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Romanians and Rákóczi's Insurrection

It is common knowledge that not only Hungarians, but also various other nationalities took part in Rákóczi's insurrection, including Ruthenians, Slovaks, and Romanians¹. This was the last major struggle, in which different ethnicities took a common stand against the rule of the Habsburg dynasty. Conflicts between the nationalities began to boil only at the end of the 18th century and surfaced during the 1848–1849 War of Independence. At the time of Rákóczi's insurrection, with the exception of Croatians and Serbs, all held the opinion that they should shake off the rule of Vienna and establish an independent Hungary and Transylvania. These two countries lived separate lives and, as far as Rákóczi was concerned, he wanted only Transylvania for himself and would have liked Maximilian Emmanuel, prince elector of Bavaria, to rule Hungary.

Romanians played a significant role in Rákóczi's insurrection for two reasons. The first is of general character, since Romanian serfs and nobles revolted against the Viennese rule together with the Hungarians. The serfs hoped to be granted the privilege of *heyducks* in return of their military service. There was another reason, however, which made Romanians, serfs, nobles, and priests in Transylvanian side with Rákóczi: the issue of the church. Emperor Leopold I, just as in Ruthenia, planned to establish the Romanian Greek Catholic Church on the recommendation of Cardinal Leopold Kollonich. Lengthy debates ensued on the foundation of the new church, which led to some of the Romanian clergy recognising the Pope as their leader together with the related dogmas in 1700, while retaining clerical marriage and other laws as an inheritance from the Greek Church. The union, as it was called, gave rise to conflicts within the Romanian population, clergy, and made many support Rákóczi's insurrection, the leadership of which embraced the idea of religious tolerance.

As follows, both reasons of Romanian participation will be discussed, allowing that, naturally, the two endeavours shared common features and they reinforced each other.

The Role of the Romanians in the Insurrection

Romanians (called *Vlachs* at the time), more exactly Romanian serfs, turned against the nobles as the insurrection broke out. Mihály Teleki, Jr. wrote in his

¹ Sándor Márki was the first one to examine this issue: *II. Rákóczi Ferencz*, Vol. I. Budapest, 1907. Expanded: Köpeczi B.: A nemzetiségek a Rákóczi-szabadságharcban [Nationalities in Rákóczi's Insurrection]. In: *Történelmi Szemle*, 2000, Issues 3–4.

Minorities History

diary that the “Vlachs” burned all their properties to ashes at the end of 1703². Mihály Cserei noted the same: “the plundering of these (i.e. anti-Habsburg Kuruc) and the Vlachs of Kővár all around Transylvania; they keep on driving the studs, cattle, and sheep away in Transylvania and devastate the whole country.”³ At first, the Transylvanian nobles turned to the Gubernium for help, without any success, though.⁴

However, Rákóczi wanted to lead not a serfs’ uprising but the insurrection of an entire country against Vienna. Therefore, he turned to the nobles seeking their cooperation. This changed the character of the revolt, and made the majority of the Transylvanian nobles take the side of Rákóczi. Only those failed to join whom Imperial General Rabutin kept in Szeben (Sibiu, Hermannstadt) and Brassó (Brasov), including for example Miklós Bethlen. Rabutin had him arrested and sent to Vienna because of Bethlen’s political pamphlet entitled *The Dove of Noah*. Other nobles from families such as the Teleki, Wesselényi, Petri, Mikes, and Barcsai families, stood by the Kuruc with important tasks to carry out. Similarly, Romanian serfs and members of the lesser nobility joined the insurrection in this new situation. We know, for example, that Márkuly Haczegány participated in the fights with 300 soldiers. The same happened in Avas (Oas) as well. Romanian lesser nobles, the Finta, Tatár, Pap, Drágos, and the Sztán families joined the struggle under the lead of the Greek Orthodox Mihály Szuhay in Máramaros (Maramures). The serfs of Neagra Vaszil in Marosszék (Mures) and Udvarhelyszék district, those of Kimpián Bukur in Háromszék (Trei Scaune) and the Barcaság (Burzenland, Tara Bîrsei), and those of Balika of Aranyosszék (Scaunul Aries) enlisted among the Kuruc as well.⁵

The Romanian outlaw Pintye Gligor (Grigor Pinteá), who was held to be an “outlaw in the mountains” became famous in August 1703. Following the outbreak of the war, he captured Nagybánya (Baia Mare), from where the imperial troops tried to carry off the minter tools to Szatmár (Satu Mare). Rákóczi himself wrote in his *Memoirs* the following: “In his endeavour to express his loyalty, the infamous thief of the Meszes Mountains (M.tii Mezesului), this Romanian-born Pintye descended to the city of Nagybánya... to capture it for me or win it over to my side.”⁶ He was well-received but his troops raided the city and, as it is revealed in the documents, a councillor named István Décsy shot him on August 22. In 1706, the proceedings of Décsy’s case were still going on.⁷

² Ifj. Teleki, Mihály: *II. Rákóczi Ferenc főtisztjének naplója* [Diary of the Field Officer of Ferenc Rákóczi II]. Ed. Temesi A., Budapest, 25.

³ *Rákóczi-tükör* [Rákóczi Mirror]. Eds. Kőpeczi B. and R. Várkonyi Á., Vol. I Budapest, 1973. 377.

⁴ Márki op. cit. I. 487.

⁵ Márki enumerates them in his book.

⁶ *II. Rákóczi Ferenc Emlékiratai* [Memoirs of Ferenc Rákóczi II]. Critical edition. Budapest, 1978, 313.

Minorities History

Tódor Karácsony of Surányfalu “was once a mountain thief” but earned renown with his valiant deeds in the service of Rákóczi, and took part in the fights that forced the Tartars to withdraw.⁸

Likewise, István Szurdicsán joined the anti-Habsburg Kuruc. In a letter dated on 1 December 1704, Rákóczi wrote that Szurdicsán declared himself captain and then he went on praising his stand against the Germans attacking Zalatna (Zlatna) a few days later. Szurdicsán committed some crime in 1706, because of which Rákóczi sentenced him to death. However, in a letter addressed to Károlyi at the beginning of the same year, he wrote: “He deserved to be pardoned.”⁹ Draguly (or Dráguly) was the most famous of these figures. He managed to keep his regiment throughout the war, participating with them in various operations. Prince Rákóczi mentioned him in 1708, when Draguly defeated a German unit; a deed that made also Bercsényi rejoice. Draguly accompanied the prince to Poland, and Dolgorukij requested his service from Bercsényi. There are no further traces of him, but it is rather likely that Draguly served in the Russian army later on.¹⁰

This enumeration clearly proves that a relevant number of Romanians took part in the various operations of Rákóczi’s insurrection in Transylvania, naturally, as long as the Kuruc army could offer resistance against the Habsburg troops both in Hungary and Transylvania.

Religious Resistance

In his rather detailed book¹¹, Silviu Dragomir, Romanian historiographer describes the resistance of Greek Orthodox Romanians mounted against the church-unifying efforts. This resistance was present among the serfs, nobles, and the clergy as well. The Romanian Greek Orthodox turned to Miklós Bethlen, chancellor, in 1701 for the first time. Bethlen wrote in his *Autobiography*: “A man named Gábor Nagyszegi... a poor noble, but otherwise rather intelligent, literate man, who had been Catholic but adopted the Vlach religion, was made curator (by priests and serfs) so that he would further their case in front of the Gubernium, the country and anybody else; they, other than the freedom of their conscience according to their own rite, do not have any other wish.” (The Latin text is: *Praeter conscientiae libertatem secundum ritum veterem.*)¹² Nagyszegi presented himself in front of

⁸ Marosán, V.: Az avasi oláhok a Rákóczy-forradalomban [The Vlachs of Avas in Rákóczi’s Insurrection]. In: *Magyar-román Szemle*, 1896, Issue 2.

⁹ A.R.I. (Archivum Rákoziánum) 185, 192, 320, 531.

¹⁰ A.R.I. (Archivum Rákoziánum) 518, II. 67, 290, 446, 503, III. 291, 594, 602, VI. 4, 410, 416, 418, 421, 427, 428, 432, 459, 494, 702, 704, 708, 713.

¹¹ *Istoria desrobirei religioase a Românilor din Ardeal în secolul al XVIII-lea*, Sibiu, Vols. 1–2. 1920–1930.

¹² *Bethlen Miklós Önéletírása* [Autobiography of Miklós Bethlen]. Published by V. Windisch Éva. Budapest, 1955. Vol. II. 52 and cont.

Minorities History

Bethlen and filed a protest. The chancellor tried to appease him, but did not have the courage to take his side in front of other members of the Gubernium. Nagyszegi, who was in the service of a Romanian bishop, turned against his superior when he embraced the unity of churches. He appeared in front of Bethlen once again, saying that "he was ready to do anything for God, ready to die even". The chancellor sent him to Protonotary János Sárosi at last, who did endorse his protest. This was the ruin of Nagyszegi, as he was arrested, although also acquitted later on. As revealed by his *Autobiography*, Bethlen felt sorry for Nagyszegi: "I did feel for this cause and this man, and had it been possible, I would have liked to help him. Yet, I was afraid that he would imperil himself, others, and myself, and from the issue of religion I could not have benefited." Nagyszegi was arrested and released only in 1706. His wife died during his imprisonment, after which he joined the Kuruc despite his age. Rákóczi mentions him in his letters in 1708 as brigadier and, later on, as commander of Érsekújvár (Nové Zámky)¹³. There is no other information about him from later on. In any case, Rákóczi wrote that Nagyszegi was already an old man in those times.

The Romanian Greek Orthodox received missals from Russia and the Romanian principalities and Orthodox priests occasionally fled and received training there.¹⁴

Miklós Bethlen got into contact with a Greek Orthodox priest, whom he called János Czirka (Ioan Țirca), and described him as follows: "(a Jesuit called Ferenc Szunyogh) had a Hungarian, literate, and learned Vlach priest arrested and held in irons in the monastery. He escaped into the college of Fehérvár and I sent him to Enyed (Aiud) and offered him a hiding-place for almost two weeks. Together with the gubernator (György Bánffy) and several Protestant nobles, we openly supported his case, arranged him in a Protestant Vlach Church in Hunyad (Hunedoara) county, and ordered him payment."¹⁵ At last, Czirák was constrained to run away, going first to Havaselve (Muntenia) and then to Moldva (Moldova, Moldau). Rákóczi recognised him as the bishop of the Greek Orthodox church and Czirák held the prince in great esteem.¹⁶ Following the defeat of the Kuruc he retreated to Máramaros, and there is no information after that point.

At the time of the insurrection, Uniate Bishop Atanasie and his priests worked under imperial rule and accepted advice from the Jesuits. In the territory occupied by the Kuruc, the Greek Orthodox retained the "old rite" in their religious life. Struggle continued between the two Churches and, at the end of the 18th century, also the Greek Orthodox established their independent episcopate.

¹³ A.R.II. 177, 468, 541, 651, III. 126, 178, 212, 233, 236. This latter is mentioned at the outlaws.

¹⁴ P. Cernovodeanu: *A havasalföldi és a moldvai vezető körök magatartása a kuruc felkeléssel szemben* [Behaviour of the Leading Circles of Havasalföld and Moldva with Respect to the Insurrection]. In: Rákóczi tanulmányok, Budapest, 1980., especially with respect to Bishop Damaschin. 260.

¹⁵ Bethlen op. cit. II. 59.

¹⁶ Dragomír op. cit. Vol. I. 74 and cont.

The Role of the Romanian Principalities

Ferenc Rákóczi conducted negotiations with the Romanian principalities for various reasons. First, he informed the sovereigns about developments in Hungary and Transylvania. He paid careful attention at asking for their support concerning the Transylvanians who found refuge in their territory. Two waves of refugees have to be mentioned: the first following 1705, and the second in 1707. The French envoy in Constantinople, Ferriol, and the Hungarian envoys there were of great help in requesting the Porta to help the arriving refugees.¹⁷

The second reason was the negotiation with the Serbs. According to one of the points of the Warsaw agreement that Rákóczi concluded with Peter I in 1707, the czar was to promote understanding with the Serbs. Yet, not much happened in this respect. Nevertheless, negotiations went on with the Serb leaders in Bucharest and Rákóczi hoped that they would bring a positive turn in the relations. However, no breakthrough occurred and the Serbs attacked the Kuruc throughout the war.

The third reason was that Rákóczi sought to interfere with the internal affairs of Havaselve, where Voivode Constantin Brâncoveanu did give refuge to Hungarian outlaws, but entertained good relations with the Habsburg troops stationed in Transylvania as well. This displeased Rákóczi, who complained about this behaviour on several occasions both at the Porta and the French envoy in Constantinople. The situation was further complicated by the removal of Mihai Cantacuzino from the post of commander when he dared protest against the “despotism” of the Voivode. Dissention ensued from this in the principality and Rákóczi sent an envoy to Havaselve. However, this step did not bear fruit. P. Cernaovodeanu published a scholarly and detailed description of the connections of the principalities to Rákóczi’s insurrection.¹⁸

In Memory of the Insurrection

Similar to what happened in Ruthenia and Slovakia, folk poetry preserved the memory of Rákóczi’s insurrection in Romania as well. The figures of Romanian outlaws are mentioned the most often, among them Pintye, whose deeds are remembered in several songs.¹⁹ In the song entitled *Pintye vitéz* [The Valiant Pintye], a lieutenant tries to capture him but a priest urges him to revolt against the nobles. He obtains money, which he distributes among the poor. In the translation of Andor Bajor, the song finishes as follows:

¹⁷ See the aforementioned study by Cernovodeanu.

¹⁸ Kőpeczi B.: *A Rákóczi-szabadságharc és Franciaország* [Rákóczi’s Insurrection and France], Budapest.

¹⁹ *A román irodalom kistükre* [Romanian Literary Mirror]. Published by M. Gafita and Lőrinczi L., Bucharest, 1961. Vol. I. 60 and cont.

Minorities History

Megtettem mindent, amit megtehettem, / kinek tartóztam, mindent megfizettem. [I have done all I could / I have paid those I thought I should]

This might remind one of a line of Jenő Dsida.

I. Pop-Reteganul published a poem on the death of Pintye, which asks future generations to remember him.²⁰

De românii fe horit / Și de unguri pomenit. In Hungarian: A románok dicsőítsék / a magyarok megemlékezzenek róla. [Romanians, may they praise him / Hungarians, remember him.]

This seems to reinforce the information available on the death of Pintye in Nagybánya.

The publication entitled *A kuruc küzdelmek költészete* [Poetry of Kuruc Struggles] contains, among others, two Romanian poems connected to this insurrection.²¹ The text of one of these survived in the Bochkor codex compiled in 1716. It is a special record, since it presents the text both in Romanian and Hungarian, the presumable author of which was a Transylvanian student familiar with Latin poetry. The first line of the song is “Ni ficiori cu piciori / minden vígan járja [all dance gladly]”, and the last one is “Cînd a dormit / szegény ember ellopták a lovát [poor man, his horse has been stolen].²² That is, it is about a Kuruc who falls asleep and his horse gets stolen. This bilingual song reminds one of another song from the 20th-century Kolozsvár (Cluj): Nincs Kolozsvár bekerítve [Kolozsvár is not surrounded], slobod îi drumul...

The song of another outlaw recorded in 1770 goes like this: “sărăcă străine-tate, Mult mi aifost fără dreptate.” In Hungarian: Boldogtalan idegenség, nagyon igazságtalan volt hozzám. [This miserable outlaw’s life was very unjust to me.]

Some poems published by Viktor Marosán in the Hungarian–Romanian Review deal with the insurrection more closely. One of these in Romanian and Hungarian is as follows:

Fruză verde, nucă sacă / Nu-mi treba boi, nici vacă

In Hungarian: Zöld levél, de száraz dió / Nem kell nekem ökör, tinó, /

Zöld levél a kalapodra, / Még a tűznek sem néz oda.

[Green is the leaf, juiceless the nut, / I want no ox nor a bullock, /

Green leaf to your hat, Don’t dare looking at that.]

The next one refers to the war of independence and its leaders more specifically:

Măi Rákóczi, Bercsényi, / Unde-i merge, acolo om fi.²³

In Hungarian: Hej Rákóczi, Bercsényi, / Ahova mentek, ott leszünk.

[Alas, Rákóczi, Bercsényi, / wherever you’ll be, we’ll be there.]

²⁰ I. Pop-Reteganul: *Trandafiri si viorele*. Szamosujvár, 1908. The title: *Hora lui Pintea Viteazul*. 45 and cont.

²¹ *A kuruc küzdelmek költészete* [Poetry of the Kuruc Struggles]. Ed. Varga I., Budapest, 1977, 702–703.

²² *Ibid.* 704.

²³ *Ibid.*

Minorities History

All seems to confirm that Romanians in Transylvanian were indeed remembered in connection to Rákóczi's insurrection as outlaws, fighting serfs or exiles. This memory preserved in folk poetry is worthy of our attention as well, not to mention the fact that Hungarians and Romanians joined forces to fight this war against the Habsburgs. At the time when the remains of Rákóczi were taken home, N. Iorga set forth in connection to the insurrection that it was of a "national character", and mentioned the Romanian principalities in that respect.²⁴ He did not make mention of the Romanians in Hungary. The present study has sought to make up for that shortfall.

²⁴ N. Iorga: *Francisc Rákóczy al II-ilea, înviatorul conștiinței naționale ungurești și României*. Analele Academiei Române. 1910–1911.