Historical Aspects of the Hussite Migration in Moldavia for Religious Freedom

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ABSTRACT: The study shows a few issues related to the migration of the Hussite believers during the 15th century due to the lack of religious freedom and religious or economic persecutions they were subjected to in Bohemia and Moravia which were their homeland, migrating towards Poland, Hungary, Transylvania and Moldavia where they found shelter and religious acceptance. A notable fact is that the rulers of Moldova at the time, Stefan the Great and Alexander the Kind who were Orthodox Christians, not only did they offer the Hussite the possibility to leave in peace and unbothered by anybody due to their religious beliefs but even offered them certain privileges. The study shows that religious tolerance is a demonstration of love and respect towards another, indispensable qualities of a believer’s spiritual life.

KEY WORDS: Hussite, religious persecution, sect, heretics, acceptance, Moldavia.

In this study we aim to present a few issues related to the migration of a group of believers due to the lack of religious freedom and religious or economic persecutions which they were subjected to in their native country, namely we specifically refer to the Hussite group that migrated from Bohemia and Moravia area which was their homeland during the 15th century, towards Poland, Hungary, Transylvania and Moldavia.

During the socio–political and religious context at the time, after the banishing of the Hussites, i.e. the spiritual descendants of Jan Huss,
from Hungary, many of them would find a new home in Moldavia, from where they will exert a certain religious influence not only in Moldavia but also in the Eastern parts of Transylvania especially in the area occupied by the Secui and their neighboring counties. As such, after the Hussite settling in Moldavia, Hussitism, as religious movement, begins to also develop in the Transylvanian territories.

The term of Hussite which we utilize comes from the name of the priest and professor Jan Huss (1369–1415) who was a professor and provost of the University of Prague. Influenced by the teachings of John Wycliffe and together with his friend Ieronim of Prague, expose himself as defending the teachings of the English reformer. Due to the fact that Provost Jan Huss protests against Pope Alexander the fifth decision (1409–1410) to publicly burn the religious writings of John Wycliffe, he was excommunicated by the Church of those times. After these events a revolt breaks loose in the Bohemian region. Jan Huss, starting with the year 1412, was preaching against the indulgencies. As a consequence of these actions papal bulls begin to be burned, but because of the revolts, Jan Huss has to flee, during which time he will write his masterpiece De Ecclesia (About the Church). In the year 1414 under the assurance of Emperor Sigismund he comes before the Council of Konstanz where he would be arrested, and in the year 1415, labeled as heretic, burned to the steak. His work is continued by the zealous follower of his teachings, Ieronim of Prague, who would also be burned to the steak in 1416. The spiritual descendants of the teachings of Jan Huss, being persecuted in their own homeland, had to flee and find shelter in other parts of Europe.

We have to mention the fact that the Hussites found a temporary shelter in Moldavia after the dramatic events that followed the death of provost Jan Huss and Ieronim of Prague, after the wars waged by the Czech Hussites led by Jan Ziska and after the religious persecutions aimed towards them. It is considered however that the first groups of Slovakian and Hungarian Hussites arrived in Moldavia as early as 1420. In this regard, the Chronic of Levoca (Slovakia) mentions the Hussites arrival in Moldavia around 1420. The Moldavian ruler Alexander the Kind, Romanian Orthodox believer, manifesting tolerance and acceptance towards
another religion, received the Hussites well and allowed them to settle and live in the cities from his country. Romanian historian C.G. Giurescu wrote about the Hussites arrival in Moldavia and their welcoming by the Moldavian ruler Alexander the Kind saying that the ruler: “allowed their settling in Moldavia in the towns of Trotus, Bacau, Roman and the nearby villages from the latter two towns—in Târgul Neamț, Cotnari, Huși and Ciubarciu on Nistru, as well as the the villages Saint John, Saint Peter and Saint Anton. More so the ruler issued a written command that nobody was to disturb them for practicing their religion.”

In Moldavia, the Catholic Bishop of Baia, John of Ryza, entered in a religious conflict with the Hussites but they were under the protection of the Moldavian ruler who also offered them some privileges as well as housing areas in Bacau.

Other Hussites groups looked for shelter in Transylvania, but the religious persecutions from the Catholic Bishops John of Oradea and Gheorghe Lepes of Alba Iulia together with the papal inquisitor Jacob of Marchia, made the Hussites to leave Transylvania and look for refuge and shelter in Moldavia. By mid 1437 a large number of the Hussites from Hungary moved to Moldavia led by priests Toma and Valentin and settled in Trotus (Târgu Trotus) and other areas. Some of these Hussites settled in the Sălaj area in Northern Transylvania where they build several towns. It is well known that the town of Cehul Silvaniei was founded by the Hussites.

Once settled in Târgu Trotus, the Hussite priests Toma and Valentin translate the Bible for the first time into the Hungarian language. Some historians (M. Constantinescu, C. Daicoviciu, St. Pascu) believe that the Bible was translated into the Hungarian language by the Hussite priests in 1430. Bandini, a papal envoy, who visited Moldavia during the rule of Vasile Lupu, tells a story, which circulated in the Moldavian area, about the arrival of a group of Hussites in 1460 because of the religion persecution instilled by the king Matei Corvin.

Other groups of Hussites arrived in Moldavia between 1481 and 1483 due to being banished by king Matei Corvin on the request of Pope Sixtus the 6th. Part of these Hussites settled in the town of Huși, some in Saint Ieronim, near Huși, some in Raducaneni on the
banks of the river Prut and others in Roman. Between 1481–1488 new groups of Hussites arrived in Moldavia from Silezia and Moravia because of king Matei Corvin’s religious persecution, and in Moldavia they found shelter, acceptance and religious freedom being well received by the ruler Stefan the Great.\textsuperscript{26}

The Hussite presence in Moldavia is confirmed by several documents, namely:

\textit{The March 5\textsuperscript{th} 1431 letter of Bishop Ioan Ryza of Baia send to Bishop Sbiegniew of Krakow.}\textsuperscript{27} This letter mentions a man named Jacob who renounced the Catholic faith and together with six other monks, who also renounced the Catholic faith, is making Hussite missionary propaganda in Moldavia. Moldavia’s ruler, Alexander the Kind, allowed the Hussite proselytism in Moldavia also due to some political reasons because he wanted to weaken the Polish influence in Moldavia.\textsuperscript{28} Thus the Catholic Bishop Ioan Ryza of Baia complains to Bishop Sbiegniew of Krakow of the favors awarded to Jacob by the ruler Alexander the Kind as well as showing the ruler’s audacity and pride.\textsuperscript{29} So, at Bishop Ioan Ryza’s request to Bishop Sbiegniew, the latter addresses the king of Poland who sends a letter (on April 6\textsuperscript{th} 1431) to the ruler Alexander the Kind telling him, among other things, about the downfall of Bohemia due to the anarchy created by the Hussites. The intervention had no effect and so the Hussites settled wherever they wanted until the time of Alexander the Kind’s descendents, when a new pro Poland political orientation resulted in banishing the Hussites in Transylvania.\textsuperscript{30}

\textit{The letter from April 6\textsuperscript{th} 1431, send by the king of Poland, Vladislav Jagiello, to the Moldavian ruler, Alexander the Kind.} As a result of the letter send by Bishop Ioan Ryza of Baia to Bishop Sbiegniew of Krakow, the latter addresses the king of Poland asking him to intervene to the Moldavian ruler Alexander the Kind. This letter send by the king of Poland to the Moldavian ruler contained two issues regarding the Hussites: First the king asks the ruler to end the acceptance and support shown towards the Hussites in Moldavia and second he asked for the extradition of Jacob, the main Hussite preacher in Moldova along with his acolytes, so they can be trialed and punished for heresy by the Polish authorities.\textsuperscript{31} The king of Poland’s requests fell on deaf ears and the Hussites settled wherever
they wanted until the time of Alexander the Kind’s descendents, when a new pro Poland political orientation resulted in banishing the Hussites in Transylvania.32

The letter from January 1432, send by the Bishop of Krakow, Sbigneus (Zbigniew) Olesnicki, to Cardinal Cesarini. The Bishop’s letter details some important issues about the status of Catholicism which is confronted with the Hussite ideas of the strong Hussite community in Moldavia. Bishop Sbigneus33 wrote that the Hussites represented a strong source of heresy for the Catholics and that Jacob, the Hussite preacher, managed to convince a large number of Catholics to convert the Hussite teachings and renounce the Catholic religion.

The letter of Pope Eugenius the 4th from 1446 that said: “I heard with great sadness that in Moldavia a lot of heretics found shelter, especially those from the abominable Hussite sect.”34

Certain details about the Hussites ‘that live in Moldavia and they are refugees’, are found in a letter from 1452 belonging to the Patriarch of Constantinople, letter send to the University of Prague, which referenced the Hussite believers.35 The Hussites, banished as heretics from everywhere by the Catholics, found shelter in Moldavia under the rule of Alexander the Kind and Stefan the Great.

A document from 1452 which mentions Vadul Hușilor, also attests to the presence of Hussites in that area at that time.36

The testimony and activity of Catholic priest Constantinus Romanus. This Roman Catholic priest, converted to Hussitism in Moldavia, was in 1452 one of the most active and passionate preachers of Hussite teachings in Moldavia.37

A note from 1571 addressed to the Vatican by the Catholic Bishop of Camenita. In this note the Bishop made the Vatican aware of the existence of roughly 2000 Hussites that live in the cities of Huși, Roman and a few nearby villages.38

The testimony of the Catholic Bishop Petru Bogdan Baksic.39 The Bishop, around mid 17th century, talks about the life of Hussites and their way of worship.

The Sigil of the town of Huși. It is described, according to a document sealed in 1667, as having the form of an open book, which has on its sides a simple cross and a double one. It is suggested that
the book portrayed is the *Bible*. The *Bible* was taken as a symbol of the city’s founding and it is believed to be a clear reference at the Hussite beginnings of Huși.\(^{40}\) Târgul Huși was founded by the Hussites from Moldova.\(^{41}\)

Ioan of Ryza, the Catholic Bishop of Baia, who belonged to the Polish Church, had a special mission for Moldavia, a mission which consisted in the strengthening and spreading of Catholicism in Moldova, using all the favorable moods of the ruler Alexander the Kind, but all attempts to convert the ruler to Catholicism made by his wife Rimgailla,\(^{42}\) who was a Polish Catholic, failed.\(^{43}\) Alexander the Kind not only refuses to convert to Catholicism but also divorces his wife Rimgailla, this causes extreme anger to Pope Martin the 5th (1368–1431), who in 1420 tasks Bishop Ioan of Ryza to analyze the reasons that led to the annulment of marriage between the Moldavian ruler Alexander the Kind and Rimgailla (Ringala).\(^{44}\)

In 1431, Jacob, the leader of the Hussites in Moldavia, will gain the favor of Alexander the Kind and the Moldavian Hussite community becomes privileged, even being protected by a royal privilege (hrisov).\(^{45}\) Besides the fact that they were allowed to build homes in Bacau, the royal hrisov also contained a certain provision regarding their protection, namely any harm brought upon the Hussites was punishable by a fee of twenty Turkish ducats.\(^{46}\) The ruler Alexander the Kind also too special measures to protect the Hussite preachers from the Catholic Cleric’s attempts to exact certain reprisals on them.

Under these conditions, Catholic Bishop Ioan of Ryza, being unable to convert the Moldavian ruler, Alexander the Kind, to Catholicism, signals in 1431 the presence in Baia of a community of Hussites believers gathered around a Krakowian Hussite refugee named Jacob, even narrating some of his declarations from the discussion he had with the Moldavian ruler to the Catholic Bishop of Krakow Sbigneus (Zbygniew). The fact that that discussions was held before the Moldavian ruler confirms the suspicion that it was a call to judgment made by the Bishop before the laic supreme forum. Unable to obtain, from the Moldavian ruler Alexander the Kind, the banishment or the surrender of the Hussites towards whom the ruler showed great favor, Bishop Ioan of Ryza asks the
Catholic Bishop of Krakow to intervene with the king of Poland, Vladislav Iagello, so that the request for the Hussite extradition to appear as a request of the king and not as an initiative of the Catholic Bishop from Moldavia. The letter from March 5th, 1431, sent by the Catholic Bishop of Baia, Ioan of Ryza to Sbigneus (Zbygniew) Okesnicki, the Catholic Bishop of Krakow, comes from the Archive of the Teutonic Order from Göttingen. The document shown brings forward precious information about the history of Hussitism as well as about knowing certain aspects of Moldavia’s religious policy under the ruler Alexander the Kind regarding the support found the Hussites in Moldavia. Moreover the document presents also presents some negative aspects regarding the moral integrity of the Roman Pontiffs.

Due to the fact that the Catholic Bishop Ioan of Ryza failed in all his attempts to stop and prevent the Hussite development and if at first the Episcopal and Princely authorities do not pay much attention to Hussite activities, in 1436 the Catholic Bishop Gheorghe Lepes asks for immediate help to stop and destroy the Hussite heresy. As a consequence to the growing Hussite influence in Hungary and Transylvania, Pope Eugenius the 4th, tasks the Franciscan inquisitor Jacob of Marchia with the mission to eradicate the Hussite heretical movement.

In 1436 the Franciscan Jacob of Marchia is named as Main Vicar in Bosnia and at the same time is tasked with a mission from the Pope and the Synod of Basel to act as inquisitor in Hungary and the Austrian territories, with the purpose of following the Hussite converts. Jacob of Marchia is first invited by the Catholic Bishop of Oradea, then by the Catholic Bishop of Transylvania, Gheorghe Lepes, and the Canon of Cenad. In 1436 the inquisitor Jacob of Marchia is quite active on these territories, with the purpose to eradicate the Hussite teachings, his actions having a strong echo in Transylvania on the eve of the Bobalna Uprising (1437–1438). With this occasion Jacob of Marchia gathered and noted the thesis of the dogmatic teachings of the Hussite converts in Transylvania.

In conclusion we state the fact that for the descendants of Jan Hus, persecuted for their faith in their homeland, migrated to other territories, where they found religious tolerance and the permission
to freely practice their faith. The political authorities at the time from Moldavia and Transylvania offered shelter and support for believers different than those who lived in those territories, and the Hussite believers enjoyed those privileges.

NOTES
1 We mention the fact that this study is part of a much larger work written in Romanian, about the Sabbatarian group in Transylvania. Thus the ideas from this study can be found in a Romanian version by Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, Sabatarienii în contextul vieții transilvane (sec. XVI–XIX). (Cluj–Napoca: Editura Risoprint, 2014), vol. I., 129–140.
10 Ibid., 71.
15 Burned on the steak in 1416.
19 Dr. Anatol Măcriş, *Segmente şi fragmente de istorie*…., 119.
22 Dr. Anatol Măcriş, *Segmente şi fragmente de istorie*, 118.

24 Dr. Anatol Măcruș, Segmente și fragmente de istorie, 118.


31 Ibid.


33 Zbigniew (Sbigneus) Oleśnicki (Polish, 5 December 1389 in Sienno – 1 April 1455). Oskar Halecki; W. F. Reddaway; J. H. Penson, The Cambridge History of Poland. CUP Archive. 237.


36 Documenta Romaniae Historica, A II, p.22, nr.20.
37 Mihail P. Dan, Cehe, slovaci și români în veacurile XIII–XVI, 193.
38 Dr. Anatol Măcriș, Segmente și fragmente de istorie, 119.
40 Melchisedec Ștefănescu, Chronica Hușilor și a episcopiei cu asemenea numire. (București: Tipografia C.A.Rosetti, 1869), 132–133.
42 Rimgailla, (Ringala, Ryngalla) Lithuanian princess, the fourth wife of Alexander the Kind, she was the sister in law to the king of Poland, Vladislav al II-lea lagello.
43 Călători străini despre Țările Române, Maria Holban (ed.). (București: Editura Științifică, 1968), vol I, 62.
44 I. Filitti, Din arhivele Vaticanului, I, (București, 1913), 34–36, doc. 20. The third wife of Alexander the Kind was Rimgailla (Ringala), who was sister to Vytadaus and sister in law to Vladislav al II-lea lagello. At the same time Rimgailla Ringala was related to Alexander the Kind, being first cousin to Anastasia, wife of Roman I and mother of Alexander the Kind. Before the marriage to Alexander the Kind Ringala was married to the duke of Mazovia, but became his widdow. https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexandru_cel_Bun, accsed 17.07.2016.
45 P. P. Panaitescu, Începuturile și biruința scrisului în limba română..., 33–34.
47 The comminatory letter of king Vladislav lagello to the Moldavian ruler, as a result of this appeal, was published in the Monumenta Medii Aevi Historica res gestas Poloniae illustrantia collection, XII, 254–255, where it was also published a letter of the Bishop of Krakow, Zbygniew Olesnicki (Oleśnicy) (1389–1455) to Cardinal Cesarini, informing him of the news received from from Ioan of Ryza, the Catholic Bishop of Baia regarding the progress of Hussitism and Alexander the Kind’s religious policy (Monumenta Medii Aevi Historica res gestas Poloniae illustrantia, XII, 290–291) from the second half of January 1432. He died before April 30th 1438 when his successor, the Dominican Petru Czipser, was named, cf. I. Filitti, Din arhivele Vaticanului, I, 46, doc. I, 36. See Călători străini despre Țările Române, vol. I, 63; For more details: Lorenzo Cardella, Memorie storiche de’ cardinali della Santa Romana Chiesa, (Rome: Stamperia Pagliarini, 1793), III, 81–82; Alfonso Chacón, Vite, et res gestae Pontificvm Romanorum et S. R. E. Cardinalivm ab inicio nascentis Ecclesiae vsque ad Vrbanvm VIII. Pont. Max., 4 vol., (Romae : Typis Vaticanis, 1677), II, col. 910–911; „Essai

48 The translation was made after the original in Latin from the Archive of the Teutonic Order, currently in Göttingen. The text of this letter was published by Serban Petrescu in the article called „Știri noi cu privire la istoria husitismului în Moldova în timpul lui Alexandru cel Bun,” in *Studii și cercetări științifice*, Istorie, Iași, XIII (1962), nr. 2, 257–258. The Catholic Bishop Ioan of Ryza is mentioned by Sadi Ionescu in *Bibliografia călătorilor străini*, 17, and N. Iorga in *Studii și Documente*, I–II, XXXII.


51 Jacob of Marchia (Iacobus Picenus, Iacob de Picano, de Monte Brandone), (n.1394–d.1476), of Italian origin, was a member of the Franciscan Order. In 1432 he is send by Pope Eugen the 4th to tend to the life of the monks of the Franciscan Order in Bosnia, and in 1434 we find him in Cenad, from where he is recalled by the Pope and send to Bosnia again. In 1435 he works in the Pecs Episcopy (Ungaria); About the activity of inquisitor Jacob of Marchia in Transylvania. Look at: *Istoria României*, vol. II, (București: Editura Academiei, 1962), 404; V. Fraknói, *Magyar-ország egyházi és politikai összeköttetései a rămai szentszékkel*, vol. II, (Budapest, 1902), 34 and the following.; Tóth Szabó Pál, A cseh-huszta mozgalmak és uralom története Magyarországon, (Budapest, 1917), 155 and next. cf. "Călători străini despre Țările Române.” Maria Holban (ed.) vol. I, 67–68.


*Călători străini despre Țările Române*. Maria Holban (ed.) vol. I, 67–73.