



THE MENDICANTS' MISSION IN AN ORTHODOX LAND: A CASE STUDY OF MOLDAVIA IN THE THIRTEENTH AND FOURTEENTH CENTURIES

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And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come. (Matthew 24:14)

This quotation from Matthew summarizes one of the purposes of the Mendicants' mission inside and outside Christendom; it was one of the goals of their presence in Moldavia, where they tried to put it into practice. This study will show how the Mendicants developed their mission in Moldavia, what their activities and strategies were, and what their role was in the life of the country from the thirteenth to the fourteenth century. The study will focus on the fourteenth century, the period when the influence of the Mendicants in Moldavia was growing.

Moldavia during the Middle Ages was a region situated at the borderlands of Latin Christendom, inhabited by Orthodox, pagan, and "heretical" populations. The mission in this frontier space, where the majority of the population belonged to Orthodoxy, was different from, and more complex than, missions either in a pagan space or within Western Christendom. The Mendicants had to adapt themselves to this reality.

The popes, who had a special policy towards the region, supported the Mendicants' mission. Papal policy regarding the mission changed during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In the thirteenth century the mission was an apostolic one, supported by privileges granted by the popes. Bishoprics were organized under papal jurisdiction in the newly converted region: this was the basis for new missions launched towards new peoples and regions. It was a policy of expanding Western Christendom's frontier.¹ In the fourteenth century the mission tended to be organized by the local provinces of the orders and through the creation of missionary bishoprics, organized hierarchically and endowed with great privileges. This program was supported by the popes in Avignon, but failed because of the very situation of the papacy and the new political realities.²

¹ C. Morris, *The Papal Monarchy: The Western Church from 1050–1250* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) (hereafter cited as C. Morris, *The Papal Monarchy*), 56.

² At the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century, the papacy was confronted with the Great Schism (1378–1418); Bernhard Schimmelpfennig, *The Papacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 219–230. It also had to face the threat



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Moldavia was considered a country of mission by the papacy and, therefore, great privileges were granted to both Franciscans and Dominicans. The bull that defined the basic statement of the church's missionary function and numbered these privileges was *Cum hora undecima*, issued in 1235 by Pope Gregory IX and reissued in an extended form by Pope Innocent IV in 1245. According to Pope Gregory IX, the task of the missionaries was to fulfill Christ's injunction to preach the gospel to all men so that the process of salvation might be completed. In order to accomplish this task, the missionaries received the right to hear confessions, to absolve excommunicates, to baptize, to administer the sacraments, to appoint priests, to celebrate the mass, to build churches, and to grant indulgences.³

Furthermore, the Mendicants in Moldavia not only enjoyed the privileges granted by the papacy but also had the support of the Polish and Hungarian kings, who were interested in keeping Moldavia under their influence. Whether obeying the papal policy and the interests of the Hungarian and Polish kings, or applying their desire for mission, the Mendicants went into Moldavia and tried to gain it for Catholicism, or at least tried to provide pastoral care for the Catholics living there. Nevertheless, they always had to take into account the attitude of the Moldavian rulers, be they Cumans, Tartars or Orthodox princes.

The Reasons for the Mendicants' Presence in Moldavia

Conversion of the Cumans

The earliest Mendicant presence in the Moldavian region, in the thirteenth century, was related to the Dominican interest in the conversion of the nomadic Cumans. The Cumans were divided into two tribal groupings, Eastern and Western Cumania. The tribes of Eastern Cumania controlled a large area, from the Dnieper to the Volga region all the way to the Black Sea.⁴ Moldavia was part

represented by the Ottomans, who had succeeded in conquering and in imposing their sovereignty over all of southern Europe and Asia. See H. Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire. The Classical Age 1300–1600* (London: Phoenix, 1994). James Muldoon, *The Church and the non-Christian World 1250–1550. Popes, Lawyers and Infidels* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1979) (hereafter Muldoon, *Popes, Lawyers and Infidels*), 54–70.

³ G. Golubovich, *Biblioteca bio-bibliografica delle Terra Santa e dell'Oriente Franceseano* (Florence: Tipografia. Del Collegio di San Bonaventura, 1906–1927) (hereafter G. Golubovich, *Biblioteca bio-bibliografica*), 414–415.

⁴ András Pálóczi Horváth, *Pechenegs, Cumans, Iasians* (Budapest: Corvina kiadó, 1989), 44–46.



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of Western Cumania and its territory was under Cuman rulership until the Mongol invasion.⁵

The Dominicans started their mission in the early 1220s, and enjoyed support from both the ecclesiastical and lay authorities of Hungary.⁶ The missions in Cumania combined a missionary impulse with the interests of the Hungarian church and king.⁷ The conversion of the Cumans would not only stop the raids and establish peace on the eastern borders, but would also lead to the expansion of Hungary's territory. To achieve these objectives, Hungary collaborated closely with the pope, at the same time taking advantage of the activity of the Dominican order.

After a period of intensive preaching to the Cumans, the Dominicans succeeded in gaining an important number of Cumans for Catholicism. Therefore, in order to convert more Cumans to Catholicism, Pope Gregory IX appointed Archbishop Robert to the role of apostolic legate in Cumania and in the Brodniks'⁸ land, and granted him important prerogatives among which was the right to preach, to baptize, to build churches, and to appoint priests and even bishops:

*...legationis officium tibi committere dignaremur, per quod habeas potestatem in eisdem terris vice nostra predicandi, baptizandi, edificandi ecclesias, ordinandi clericos, nec non et creandi episcopos...*⁹

⁵ Victor Spinei, *Moldavia in the 11th–14th Centuries*, tr. Liliana Teodoreanu and Ioana Sturza (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1986) (hereafter Spinei, *Moldavia in the 11th–14th Centuries*), 96–97.

⁶ Guilielmus Schmidt argued that the archbishop of Esztergom, Robert, sent Dominicans to Cumania in 1224 after the settlement of the Teutonic Knights and they convinced the Cumans to ask for conversion. G. Schmidt, *Romano-Catholici per Moldaviam Episcopatus et rei Romano-Catholicae Res Gestae* (Budapest: Typis Societatis Typographicae "Athenaeum," 1887), 13.

⁷ The region was important for the Hungarian kingdom, which could thereby gain access to the Black Sea. See Răzvan Theodorescu, *Bizanz, Balcani, Occident. La începuturile culturii medievale românești (secolele X–XIV)* (Byzantium, the Balkans, the Occident. At the beginning of Romanian medieval culture from the tenth to the fourteenth century) (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1974), 164.

⁸ According to Spinei, the Brodniks were nomadic people like the Cumans, of Turanian origin, who settled in southern Moldavia in the thirteenth century; Spinei, *Moldavia in the 11th–14th Centuries*, 108.

⁹ A. Theiner, *Vetera monumenta historica Hungariam sacram illustrantia*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Rome, 1860) doc. 154, 87.

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The presence of the papal legate and the continuing missionary activities of the Dominicans determined the conversions of a large number of Cumans. As a consequence of these large-scale acts of conversion and of the consolidation of Hungary's position in the outer Carpathian region, the archbishop created a bishopric of the Cumans. Reconstructing the exact territory of the bishopric poses some problems.¹⁰ A delimitation of the borders was made in 1231, as can be inferred from a papal letter from 1234 sent to Theodoric, bishop of the Cumans. Robert, the archbishop of Esztergom, went to the region ... *tuam diocesim limitans*.¹¹ Nevertheless, the exact borders remain a problem under discussion. It has been argued that they included the sub-Carpathian zone in south-western Moldavia and north-eastern Wallachia, as well as a part of south-eastern Transylvania.¹² From the information given by Rogerius in *Carmen miserabile* it can be inferred that the eastern border was the Siret River. He wrote that the Tartar Bochetor, after having crossed this river in 1241, entered the land of the bishop of the Cumans ... *cum aliis regibus, fluvium qui Zerech dicitur transeuntes pervenerunt ad terram episcopi Comanorum*...¹³

The bishopric of the Cumans only had a short life due to the Mongols' attack in 1241. They destroyed the bishopric and its cathedral, and many

¹⁰ Nevertheless, the bishopric did not encompass the whole territory under Cuman rulership. Only a small part of the territory inhabited and controlled by Cumans was part of the bishopric.

¹¹ Eudoxiu Hurmuzaki and Nicolae Densusianu, ed. *Documente privitoare la istoria Românilor* (Documents pertaining to the history of the Romanians), vol. 1, part 1 (Bucharest: Socec, 1887) (hereafter Hurmuzaki), vol. 1, part 1, doc. 103, 130.

¹² Spinei, *Moldavia in the 11th–14th Centuries*, 52. I. Ferenț argued that the bishop of the Cumans never had jurisdiction in southern Transylvania. Ioan Ferenț, *Cumanii și episcopia lor* (The Cumans and their bishopric) (Blaj: Tipografia Seminarului teologic greco-catolic, 1931), 141. Ș. Papacostea argued, based on the Diploma of the Knights of Saint John, that the western border of Cumania was the Olt River. Therefore, the border of the Cumanian bishopric did not extend further west beyond the Bran Pass and Cîmpulung. In the south, the border reached the lower segment of the Danube. Ș. Papacostea, *Between the Crusade and the Mongol Empire*, tr. Liviu Bleoca (Cluj-Napoca: Romanian Cultural Foundation, 1998), 106–107. Gábor Lükő argued, based on toponyms of Turkish origin, that the bishopric encompassed the territory between the Olt and Ialomița rivers. Gábor Lükő, "Havaselve és Moldva népei a X–XII században" (The people of Wallachia and Moldavia from the tenth to the twelfth century) *Ethnographia-Népelet* 3–4 (1936): 90–103.

¹³ Rogerius, "Carmen miserabile," ed. Ladislaus Juhász, in *Scriptores Rerum Hungaricarum*, Vol. 2, ed. Emericus Szentpétery (Budapest: Academia Litter. Hungarica, 1938), 564, republished by Kornél Szovák and László Veszprémy in *Scriptores Rerum Hungaricarum* vol. 2 (Budapest: Nap Kiadó, 1999), 564.



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Dominicans were killed (according to the *Comentariolum*, 90 Dominicans were martyred there¹⁴). After the Mongol invasion, the Hungarian kings made some attempts to restore the bishopric with the help of the Franciscans, who had become influential at the royal court.¹⁵

The Mendicant interest in the Tartars

The presence of the Franciscans in the Moldavian region was related to their interest in the Mongols. The Mongols attracted the Minorites, who tried to convert them.¹⁶ Following papal policy, they believed that converting the Mongols would lead to the liberation of the Holy Land.¹⁷

In order to succeed in their attempts to convert the Mongols, but also to provide care for the Catholics dispersed in the region, the vicariate of *Tartaria Aquilonaris* was created in 1252, encompassing the region from north of the Black Sea to the Caucasus. It was divided into two custodies: Gazaria and Saray. The custody of Gazaria had under its jurisdiction two localities situated in the

¹⁴ László Makkai, *A Milkói (kun) püspökség és népei* (The Cuman bishopric of Milkovia and its people) (Debrecen: Pannonia könyvnyomda, 1936), 43.

¹⁵ Franciscan influences replaced those of the Dominicans at the royal court of Hungary after the blessed Margaret, encouraged by her Dominican confessor, refused to marry as her father wished her to in 1260. See Gábor Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses. Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe*, tr. Éva Pálmai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 277. Nevertheless, the expansion of the Dominican Order in Hungary did not stop for a longer period, as was argued by Erik Fügedi, "La formation des villes et les ordres mendiants en Hongrie," in *Kings, Bishops, Nobles and Burghers in Medieval Hungary*, ed. János Bak, 966–987 (London: Variorum Reprints, 1986). Beatrix Romhányi argues that immediately after the death of Béla IV the General Chapter of the Dominican Order allowed the foundation of a new friary and that the Dominicans were supported by kings Stephen V and Ladislas IV; Beatrix Romhányi, "Settling Features of the Orders in Medieval Hungary," MA Thesis (Department of Medieval Studies, Central European University, Budapest), 32–35. The Franciscans took also the initiative of reestablishing the bishopric of the Cumans. On the Franciscans in Hungary see also János Karácsonyi, *Szent Ferenc rendjének története Magyarországon 1711-ig* (The history of Saint Francis' order in Hungary to 1711) vols 1–2, (Budapest, 1922–24) (hereafter cited as Karácsonyi, *Szent Ferenc*).

¹⁶ Giovanni Soranzo, *Il Papato, l'Europa cristiana e i Tartari. Un secolo di penetrazione occidentale in Asia* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1930).

¹⁷ It was believed that the Tartars would help the Christians to conquer the Holy Land from the Muslims. Muldoon, *Popes, Lawyers and Infidels*, 42.



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south of Moldavia, Vicum¹⁸ and Maurocastrum,¹⁹ in which Franciscans from Italy were active.

The Tartars were the main concern of the Franciscans who were active in the territory of the future Moldavia. In 1278 Pope Nicholas III wrote in a letter to Philip de Fermo, his legate in Hungary, that many Franciscans had been living for a long time (*commorantur*) among the Tartars. "*Minister provincialis fratrum ordinis Minorum regni Ungarie, nobis significare curavit quod plures fratres eiusdem ordinis inter Tartaros commorantur.*"²⁰ Furthermore, the pope specified the territory where these brethren carried out their mission:

*Cum autem nullus sit ibi catholicus episcopus, qui eosdem fratres ad sacros ordines valeat promovere, et civitas de Multo,²¹ posita in confinibus Tartarorum, iamdudum per predictos Tartaros destructa fuerant...*²²

¹⁸ Vicum was first mentioned by the *custos* of Gazaria in a letter of 1287. G. Brătianu identified Vicum with Vicina. G. I. Brătianu, *Recherches sur Vicina et Cetatea Albă. Contribution à l'histoire de la domination byzantine et tatar et du commerce génois sur le littoral roumain de la Mer Noire* (Bucharest, 1935), 58–60. The location of Vicina is debated; it has not yet been identified on the ground but it was probably somewhere between Chilia and Cetatea Albă. A *Ludovicus Vicinensis, de ordine Minorum* was present in Cracow in 1371 when the bishop of Siret was consecrated. See N. Iorga, *Istoria Bisericii românești* (The history of the Romanian Church) second ed., vol. 1 (Bucharest: Editura Ministerului de Culte, 1928), 34. Constantin Andreescu considered that Vicina might be in the present-day Dobrogea. C. Andreescu, "Așezări franciscane la Dunăre și Marea Neagră" (Franciscan houses on the Danube and the Black Sea), *Cercetări istorice* 8–9, no. 2 (1932–1933): 163; Malciuc Petru Herkulan situated Vicina in the south of Moldavia. Herkulan Malciuc Petru, *Presenza minoritica nei territori della Moldavia nell' epoca medievale (secc. XII–XV)* (Rome: Pontificium Athenaeum Antonianum, 1999) (hereafter Herkulan, *Presenza minoritica*), 57.

¹⁹ Maurocastrum or Albi Castri is Cetatea Albă, also called Akkerman by the Ottomans.

²⁰ *Documenta Romaniae Historica, D. Relații între Țările Române*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1977) (hereafter DRH. D), doc. 12, 29.

²¹ N. Iorga interpreted "civitas de Multo" as "civitas de Mylco" and identified the bishopric of Milkovia with the former bishopric of the Cumans. N. Iorga, *Studii și documente privitoare la istoria Românilor*, vol. 2, *Acte relative la istoria cultului catolic în principate* (Studies and documents regarding the history of the Romanians, vol. 2, Papers related to the history of the Catholic faith in the Romanian principalities) (Bucharest: Socec, 1901) (hereafter cited as Iorga, *Studii și Documente*), xix, footnote 2. Nevertheless, there is another explanation of "civitas de Multo." Bolșacov-Ghimpu interpreted "Multo" as "Multă" or "Mulda," which means Moldavia. He argued that "Mulda" is Baia. See A. A. Bolșacov-Ghimpu, "Episcopi ortodocși din Țările Române în secolul al XIII-lea"



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It has been argued that the Franciscans were preaching in the territories of the former bishopric of the Cumans. This papal letter implies that the Franciscans not only preached among Tartars, but also lived and traveled together with them. They tried to accomplish their task of administering the sacraments and thereby to win more people over to Catholicism.

*Inter istos tartaros pastores gregum, fratres minores Sanctae Francisci habent quinque loca mobilia in papilionibus filtro coopertis, et cum Tartaris moventur de loco ad locum, in curribus portantes loca et libros et utensilia, qui Tartaris predicant et baptizant et administrant credentibus sacramenta.*²³

The Franciscans seemed to enjoy a warm welcome from the Tartars, as can be inferred from the letter quoted above. However, they sometimes had to face the Tartars' displeasure; living and preaching among the Tartars exposed them to the possibility of martyrdom. In 1314 Angelo da Spoleto was killed by Tartars in Maurocastro: *item in Maurocastro Frater Angelus de Spoleto, tunc custos fratrum, interemptus est per bulgaros*²⁴ and the Franciscan Pietro da Unghera was killed by *saraceni della Tartaria Aquilonare, limitrofa alla Transilvania*.²⁵

The Dominicans were also active in the conversion of the Tartars at the beginning of the fourteenth century. In February 1327, the pope asked Basarab, the voivode of Wallachia, to allow Dominicans from Hungary to cross his country en route to preach to the Tartars: *hostes crucis de remotis partibus Alamannie et polonie circumpositis regionibus*...²⁶ Nevertheless, the Mendicants failed in their attempts to convert a large number of Tartars.²⁷

(Orthodox bishops from the Romanian Countries in the thirteenth century), *Glasul Bisericii* 30, no. 1–2 (1971): 118–119.

²² DRH. D, doc. 12, 29.

²³ Furthermore the Franciscans "...quia bellare nolunt, nec arma portare, et quia terras et venias nollunt possidere, sed solum loca humilia, ubi possint hospitari, cum omnes alii habeant possessiones..." J. Elemosina, *Chronicon*, ed. G. Golubovich in *Biblioteca bio-bibliografica*, vol. 2, 125–126. This situation reflected the mission of the Franciscans from *Tartaria Aquilonaris*, but the situation might have been similar in the Moldavian region.

²⁴ Wadding, *Annales Minorum*, (Rome: Typis Rochi Bernabo, 1733), vol. 7, 712–714.

²⁵ Golubovich, *Biblioteca bio-bibliografica*, 182.

²⁶ DRH. D, doc. 17, 39.

²⁷ The Tartars were the masters of the region and therefore they were less receptive to conversion to Catholicism. Furthermore, they converted to Islam, which made the mission of the Mendicants impossible. Virgil Ciocăltan, "Hegemonia hoardei de Aur la Dunărea de Jos (1301–1341)" (The Golden Horde's hegemony on the Lower Danube (1301–1341), *Revista Istorică* 5, no. 1–2 (1994): 1100–1111. See also Virgil Ciocăltan,



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Following the Merchants

The presence of Catholic merchants in the northern part of the Black Sea was another reason for the Mendicants' activities into the region. It has been argued that the Mendicants followed the merchants on their routes. An important commercial route crossed Moldavia and therefore Mendicants could be found in Moldavia as well.

In the first half of the fourteenth century the most important commercial route in the region was known by the name of *via tartarica*; it stretched from the Baltic Sea to Caffa. The insecurity of the Tartar route, which crossed the lands under Tartar domination, and the importance of Lviv, which gained the right of emporium, led to the development of another commercial route in the second half of the fourteenth century, the so-called *via moldava*, which ended in Chilia and Cetatea Albă.²⁸ Therefore both the Hungarian and Polish kings, and later the Moldavian prince, were interested in these two towns.²⁹

The commercial importance of Chilia and Cetatea Albă, situated in southern Moldavia, determined their incorporation in an organized bishopric run by Mendicants. Beginning in 1318, or perhaps 1317, when the Catholic bishopric of Caffa was founded (under the archbishopric of Genoa), southern Moldavia was under its jurisdiction. The first bishop was a Franciscan,

Mongolii și Marea Neagră în secolele XIII–XIV (The Mongols and the Black Sea from the thirteenth to the fourteenth century) (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1998).

²⁸ D. Deletant, "Moldavia between Hungary and Poland, 1347–1412," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 64, no. 2 (1986): 203–204. Chilia was the destination of another commercial route that crossed the Hungarian kingdom. See in this respect Zsigmond Pál Pach, "Le commerce du Levant et la Hongrie au Moyen Age," *Annales. E.S.C.* 31, no. 6 (1976): 1176–1194. Ștefan Andreescu argued that *via moldava* gained predominance only in the beginning of the fifteenth century. See Ștefan Andreescu, "Note despre Cetatea Albă" (A Few Notes on Cetatea Albă), *Studii și materiale de istorie medie* 18 (2000): 57–77.

²⁹ In the fourteenth century both cities were under Genoese jurisdiction and were important places for commerce and also for Mendicant activities; the two cities belonged to Moldavia between 1410 and 1420. The interest of the Hungarian king, Sigismund of Luxemburg, and the Polish king in these two commercial towns was manifested in 1412 when they signed the Treaty of Lublau. They agreed to share sovereignty over Moldavia should it refuse to help them in a war against the Ottoman Empire, and to take control over the two cities: Hungary would take Chilia, and Poland would take Cetatea Albă. See on this topic Florin Constantiniu and Șerban Papacostea, "Tratatul de la Lublau (15 martie 1412) și situația internațională a Moldovei la începutul veacului al XV-lea" (The Lublau Treaty and the international situation of Moldavia in the beginning of the fourteenth century), *Studii. Revista de Istorie* 17, no. 5 (1964): 1138–1140.



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Hieronymus, who was succeeded by a Dominican, Matthew.³⁰ The Mendicants were interested not only in pagans and Catholics living in the territory of Moldavia, but also in the Orthodox population.

The Conversion of the Orthodox

The Mendicants did not have a special strategy for converting the Orthodox. They had to deal with the Orthodox Romanian population in the bishopric of the Cumans as early as the 1220s. In 1234, Pope Gregory IX wrote to King Béla of Hungary about the Orthodox people, and recommended to him that he support the bishop of the Cumans in applying the canon of the Fourth Lateran Council regarding the Orthodox.³¹ After the Second Council of Lyon (1274), where the union of the Churches was accomplished, the Mendicants also turned their attention to the Orthodox.

Although neither the popes nor the Mendicants had a coherent policy regarding the conversion of the Orthodox, this was foreseen—and the Orthodox were targeted—by the Mendicants in Moldavia.³² A Franciscan, Antonius de Spoleto, *qui linguam dicte nationis scire asseritur, baptizasse et magnum fructum sua predicatione animabus eorum dicitur attulisse*³³ converted Romanians to Catholicism using the method of preaching in their language, a method envisaged by the Mendicants from the very beginning of their foundation. The popes also considered this method a good solution for conversions.³⁴

Despite their attempts to convert the Orthodox, the Mendicants were not successful in this activity and their strategies failed. Furthermore, their activities in Moldavia were hindered because they could not count on the support of the population, the majority of whom were Orthodox. Therefore they organized themselves in small houses with few members, and not the twelve people

³⁰ Spinei, *Moldavia in the 11th–14th Centuries*, 171.

³¹ A papal letter, in DRH. D, doc. 9, 21. The bishop of the Cumans had to appoint a vicar for the Orthodox. The Fourth Crusade meant the end of the schism in the view of the pope, therefore the Orthodox as part of the Catholic Church did not need to be converted to Catholicism. Radu Constantinescu, "Note privind istoria bisericii române în secolele XIII–XV" (Notes on the history of the Romanian church from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century), *Studii și materiale de istorie medie* 6 (1973), 188.

³² Claudine Delacroix-Besnier, *Les Dominicains et la chrétienté grecque aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1997), 43 (hereafter Delacroix-Besnier, *Les Dominicains et la chrétienté grecque*).

³³ Hurmuzaki, vol. 1, part 2, 216–217.

³⁴ See in this regard the papal letter published in Hurmuzaki, vol. 1, part 2, 216–217.



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minimum in a house which was required by the statutes of the orders. Moreover, they sought properties and privileges.³⁵

The Reestablishment of the Bishopric of the Cumans

The interest of the Hungarian kings in reestablishing the bishopric of the Cumans coincided at the end of the thirteenth century with the papacy's interest in applying the decisions taken at the Council of Lyon II (1274). The union of the two Churches, settled in Lyon, was an important decision that had to be put into practice. The instruments of the papal policy in this respect were the Mendicants, especially the Franciscans. Franciscan interest in the former bishopric of the Cumans (called in the fourteenth century the bishopric of Milkovia³⁶) coincided with the anti-Mongol operations undertaken by King Charles I of Anjou (1301–1342). His actions might be also regarded as an example of the expansionist policy of Hungary towards the Carpathian region.

The papacy supported both the Franciscans and the Hungarian king, and granted privileges to those who were fighting against the Mongols. In 1314, Pope Clement V absolved the sins of those who would die fighting against the Tartars and schismatics.³⁷ In 1332, Pope John XXII, at the request of Charles I, renounced in favor of the king one third of the revenue of the Pontifical Seat from the Kingdom of Hungary, which derived from a three-year vacancy of the church benefices, to use in the campaign against the Ruthenes, schismatics, and pagans.³⁸ Moreover, the pope agreed to remit to the king within six years a third of the tithes to which he was entitled in Hungary, to be used toward the same end.³⁹

Furthermore, the popes appointed a number of Mendicant friars as bishops of Milkovia. In 1327, Pope John XXII appointed Luca de Castello

³⁵ J. Kloczowsky, "Dominicans of the Polish Provinces," in *La Pologne dans l'Eglise médiévale* (Norfolk: Variorum, 1993) (hereafter cited as J. Kloczowsky, "Dominicans of the Polish Provinces"), 93. See also the case mentioned above regarding the Dominican privileges to gather the income of the custom duties in Siret.

³⁶ It was called Milkovia after the name of the town where the cathedral stood. In the documents it appears with the name Milkovia in the papal letter of 1332 when Vitus de Monteferro was appointed as its bishop. Nevertheless, as noted above, according to Iorga the name Mylco appeared in the papal letter sent to Philip de Fermo in 1278. See DRH. D, doc. 22, 45–46.

³⁷ Hurmuzaki, vol. 1, part 1, 575.

³⁸ Hurmuzaki, vol. 1, part 1, 618

³⁹ Hurmuzaki, vol. 1, part 1, 623.



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administratori ecclesiae cumane, in spiritualibus et temporalibus auctoritate apostolica deputato. The same papal letter mentioned Leon, a former bishop of the Cumans.⁴⁰ In 1332, at the request of the Hungarian king, Pope John XXII asked the archbishop of Esztergom to take care of the bishopric and to appoint Vitus de Monteferre, the chaplain of the Hungarian king, as bishop. In 1347 another bishop of Milkovia was appointed, in the person of Thomas of Nympti, who was also the chaplain of the Hungarian king.⁴¹ The appointed bishops of Milkovia never went to their bishopric; they were mentioned as suffragans of other bishoprics or as carrying out missions for the Hungarian king. This was the case with Thomas of Nympti, who some months after his appointment was in Venice as the envoy of the Hungarian king.⁴² It may be assumed that all the Hungarian and papal attempts failed to make the bishopric functional.⁴³ Șerban Papacostea has argued, however, that the bishopric functioned during the rulership of Louis I of Anjou, whose military campaigns in the region coincided at the ecclesiastical level with the reestablishment of the bishopric of Milkovia.⁴⁴ A letter of Pope Clement VI from 1348 implies that conversions were made in the region of Cumania,⁴⁵ therefore he wrote to the provincial minister of the Dominicans in Hungary about the necessity for friars to go there to support the *novella plantacio*, and to convert the others:

*Attendemus igitur, quod in partibus Cumanie, ... multis ex infidelis ipsis ad ipsius agnitionem fidei iam conversis, nos desiderantes attente, ut huiusmodi novella plantacio, ... aliquos ex fratribus ordinis vestri, ad dictas partes destinare curetis...*⁴⁶

Moreover, in subsequent years new bishops were appointed to the bishopric. The Polish Dominican Bernard of Mazovia was promoted as bishop

⁴⁰ Hurmuzaki, vol. 1, part 1, doc. 478, 602.

⁴¹ Hurmuzaki, vol. 1, part 2, doc. 4, 4

⁴² Hurmuzaki, vol. 1, part 2, doc. 5, 6.

⁴³ C. Auner considered that the bishopric could not have been reestablished because the independent voivode of Wallachia could not agree to a Catholic bishopric in his territories. See Carol Auner, "Episcopia Milcoviei în veacul al XIV-lea. Încercări de restaurare" (The Bishopric of Milkovia in the fourteenth century. The attempts at restoration), *Revista Catolică* 3 (1914): 63–65.

⁴⁴ Șerban Papacostea, *Geneza statului în Evul Mediu românesc* (The genesis of the state in the Romanian Middle Ages) (Bucharest: Corint, 1999) (hereafter cited as Ș. Papacostea, *Geneza statului*), 42–43.

⁴⁵ It should be mentioned that even in the fourteenth century the popes referred to the region as Cumania.

⁴⁶ Hurmuzaki, vol. 1, part 2, doc. 8, 7.

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of Milkovia on 12 February 1353. As no revenues were obtainable, two months after his appointment Innocent VI exempted him temporarily from paying taxes. Bernard lived in Germany and Bohemia until 1357, when he was transferred to Plock in Poland.⁴⁷ In 1364, Albert de Usk was appointed the bishop of Milkovia; he was also absolved from paying taxes.⁴⁸

The Hungarian king's interest in Milkovia was even greater when the bishopric of Siret⁴⁹ was founded under the influence of Poland. In order to counteract this influence in Moldavia, a new bishop, Nicholas of Buda, was appointed to the seat of Milkovia.⁵⁰ The pope wrote to the Hungarian king to help the new bishop recover the possessions of the bishopric: ...*in recuperandis bonis et iuribus dicte sue ecclesie*.⁵¹ Another solution to make the bishopric functional was to appoint a bishop who could speak the language of the majority of the population there. In 1374 the pope mentioned Antonio de Spoleto, who was preaching in the bishopric of Milkovia and had converted many people, especially Romanians, because he knew their language:

*Anthonius de Spoleto ordinis fratrum Minorum professor, qui linguam dicte nationis scire asseritur et qui tempore dicte conversionis multos ex dictis Wlachis convertisse, baptizasse, et magnum fructum sua predicatione animabus eorum dicitur attulisse, ...*⁵²

⁴⁷ Hurmuzaki, vol. 1, part 2, doc. 36, 45–46.

⁴⁸ The bishops *in partibus* of Milkovia never went to their bishopric because, as the papal letter stated, there were no incomes, and its properties had been taken by powerful people of the region. DRH. D, 63.

⁴⁹ The bishopric of Siret was founded in 1370 and encompassed the whole territory of the country of Moldavia. The southern part of the country belonged to the bishopric of Milkovia. More details about the Siret bishopric are given below.

⁵⁰ Gheorghe I. Moisescu, *Catholicismul în Moldova până la sfârșitul veacului XIV* (Catholicism in Moldavia until the end of the fourteenth century) (Bucharest: Tipografia Cărilor bisericești, 1942) (hereafter cited as Moisescu, *Catholicismul în Moldova*), 45.

⁵¹ Hurmuzaki, vol. 1, part 2, doc. 134, 175. The properties and rights of the bishopric were occupied by the former archbishop of Esztergom, as can be inferred from a papal letter in the same year sent to the archbishop of Esztergom. Hurmuzaki, I/2, doc. 135, 176. In a letter sent to the Hungarian king, the pope also mentioned some lay persons who had taken over the properties of the bishopric; see the letter in Hurmuzaki, vol. 1, part 1, doc. 496, 622.

⁵² Hurmuzaki, vol. 1, part 2, doc. 133, 174–175. In this respect see also Donato Fabianich, *Storia dei frati minori dai primordi della loro istituzione in Dalmazia e Bossina fino ai giorni nostri*, vol. 1, (Zadar: Tip. Fratelli Battara, 1863), 137–138.



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Nevertheless, he was not appointed bishop and we have no information about other bishops for 50 years. The last mention of the bishopric of Milkovia was in 1511, when Pope Julius II subordinated it to the archbishop of Ezstergom.⁵³

Papal bulls hinted at the boundaries of the bishopric of Milkovia in 1332 and 1347 when they specified that *Episcopatus Milkoviensis in regno Hungariae, in finibus videlicet Tartarorum*.⁵⁴ New information about the boundaries of the bishopric appeared in the letter of Pope Eugenius IV when, in October 1431, he appointed the archdeacon of Satu Mare as bishop of Milkovia and mentioned that the bishopric as situated in Wallachia and belonging to the province of Kalocsa: "*ecclesie Milcoviensi in Valachia provincie Colocensis etc. de persona domini Emerici Zechel presbiteri archidiaconi de Zathmarensi*"⁵⁵ Another mention of the bishopric's limits dates from 1453, when the bishop of Milkovia informed Pope Nicholas V that parts of Transylvania had belonged to his diocese in the past. The bishop succeeded in persuading the pope to move the seat to Braşov, under the pretext that Milkovia had suffered a great deal from Turkish invasions and that its inhabitants were Orthodox. Protests by the bishop of Esztergom led the pope to revoke the previous decisions.⁵⁶ Despite the absence of the bishops of Milkovia from their bishopric, the mission of conversion was carried on by the Mendicants, who still considered Moldavia a country of mission, *Terra Peregrinantium*.⁵⁷

⁵³ Hurmuzaki, vol. 2, part 1, doc. 28, 25–27. The pope was motivated in his decision by the fact that the bishopric had previously belonged to this archbishopric. Karácsonyi argued that the Franciscans of the observant province of Hungary asked the pope to revoke the privileges granted to the bishop of Milkovia to appoint priests in Moldavia and to give to them this right instead. The pope did even more, abolishing the bishopric by merging it with the archbishopric of Esztergom. See Karácsonyi, *Szent Ferenc*, vol. 2, 13.

⁵⁴ Hurmuzaki, vol. 1, part 2, doc. 4, 4.

⁵⁵ I. C. Filitti, ed, *Din Arhivele Vaticanului*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Tipografia Dim. C. Ionescu, 1914), (hereafter cited as Filitti, 1), 42.

⁵⁶ Hurmuzaki, vol. 2, part 2, 16–18.

⁵⁷ Moldavia was considered *Terra Peregrinantium* even in the fifteenth century, when the general minister of the Dominican Order wrote that "*frater Nicolaus Iordanis de conventu Cassoviensi et frater Michael de Buda fuerunt deputati predicatoris nationis Moldaviensis sive Terre Peregrinantium*." See P. Loenertz "*Les missions dominicaines en Orient au XIV^e siècle et la Société des Frères Pérégrinants pour le Christ*," *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 4 (1934) (hereafter cited as Loenertz "*Les missions dominicaines en Orient*"), 45.

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The Mendicants' Activities and Strategies in the Fourteenth Century

It has been argued that at the beginning of the fourteenth century the Franciscans were present in other parts of Moldavia besides the territories of the former bishopric of the Cumans. Paulinus of Venice, in his work dated to 1343 by C. Eubel,⁵⁸ mentioned five Franciscan houses situated in the territory of Moldavia belonging to the vicariate of Russia: *Cereth*, *Modalvie*, *Cotham*, *Licostomo*, and *Albi Castri*.⁵⁹ The first three, identified with Siret, Baia, and Hotin, were situated in the northern part of the country; the other two, identified with Chilia and Cetatea Albă were in the south.⁶⁰

The sources show that missionary activities in Moldavia in the first half of the fourteenth century were carried on by the Polish Franciscans supported by the Polish kingdom, which became interested in the mouth of the Danube after conquering Red Rus' in 1340. Nevertheless, Hungarian Franciscans were also present in Moldavia. In 1348, Pope Clement VI asked the provincial of Minorites in Hungary to send missionaries to Moldavia *in partibus Cumanie... infra fines*

⁵⁸ The dating of Paulinus of Venice's work is debated. Its editor, C. Eubel, proposed the year 1343. K. Kantak argued that the list of the Franciscan houses dated from the end of the fourteenth century and it is identical with the one of Bartholomeus Pisanus. See in this respect Kamil Kantak *Franciszki polscy* (The Polish Franciscans) vol. 1 (Cracow, 1937), 274.

⁵⁹ The list encompassed 13 houses: Lemburg, Grodech, Colomia, Galfiff, Nostin, Caminix, Scotorix, Cusminen, Cereth, Modaluie, Cotham, Licostoni, Albi Castri. Herkulan identified Cereth with Siret, Cotham with Hotin, Moldavie with Moldovitzam, Licostoni with Chilia and Albi Castri with Cetatea Albă, Herkulan, *Presenza minoritica*, 67–69. The same identification is proposed by J. Moorman, *Medieval Franciscan Houses* (New York: The Franciscan Institute. St. Bonaventure University, 1983), 7, 307, 448. Gh. Moisescu identified Moldauie with Baia. See Moisescu, *Catolicismul în Moldova*, 84. See also C. Giurescu. *Tirguri sau orașe și cetăți moldovene din secolul X până la mijlocul secolului XVI* (Boroughs or towns and Moldavian fortresses from the tenth to the middle of the sixteenth century) (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1967), 86.

⁶⁰ There is no clear evidence for the presence of all these five Franciscan houses on the territory of Moldavia around 1340. The presence of the Franciscans in Siret in 1340 might be possible as Wadding mentioned martyrdom in Siret. In 1340 Blasius and Marcus were killed in Moldavia: ...*quando in Valachia et civitate Seret frater Blasius, una cum fratre Marco martyrii coronam fortiter adipiscebatur...* Lucas Wadding, *Annales Minorum seu trium ordinum a San Francisco institutorum* (Florence: Ad Claras Aquas, 1931) (hereafter Wadding, *Annales Minorum*), 287. A Franciscan house in Cetatea Albă is mentioned in a list from 1330. See C. Andreescu, *Așezări franciscane*, 4–7. Chilia and Cetatea Albă were incorporated in the bishopric of Caffa in 1318 and previously were part of the custody of Gazaria.



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regni Hungarie in order to reinforce the Catholicism of the *novella plantatio*.⁶¹ Despite the presence of the Franciscans from Hungary, the Polish Franciscans were more active; they succeeded in converting Lațcu, the Orthodox voivode, and in establishing a bishopric in Siret.

The Franciscans and Lațcu's Conversion

In 1370, as a result of Franciscan preaching activities, but also for other reasons, Voivode Lațcu manifested his desire for conversion to Catholicism. Discussions regarding the union of the two Christian Churches and Lațcu's interest in being recognized as an independent ruler were two of the reasons which determined the conversion of the voivode.⁶²

Franciscans of the Polish province (the two envoys of the Moldavian prince to the pope were two Franciscans from this province, Nicholas de Mehlsack⁶³ and Paul de Schweidnitz⁶⁴), who carried on missions in Moldavia, prepared the conversion of Lațcu, his recognition as a ruler by the pope, and the establishment of the bishopric of Siret. The pope himself presented the desire of

⁶¹ Hurmuzaki, vol. 1, part 2, 8.

⁶² There are many opinions on the conversion of Lațcu; therefore I will cite only the best-known ones; C. Auner considered that Lațcu converted because he wanted to integrate Moldavia into Western culture and religion. Carol Auner, "Episcopia de Seret" (The bishopric of Siret), *Revista Catolică* 2 (1913) (hereafter cited as Auner, "Episcopia de Seret"), 233; Gh. Moisesescu argued that the conversion was mainly for political reasons, Lațcu wanted to be recognized as an independent ruler and to have an independent church, Moisesescu, *Catholicismul în Moldova*, 69–70. Regarding the papal interest in the conversion of Lațcu, Ș. Papacostea argues that the papal policy towards Moldavia contradicted the Hungarian policy because giving an independent bishopric meant the recognition of the independence of the state. See Papacostea, *Geneza statului*, 279. According to A. A. Vasiliev, the papal policy was related to its attempts to unite the churches, after the conversion of the Emperor of Constantinople to Catholicism in 1369, A. A. Vasiliev, "Il viaggio di Giovanni V Paleologo in Italia e l'unione di Roma," *Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici* 3 (1931): 151–193.

⁶³ Nicolaus Mehlsack has been identified as Nicolaus Melsak de Krosno, the vicar of the vicariate of Russia. This explains why he was chosen by Lațcu as his personal envoy to the pope, Herkulan, *Presenza minoritica*, 118. N. Iorga stated that he was the chaplain of Queen Hedwiga, Iorga, *Studii și Documente*, XXIX. Gh. Moisesescu considered that he was the confessor of Queen Elisabeth of Hungary and in 1387 *custos Moldaviensis*. Moisesescu, *Catholicismul în Moldova*, 72.

⁶⁴ Paul de Schweidnitz was a German from Silesia who was a missionary in Moldavia. See Herkulan, *Presenza minoritica*, 118.



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the Moldavian prince for conversion as a consequence of the preaching activities of the Minorites:

*Laczko Dux Moldaviensis ac populus sui ducatus, qui licet christianitatis nomine gloriarentur, tamen scismatici fuerant et adhuc erant, quorundam fratrum ordinis Minorum predicationibus inducti abnegare volebant omne scisma et profiteri sanctam fidem, quam apostolica et Catholica tenet ecclesia...*⁶⁵

He received the news with great interest, especially because he was working for the union of the Orthodox with the Catholic Church. An Orthodox prince converted to Catholicism would have supported his ideas for the union. Therefore Urban V, interested in accomplishing this conversion as soon as possible, wrote to the bishops of Cracow and Prague⁶⁶ about the Moldavian voivode's desire for conversion and charged them with the task of finding out whether the situation was as the two Franciscans described it. The pope also responded favorably to the request of the voivode for an independent bishopric in Siret, which was previously dependent on Halicz:

*ipsius Ducis nobis humiliter supplicato, ut oppidum suum Ceretense Halecensis diocesis in civitatem erigere et civitatis vocabulo insignire, ac ipsi episcoporum Catholicum, qui ipsos ducem et populum in dicta fide instrueret et nutriret...*⁶⁷

The preparation undertaken by the Franciscans for this conversion is also shown by Lațcu's desire that the first bishop to be appointed in the newly constituted bishopric be the Minorite Andreas Wasilio of Cracow.⁶⁸ The pope responded favorably to this demand and "...*dilectius filius Andreas de Cracovia dicti ordinis fratrum Minorum professor, in sacerdotio constitutus, utilis et idoneus essent ad regimen dicte ecclesie,*"⁶⁹ was appointed and confirmed by the bishop of Cracow in March, 1371. Nevertheless, he was not eager to go to his bishopric. In

⁶⁵ Hurmuzaki, vol. 1, part 2, doc. 125, 162.

⁶⁶ The Franciscan missionaries in Siret belonged to the province of Poland-Bohemia, as the papal letter shows. See J. Sýkora, "Poziția internațională a Moldovei în timpul lui Lațcu: lupta pentru independență și afirmare pe plan extern" (The international position of Moldavia during the reign of Lațcu: the struggle for the independence and affirmation on the external front), *Revista de Istorie* 29, no. 2 (1976) (hereafter cited as Sýkora, "Poziția internațională a Moldovei în timpul lui Lațcu"): 1144.

⁶⁷ Hurmuzaki, vol. 1, part 2, doc. 125, 162. The Moldavian ecclesiastical hierarchy was dependent on Halicz: the separation of Halicz and their rulers could have been a reason for Lațcu's request. See Papacostea, *Geneza statului*, 279.

⁶⁸ Andreas Wasilio of Cracow was born in Poland in 1320 into the noble family of Jastrzebiec; in 1388 he was appointed bishop of Vilna. Herkulan, *Presenza minoritica*, 120.

⁶⁹ Hurmuzaki, vol. 1, part 2, doc. 125, 162.



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December 1371 he was still in Lviv.⁷⁰ His bishopric did not encompass all of Moldavia; the southern part of the country belonged to the bishopric of Milkovia.⁷¹

The pope must have considered that the conversion of the prince and the establishment of an organized ecclesiastical hierarchy would be a useful instrument for the conversion of the people.⁷² Encouraged by the conversion of Lațcu, he found it necessary that new friars be sent to the region in order to win over the people to Catholicism. In 1370 he asked Nicholas de Mehlsack to send twenty-five friars to Russia, Lithuania, and Moldavia:

*viginti quinque fratres ordinis minorum, cuius professor existis, quos vita, discretione et literatura idoneos ad hoc fore putaveris..., de quibuscunque nationibus et conventibus assumendi et recipiendi ac ducendi seu mittendi ad easdem partes, ... in eisdem morandi pro propagatione et conservatione Catholice fidei fideliter laborando...*⁷³

However, the conversion of Lațcu did not mean the conversion of the population; his wife was still Orthodox and therefore in 1372 Lațcu asked the pope for advice. In his answer, the pope congratulated Lațcu on his conversion and advised him to try to convert his wife to Catholicism, but he did not pronounce a divorce, and declared the children legitimate:

Litteras tue nobilitatis gratanter recepimus ad quarum contenta praesentibus respondemus, quod si ut de tua conversione ad catholicam fidem et obedienciam sacrosancte Romane ecclesie, ... et tua bona perseverantia in domino gratulamur, ita de tue uxoris, que in prioribus erroribus permanet, pertinacia condolemus, sperantes quod tu salutaribus et sedulis monitis, tueque preclare ac sincere

⁷⁰ The pope asked him to arrest the priest John of Lviv, who although Catholic, preached the Orthodox religion. See the letter in Hurmuzaki, vol. 1, part 2, doc 136, 176–178.

⁷¹ The Bishopric of Siret encompassed all of Moldavia that was under Lațcu's rulership, as the pope stated in his letter: "...ac totam dictam Terram seu Ducatum Moldaviensem in quantum ad praefatum ducem pertinet," Hurmuzaki, vol. 1, part 2, doc. 124, 161. It is argued that southern Moldavia did not belong at that time to the country of Moldavia. Sýkora, "Poziția internațională a Moldovei în timpul lui Lațcu," 1148.

⁷² In the same years a similar process took place in Lithuania. See P. Rabikauskas, "La cristianizzazione della Lituania (XIII e XIV secolo)," in *L'église et le peuple chrétien dans les pays de l'Europe du Centre-Est et du Nord (XIV^e–XV^e siècles)* (Rome: Ecole Française de Rome, 1990), 3–10.

⁷³ Hurmuzaki, vol. 1, part 2, doc. 126, 163.



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*fidelitatis exemplis ad prefatam fidem et obedienciam convertas eandem, te non intendimus cogere ad eam quocumque tempore dimittendam.*⁷⁴

Lașcu's conversion and the creation of the bishopric might have been seen as a step forwards in the work of the union of the churches, but the bishopric did not accomplish its task because most of the bishops appointed to Siret did not go to their bishopric. In subsequent years the bishopric of Siret became only a nominal function; the last known bishop, Ioannes Petrus, was appointed in 1434, but he never went to his bishopric.⁷⁵

*The Congregation of Friars Pilgrims for Christ among the Gentiles*⁷⁶

Although the bishops of Siret did not carry out their duties, the mission was carried on by the Mendicants, especially by Dominicans, members of the Congregation of Friars Pilgrims or *Societas Fratrum Peregrinantium per Christum inter gentes*, founded around 1300. The most important convents, the basis of the Society, were the convent of Pera created in 1299, and the convents of Caffa (1298) and Trebizond (1315). The Congregation was a network of convents and small houses, which enjoyed many papal privileges, situated along the routes of the Genoese commercial empire. The Congregation was abolished for the first time in 1363, but it was restored in 1376 and became even more active, enjoying great prestige. The final act was played out in 1456 when, after the fall of Constantinople, the Congregation was abolished for the second time.⁷⁷ The

⁷⁴ The letter is quoted in Auner, "Episcopia de Seret," 242.

⁷⁵ C. Auner, "Cei din urmă episcopi de Seret" (The last bishops of Siret), *Revista Catolică* 2 (1914): 567.

⁷⁶ The origins of *Societas Fratrum Peregrinantium* have been debated. Based on Wadding's information, it was considered to have been created in 1252 and to have included both Franciscans and Dominicans. See Wadding, *Annales Minorum*, 328. R. Loenertz considered that *Societas Fratrum Peregrinantium* was created around 1300 and was formed only by Dominicans. In 1398 a bull of Boniface IX mentioned that *Societas Fratrum Peregrinantium* encompassed Franciscans as well: "Fratres predicatorum et minorum ordinum Societatis Fratrum Peregrinantium nuncupati." H. Sbaralea ed., *Bullarium Franciscanum*, vol. 7 (Rome, 1764), no. 257. Marcelino da Civezza considered that *Societas Fratrum Peregrinantium* was formed both by Franciscans and Dominicans. Marcelino da Civezza, *Storia universale delle missioni francescane* (Rome: Tipografia Tiberina, 1857–1895). L. Lemmens considered that the Dominicans and Franciscans each had its own *Societas*, and that they were completely separated. L. Lemmens, "Die Heidenmissionen des Spätmittelalters," *Franziskanische Studien* 5 (1919): 3–5.

⁷⁷ See Loenertz "Les missions dominicaines en Orient," 1–15, and Delacroix-Besnier, *Les Dominicains et la chrétienté grecque*, 10–12.



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Dominicans of the *Societas Fratrum Peregrinantium* were more than missionaries; they were appointed inquisitors in the Orient beginning in 1351. Pope Urban V divided the region where they conducted their inquisitorial activities into three parts: Romania-Gazaria, Ruthenia-Moldavia-Wallachia, and Armenia-Georgia.⁷⁸ Elie Petit, the vicar of the Congregation, obtained from Pope Gregory IX the privileges of "*pro Christo peregrinantibus in terris infidelium misericorditer sit indultum quod bona mobilia et immobilia possint obtinere.*"⁷⁹ The Congregation became influential in Moldavia after 1377, when the Dominican convent of Siret came under its jurisdiction, together with several convents in Galicia and Podolia.⁸⁰ The convent of Siret was on the trade route from Lviv to Cetatea Albă and it has been argued that it was formerly a part of the Polish Dominican province together with the Ruthenian houses.⁸¹ They formed a separate *contrata* until the end of the Congregation in 1453. After this date the Moldavian convents reverted to the Hungarian province of the Dominican order.⁸²

Voivode Petru I and the Dominicans

The favorable Dominican position in Moldavia at the end of the fourteenth century was determined not only by the expansion activity and growing influence of the Congregation of Friars Pilgrims in the region but also by the support of the Polish king.⁸³ They became more influential in Moldavia under the rulership of Petru I. John of Sultanieh in his *Libellus de notitia orbis* implied

⁷⁸ Thomas Ripoll, ed. *Bullarium ordinis fratrum praedicatorum* (Rome, 1729–1740), vol. 2, 299.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Loenertz "Les missions dominicaines en Orient," 10. They obtained the privileges to have properties and therefore Ladislaus of Opole made large donations to the convent of Lviv.

⁸⁰ Elie Raymond decreed in 1377 that the convents of Lviv, Lancut, and Przemyśl in Galicia, Kamenec and Smotric in Podolia and Siret in Moldavia were included in the *Societas Fratrum Peregrinantium*. The pope approved this in his bull *Fidei Orthodoxae* from January 1378. Loenertz "Les missions dominicaines en Orient," 2.

⁸¹ Loenertz, "Les missions dominicaines en Orient," 7. Abraham Bzowski, who wrote *Propago D. Hyacinthi* and published it in Venice in 1606, considered that Siret belonged to the Hungarian province: "Gregorio IX Pontif. Max. et Magistro Ordinis Helia disponen-tibus, decem conventus, a tribus provinciis..., a provincia Hungariae Cereten," quoted in R. Loenertz, "Les missions dominicaines en Orient," 25.

⁸² Kloczowsky, "Dominicans of the Polish Provinces," 94.

⁸³ Delacroix-Besnier, *Les Dominicains et la chrétienté grecque*, 30–31. Petru I Mușat became the vassal of the Polish king in 1387.



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that their influence was due to their success in converting the ruler and his mother:

*Dominus ipsorum aliquando conversus fuit ad fidem nostram Catholicam et specialiter mater sua domina Margarita per unum fratrem Predicatorem vicarium generalem illarum partium.*⁸⁴

Attempts to convert the prince and his mother or wife was one of the strategies that the Mendicants applied in Central and Eastern Europe. They applied the same strategy in Moldavia, which was an Orthodox country and therefore the support of the ruler and its court was very important for the Mendicants' activities. They succeeded with Voivode Petru I's mother, Margaret,⁸⁵ who had a Dominican confessor. She supported the friars, for whom she built a church in Siret, which she chose as her burial place.

*Margarita, mater nostra dilecta et honorabilis, in civitate Cerethensi...matris eius, ac beati Iohannis Baptistae ecclesiam et locum religiosorum fratrum Predicatorum construi et hedificare fecit, pro salute animae sue et nostrae ac parentum nostrorum, in qua ecclesia predicta domina, mater nostra, suam sepulturam elegit.*⁸⁶

Furthermore, they also gained the favor of the voivode, Petru I, who in 1384 gave them the privilege of collecting the income from the customs duties of the town of Siret:

*Quantenus libram seu pensatorium quod est in civitate nostra predicta Cerethensi, praedictis fratribus praedicatoribus, dictae ecclesiae deservientibus, simpliciter dare et concedere dignaremur.*⁸⁷

The Dominicans enjoyed a favorable position at the court of the voivode in the next few years. The links between the court and the Dominicans are also demonstrated by documents related to a miracle which happened at the Dominican convent in Siret. In 1390, John Janitor Strenue, the vicar of the

⁸⁴ John of Sultanieh, "Libellus de notitia orbis," ed. A. Kern, *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 8 (1938) (hereafter Sultanieh, "Libellus de notitia orbis"), 104.

⁸⁵ There is little information about Margareta Mușat. C. C. Giurescu assumed that she was the sister of Lațcu and the wife of Costea Mușat. It is certain that she was the mother of Petru I and Roman I. See C. C. Giurescu, *Istoria Românilor* (The History of the Romanians) vol. 1 (Bucharest: Fundația pentru literatură și artă "Regele Carol II", 1935), 425–426.

⁸⁶ C. Cihodaru, I. Caproșu, L. Șimanschi ed. *Documenta Romaniae Historica, A. Moldova* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1956–1967) (henceforth DRH. A), doc. 1, 1.

⁸⁷ DRH. A, doc. 1, 1.



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Congregation of Friars Pilgrims for the province of Ruthenia-Wallachia, made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. He brought back a relic, a veil, which he divided into three parts: one part to a convent in Lviv, one to Kameniec, and one to Siret.

In January 1391, blood appeared on the relic of Siret. The inquisitor, Nicolas Goldberg, who was present in Moldavia at that time, started to interrogate the witnesses regarding this miracle. A notary wrote down a declaration of the inquisitor which related the process of authenticating the miracles.

*...cum sudario importavit... et eiusdem ordinis Nicolao dicto Goldberg inquisitore hereticorum protunc presente indicavit. ...michi infrascripto publico notario in memorato clastro ordinis predicatorum... a consulis iuratis senioribus dicteque Czeretensis civitatis civibus consciencie ac in animas ipsorum protestantes narraverunt coram me notario publico a testibus infrascriptis...*⁸⁸

After the inquisitor had declared that the miracle of the blood was real, a procession took place in which both Catholics and Orthodox took part. In subsequent months, many people came to the relic, especially the sick, who were cured.⁸⁹ Another miracle occurred when the chancellor of the country, who was condemned to death, survived and was set free by the voivode after praying to the relic. He converted to Catholicism and was baptized in the Dominican convent: *...et in eadem ecclesia baptizatus fidem accepit*.⁹⁰

This miracle story shows that Dominicans not only enjoyed a good situation at court, but were also allowed to convert people, including those from the court, and to have processions; furthermore, it shows that Siret was an important town for the Congregation, as a relic was brought there. The presence of John of Strenue and an inquisitor witnessed a growth in the mission activities, which might also have included a school.⁹¹

⁸⁸ A document of the notary Conrad, narrating the miracles in Siret and signed by Nicholas Goldberg. A. Czolowski edited this document in *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 5 (1891): 594–598. "...de diversis diocesibus homines... recursum habuerunt. Qui miraculose sunt curati et adhuc diebus singulis curantur tam surdi quam ceci ac paralitici nec non leprosi disenteriamque passionem perpessi una cum plurimorum mortuorum resuscitatione ac vite restauratione..." Czolowski, *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 596. The list of miracles is a topos and is reminiscent of miracles in the Bible.

⁹⁰ Czolowski, *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 596.

⁹¹ There is no direct evidence of such an activity in Moldavia; however, knowing their interest in organizing schools, it can be inferred that this was possible in Moldavia as well. The Mendicant orders organized conventual schools from the second half of the thirteenth century in the provinces of their orders. The general chapter of the



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This was a period that saw a growing Mendicant influence in Moldavia due to the fact that the voivode and his mother were Catholics and Moldavia was a vassal of Poland, which strengthened the position of the friars in the country. Although the bishops of Siret did not reside in their bishopric, the missionaries provided a functional substitute for them. The Mendicants were keen to have good relations with rulers, which is also shown by the settlement of their convents in Moldavia. They followed the court, remaining close to it so that they could maintain good relations with the ruler and gain privileges. The Franciscans had a monastery in Baia as early as 1340, when Baia was probably the residence of a knezat, and later of the march of Dragoș.⁹² Siret, which was the residence of the Moldavian voivodes until the end of the fourteenth century, had both Franciscan and Dominican monasteries.⁹³ Furthermore, when the court moved to Suceava around 1388, they might have followed the court, as archaeological research has revealed a Catholic church near the court of the voivode.⁹⁴

Dominicans imposed in 1261 the necessity for young brethren to study *artes*. Therefore, conventual schools called *studia particularia*, headed by lectors, were established in the provinces of the order. Every *contrata* was supposed to have a school for the friars and sometimes there were circuit schools, which went from convent to convent in a region. Nevertheless, their activities are not well documented even for the provinces of the orders in Hungary or Poland. At the end of the fourteenth century Moldavia was a *contrata* of the Dominican order and the residence of the vicar of the Congregation of Friars Pilgrims, John Janitor Strenue. J. Kloczowsky, "Panorama degli studia degli ordini mendicanti," in *Le scuole degli ordini mendicanti (secoli XIII–XIV)* (Todi: Presso L'Accademia Tudertina, 1978), 130–131; Pahomi argues that there might have been a Dominican conventual school in Siret, although his arguments cannot be confirmed by a reading of the documents. M. Pahomi, "Biserici și minăstiri catolice din Siret, secolele XIV–XVI. Învățămînt catolic la episcopia din Siret" (Churches and Catholic monasteries in Siret from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century. A Catholic school at the bishopric of Siret), *Codrul Cosminului*. Series noua 3–4 (1997–1998): 175–180.

⁹² Vasile Neamțu, Eugenia Neamțu, and Stela Cheptea, "Contribuții la problema urbanizării așezării de la Baia în secolul al XIV-lea" (Contributions on the problem of the urbanisation of the settlement of Baia in the fourteenth century), *Anuarul institutului de istorie și arheologie "A. D. Xenopol"* 16 (1979): 299–230.

⁹³ C. Auner, "Episcopia de Siret," 240.

⁹⁴ Archaeological research revealed a church with an unusual shape near the court of the voivode. The excavators consider this church to have been Romanesque, but very simple and rather strange for this style. Mircea D. Matei, *Civilizație urbană medievală românească. Contribuții. (Suceava pînă la mijlocul secolului al XVI-lea)* (Romanian medieval



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Conclusion

Missions in a frontier space, in a region where the majority of the population belonged to Orthodoxy, was different from, and more complex than, missions either in a pagan space or within Western Christendom. This was the challenge that the Mendicants had to face in Moldavia. They were provided with all the necessary resources which would enable them to meet this challenge. The popes, interested in the expansion of the Western Christendom and/or in the union of the Churches, endowed them with privileges. The Orders held provinces in Central Europe, which were used as bases whence they launched their missions; they had the support of the Hungarian and Polish kings; their strategies gave them the tools for their actions. Therefore, they succeeded in their task of carrying out missions and in maintaining themselves in Moldavia for centuries.

Mendicants were a constantly present in Moldavia from the beginning of the thirteenth century onwards. Nevertheless, there were periods when they were more active and periods when their activities were less important or less well documented. Their presence in Moldavia was closely related to the Moldavian rulers' interest, and support.

The first mission was related to the Cumans and was carried out by the Dominicans. The Franciscans appeared later, and first focussed their activities on the Tartars. The great period of Mendicant activities in Moldavia was between 1370 and 1390. At that time the bishopric of Siret was founded (1371), Prince Lațcu converted to Catholicism (1370), and they gained, especially the Dominicans, privileges from Voivode Petru I Mușat.

After the examination of all the published sources and using the results of archaeological research, I have argued that the activities and the strategies of the Mendicants in Moldavia were adapted to the realities of a frontier region. Furthermore, I have shown that the Mendicants considered Moldavia a country of mission even when bishoprics were founded. I have, I hope, demonstrated that during their activities in Moldavia in these centuries the Mendicants had to face the challenge of converting the Cumans, the Tartars, and most important, the challenge of Orthodoxy.

Although Hussitism and later the Reformation struck at them, the Mendicants managed to maintain themselves in Moldavia until the twenty-first century. They played an important role in Moldavia in the second half of the fourteenth century when the country swung between Catholicism and

urban civilisation. Suceava until the middle of the sixteenth century) (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1989), 60–61.



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Orthodoxy. They lost their influence, however, in the first half of the fifteenth century, when the Hussites succeeded in converting the Catholics and in gaining the support of the rulers and were thus able to hinder Mendicant activities. Nevertheless, they were a constant presence in Moldavia, especially the Franciscans, who at the end of the nineteenth century organized the Franciscan province of Moldavia.