol. 87r–88v., Fol. 89r., Fol. 90r., Fol. 91r–v., Fol. 92r., Fol. 93r–94v.; *ibid.* Vol. 509, Fol. 112r–v.
- <sup>20</sup> APF CP Vol. 29, Fol. 613r–v., Fol. 628r–629v.
- <sup>21</sup> APF Acta SC Vol. 59, Fol. 165r–169r.; *ibid.* Vol. 60, Fol. 14r–19v.; APF SOCG Vol. 510, 94r.; *ibid.* Vol. 512, Fol. 179r–v.; APF SC Fondo Armeni Vol. 4, Fol. 215r–v.; ELTE EKK Coll. Hev. Cod. 15, p. 252.; *ibid.* Cod. 16, p. 34.; *ibid.* Cod. 21, p. 83.



- <sup>22</sup> APF SOCG Vol. 506, Fol. 61r–v., Fol. 63r–64r.; *ibid.* Vol. 507, Fol. 87r–88v.; APF Lettere SC Vol. 79, Fol. 80v–81r., Fol. 82r–v.; APF SC Fondo Armeni Vol. 4, Fol. 221r.; LUKÁCSY, Christophorus, *Historia Armenorum Transsilvaniae a primordiis usque nostram memoriam e fontibus authenticis et documentis antea ineditis elaborata* (Viennae, 1859), 70; PETROWICZ, *La chiesa armena*, 94–96.
- <sup>23</sup> APF Acta SC Vol. 61, Fol. 84r–87r.; APF SOCG Vol. 510, Fol. 97r.; APF Lettere SC Vol. 80, Fol. 65r–v., Fol. 74v–v., Fol. 86v–87v.; APF SC Fondo Armeni Vol. 4, Fol. 140r., Fol. 146r–v.; Primatial Archives, Esztergom (= PL) Archivum Vetus Ecclesiasticus (=AEV) Sub Primatae Széchényi (= SPSZ) No. 273/4.2; see also Roškay, 187.
- <sup>24</sup> APF CP Vol. 29, Fol. 636r–v.; APF Lettere SC Vol. 79, Fol. 129r–132r.; APF SC Fondo Armeni Vol. 4, Fol. 221r.
- <sup>25</sup> For more detail cf. GALLA, Ferenc, *Ferences misszionáriusok Magyarországon: a Királyságban és Erdélyben a 17–18. században*, ed. Fazekas István (Collectanea Vaticana Hungariae, 2) (Budapest & Rome, 2005), 256–286.
- <sup>26</sup> APF Lettere SC Vol. 79, Fol. 134v.
- <sup>27</sup> APF Acta SC Vol. 51, Fol. 81r.; Fol. 154r–v., Fol. 232r., Fol. 255v.; APF SOCG Vol. 490, Fol. 110r.; *ibid.* Vol. 492, Fol. 313r.; *ibid.* Vol. 493, Fol. 30r+31v., Fol. 376r+377v., Fol. 378v., *ibid.* Vol. 497, Fol. 335r.; APF Lettere SC Vol. 70, Fol. 42r., Fol. 54v.
- <sup>28</sup> APF Acta SC Vol. 61, Fol. 84r–87r.
- <sup>29</sup> APF SOCG Vol. 512, Fol. 178r–v., Fol. 179r., Fol. 180r+183r., Fol. 181r+186v.; for more detail, see NAGY, Kornél, “Emlékirat az erdélyi örmények egyházáról: Az 1693. évi Fidelis relatio,” *Történelmi Szemle* 50.2 (2008), 251–285; NAGY, Kornél, “Az erdélyi örmények hitvallása 1692-ből,” *Történelmi Szemle* 53.2 (2011), 283–313.
- <sup>30</sup> APF SC Fondo Armeni Vol. 4, Fol. 263r.
- <sup>31</sup> APF SC Fondo Armeni Vol. 4, Fol. 262r., Fol. 265r–v., Fol. 266r.; ELTE EKK Coll. Hev. Cod. 21. P. 84.; ELTE EKK Res Transylvanica (= G) Cod. 522, Fol. 96r.; PL AEV SPSZ No. 274/4.1., No. 274/8.3., No. 274/8.4.
- <sup>32</sup> APF Acta SC Vol. 63, Fol. 68r–70v.
- <sup>33</sup> APF Acta SC Vol. 65, Fol. 263r–266v.; APF SOCG Vol. 514, Fol. 495r–496v., Fol. 499r–v., Fol. 500r–v., Fol. 501r–v., Fol. 502r.; APF Lettere SC Vol. 82, Fol. 100r–v., Fol. 110v–111r., Fol. 119r–v., Fol. 147r–v.
- <sup>34</sup> APF SC Fondo Armeni Vol. 4, Fol. 522r–v., Fol. 523r–v.; ASV ANV Vol. 196, Fol. 159r–160v.; for more detail, see NAGY, Kornél, “Az Elia Mendrul-ügy: A beszercei örmény egyházi vizsály története (1697–1700),” *Századok* 143 (2009), 945–974.
- <sup>35</sup> ASV ANV Vol. 196, Fol. 177r+180v.
- <sup>36</sup> APF SOCG Vol. 529, Fol. 272r–273v.; ASV ANV Vol. 196, Fol. 160r–161v., Fol. 163r.
- <sup>37</sup> APF SOCG Vol. 532, Fol. 449r., Fol. 459r–v.; ÉBLE, Gábor, *A szamosújvári Verzár család* (Budapest, 1915), 15.
- <sup>38</sup> APF Acta SC Vol. 69, Fol. 108r–v.; APF SOCG Vol. 532, Fol. 434r–440r.
- <sup>39</sup> His real name was ISTVÁN Csete; cf. APF SC Fondo Ungheria e Transilvania Vol. 3, Fol. 46r.–52v.; TÓTH, György István (ed.), *Litterae missionariorum de Hungaria et Transilvania (1572–1717)*, IV (Bibliotheca Academiae Hungariae – Roma, Fontes 4) (Rome & Budapest, 2005), 2923–2931.
- <sup>40</sup> His real name was Tamás Merczisz; cf. Molnár, 225–248.
- <sup>41</sup> APF SOCG Vol. 532. Vol. 466r., Fol. 467r–468r., Fol. 469r., Fol. 470r–471v., Fol. 472r.; ASV ANV Vol. 196, Fol. 192r–v., Fol. 194r–v., Fol. 195r–v.
- <sup>42</sup> ASV ANV Vol. 196, Fol. 203r–v., Fol. 204r., Fol. 206r–v.
- <sup>43</sup> APF SOCG Vol. 532, Fol. 461r–463v.
- <sup>44</sup> APF Acta SC Vol. 70, Fol. 103r–105r., Fol. 341r–345v.; APF Acta SC Vol. 71, Fol. 177r–179v.; *ibid.* Vol. 72, Fol. 237r–240v.; *ibid.* Vol. 73, Fol. 41r–v.; APF SOCG Vol. 535, Fol. 346r–v., Fol. 347r–350v., Fol. 352r–v.; *ibid.* Vol. 537, Fol. 412r–414v., Fol. 416r–417r., Fol. 418r–419v.; *ibid.* Vol. 539, Fol. 180r., Fol. 182r–183v.; *ibid.* Vol. 545, Fol. 243r., Fol. 244r–v., Fol. 245r–v.; APF SC Fondo Armeni Vol. 4, Fol. 613r–614r., Fol. 615r–v., Fol. 670r., Fol. 708r–v., Fol. 709r.; ELTE EKK Coll. Hev. Cod. P. 8. P. 61.
- <sup>45</sup> APF SOCG Vol. 558, Fol. 20r–v., Fol. 21r–22v., Fol. 23r.; *ibid.* Vol. 572, Fol. 278r–280v.; APF Lettere SC Vol. 96, Fol. 29r.; Hungarian National Archive (= MOL) Archive of Prince Francis II. Rákóczi (= G 16) I. 2. d. No. 520.; MOL Archive of Prince’s Chancellery (= G 19) II. 2. e/A.
- <sup>46</sup> APF Acta SC Vol. 77, Fol. 279r–280v.; APF SOCG Vol. 559, Fol. 570r–v., Fol. 571r., Fol. 574r., Fol. 575r–v.
- <sup>47</sup> APF SOCG Vol. 520, Fol. 286r–287r.; APF SC Fondo Armeni Vol. 4, Fol. 268r.
- <sup>48</sup> APF SOCG Vol. 525, Fol. 111r–v., Fol. 112r–v.; APF SC Fondo Armeni Vol. 4, Fol. 406r–v., Fol. 407r–v.+ 410v., Fol. 408r–409v., Fol. 411r–v.; Fol. 434r.; ANV ASV Vol. 196, Fol. 152r.; MOL Gubernium Transilvanicum Archive: Files (= F 46) 1698: 238; Éble, 16.
- <sup>49</sup> APF Acta SC Vol. 82, Fol. 144r–147v.; APF SOCG Vol. 580, Fol. 560r–565v.; MOL Transylvanian Fiscal Archive (=F 234) XII 1/2, Fasc. 2, Litt. A.; for the latest research, see BERNÁD, Rita & Kovács, Bálint, *The Armenian Catholic Collective Archive: Repertory* (Erdélyi Római Katolikus Levéltárak, 4) (Budapest, Alba Iulia & Leipzig, 2012), 23–38.
- <sup>50</sup> APF Acta SC Vol. 82, Fol. 443r–v.; APF SOCG Vol. 583, Fol. 211., Fol. 212r.
- <sup>51</sup> APF SOCG Vol. 598, Fol. 267r–v.
- <sup>52</sup> APF Acta SC Vol. 85, Fol. 170r–v., Fol. 582r.; APF SOCG Vol. 598, Fol. 264r., Fol. 265r–266v.; APF SC Fondo Armeni Vol. 6, Fol. 544r–545v., Fol. 552r–553v., Fol. 588r.; Roškay, 197–198; PETROWICZ, *La chiesa armena*, 103.
- <sup>53</sup> APF Lettere SC Vol. 104, Fol. 57r–58v.
- <sup>54</sup> APF SOCG Vol. 598, Fol. 265r–266v.; APF Lettere SC Vol. 104, Fol. 57r–58v.
- <sup>55</sup> BÁRÁNY, Lukács, “Verzirescul Auxendius III,” *Arménia* 4.5 (1888), 139–141.
- <sup>56</sup> APF Acta SC Vol. 85, Fol. 582r.; APF Lettere SC Vol. 104, Fol. 231r–v.; APF SC Fondo Armeni Vol. 6, Fol. 642r–643v.