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Doctoral Thesis

MENDICANT ORDERS IN TRANSYLVANIA. THE PAULINE ORDER AND THE RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE, 13TH-15TH CENTURIES

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SUMMARY

Western monasticism was brought to life in Rome, sometime during the 4th century as a result of the influence exercised by both eremitic and cenobitic communities from the area of Egypt. As a result, a new approach towards the monastic phenomenon emerged; such groups developing in and around the Eternal City had started to spread southwards and eastwards. The Benedictine order was established around the year 540. Benedict of Nursia shaped a monastic rule for the monks living within the community in Monte Cassino. By the end of the 10th century this was to become the only monastic rule, reaching all areas of Europe and becoming extremely popular especially in France, where monks were eager to adopt it due to its Roman ancestry. It was in the time of Charlemagne that the Order of St. Benedict had become the most spread monastic one within his empire. The rule itself was accepted as the foundation of the ordos monasticus. Meanwhile, others emerged, the Cistercian and the Premonstratensian, and all of them began being seen also as political instruments in the hands of both central authorities and the papacy.

This pattern was later imported also in the Realm of Hungary. In order to better understand the emergence of western religious orders, one must also keep in mind the occurrence and development of the ecclesiastic system within the realm. Western Christianity was embraced during the rule of Géza, between 972-977. The Christianization of the Magyars took place during three stages: after imposing a series of measures meant to increase the centralized power, after establishing a series of alliances to stop all rebellious actions and after establishing a central royal residence, namely the one in Esztergom. Two of Géza’s most successful political actions were the marriage alliance between his son, the future king Stephen I. and Gisela, the daughter of Henry II., Duke of Bavaria; and the spread of Christianity within his territory. As a consequence of the latter, the Arpadian rulers decided upon initiating an ecclesiastical system by founding two archbishoprics: in Esztergom and Kalocsa, as well as 10 bishoprics. The second archbishopric was ruling over the bishoprics in Cenad, Bihor and Transylvania.

The Arpadian royalty set out to develop not only the ecclesiastical institutions but strived also to align its policies in order to expand the monastic network within the kingdom, by establishing Benedictine, Cistercian and Premonstratensian abbeys up until the 13th century, when their importance was taken over by the mendicant orders. Within the Hungarian realm, the abbeys belonging to the Order of St. Benedict emerged around the 10th century and registered a continuous expansion up until the 13th century, at which point the order had built
around 160-180 establishments. By the early 14th century, most of them were closed and abandoned as a result of the Mongol invasion of 1241. In some cases, the dissolution of some of the smaller sized Benedictine abbeys was caused by their transformation into parish churches, and thus contributing to the enlargement of the rural parish network. In the eastern part of the Hungarian realm, between the Danube, the Carpathians and the Tisza river, namely within the dioceses of Cenad and Oradea, the spread of Latin monasticism became a priority ever since the 11th century, during the reign of Stephen I. The Benedictine monks were the first to arrive in the realm’s eastern regions. In Transylvania they settled and built abbeys in Herina and Cluj-Mănăștur.

Another typically western monastic order was the Premonstratensian one, being present also within the Realm of Hungary, where it flourished between the 12th and early 13th centuries, during which time a number of 30 Premonstratensian “houses” came into being. Unfortunately, a great deal of the written sources regarding the order’s history has been destroyed and the ones that survived the test of time are rather contradictory. The Premonstratensian monastery in Oradea was the first one to have been built within the Hungarian kingdom, at the same time being a filiation of the one in Premontré (France), where the order had been organized as such. King Stephen II. was the one to allow the monks to settle in Oradea during the early 12th century. Another possible Premonstratensian monastery has been located in Almaş, in the county of Bihor between the years 1200-1320. Nevertheless, there is a historiographic dispute whether this used to belong to the Order of St. Benedict or the Premonstratensian one. Its foundation seems to have been the result of the efforts undertaken by the nobility, respectively by members of the Kán and Geregye families. In Transylvania the order made history in Sibiu and Brașov.

The third defining monastic order during the Middle Ages was the Cistercian one. Its network within the Realm of Hungary had developed at the same time with their settlement in Poland and Bohemia. In the Hungarian territories the ‘white monks’ arrived around the year 1130, over a decade after the arrival of the Premonstratensian ones. It was here that the Cistercians managed to build 25 abbeys. The most important eastern ones were in Igriş and Cârţa. While the former was already standing by the year 1187, the latter has been a subject of contradiction for different historiographic traditions ever since the 19th century, being delved by Romanian, Transylvanian German and Hungarian historians and archaeologists.

The 13th century has favorized the manifestation of mendicant orders deep within medieval European society. It was during this period that the history of these orders was being
written in direct relation with two major coordinates: the fourth council in Lateran in 1215 and the second council in Lyon in 1274.

This was the century of reformatory policies at the level of religious orders, and, at the same time, it was a period for urban communities. The latter, by diversifying their topography, accepted the presence of mendicant orders. All around Europe, every mendicant province has contributed to the development or reconfiguration of urban realities. These changes were brought forth on the one hand by the very nature of the mendicant friars which were freed of all monastic constraints and were not occupied in managing large domains but were able to dedicate their time to the people, preaching or praying together with them. Ever since the late 1960s, Jacques Le Goff began theorizing and researching the impact of mendicant presence within the French urban matrix and it wasn’t long before he came to the conclusion that there hadn’t been any mendicant convents outside urban communities and there hadn’t been any urban communities without at least one mendicant convent.

The Hungarian mendicant province was established by the end of the 1220s. The main motivation for their acceptance within the realm was a symbol, on the one hand, of the papal policy of fighting back against heretic elements and, at the same time of initiating efforts of Christianization inside pagan communities around the Balkans. On the other hand, the Hungarian royal power seized the opportunity of a potential territorial expansion facilitated by the access of mendicant brothers in some outer Carpathian areas. At the same time, the urban character of the realm had already registered an exponential growth with the establishment of mendicants inside this kind of settlements. These were thus to become active vectors of the expansionist policies and the Christianization objectives promoted both by the papacy and the Hungarian royalty. Their presence and activity inside the realm became a reality also at the level of spiritual guidance.

In order to best shape the perspective that the monastic order faced when settling inside Hungarian territorial structures, one must also understand the context of the urban network at the start of the 13th century, a period that was characterized within historiographic approaches as the second stage in the urban development of the kingdom. While the first stage was best known as a period of re-using and re-purposing the Roman legacy, that pre-dated the Magyar conquest, the second one favored the emergence and progress of towns on the basis of economics. This particular aspect had brought the urban settlements of the first period at a halt. The most important urban center of the 13th century was to become Buda, surrounded by a series of urban communities, either pre-dating it or simultaneously coming into being. Transdanubia became the kingdom’s densest urban region of the 13th century. That was also a
time when the number of mining and commercial towns grew into a normative Western phenomenon even in the Hungarian territories. Generally, Hungarian towns, like other European ones, were formed on two fundaments: the fortress-type functional structure and the economic center-type activity, all while enjoying a wide autonomy.

During the 13th century, but mostly after the Mongol invasion, the Hungarian royalty made the urban development into a central policy, emphasized by the high number of royal favors granted to most of these. It is estimated that around 50 urban settlements received privileges between the 13th and 14th centuries. What turned them into recipients of royal attention was precisely their economic potential. The Transylvanian mendicant convents were part of the administrative Hungarian province that was dedicated to St. Mary. In the voivodeship, the first convents emerged during the first half of the 13th century. In the following two centuries, new ones were constantly approved and built, often within the same towns leading to a competition amongst them, as well as a need for strict regulations concerning their cohabitation. Thus, some towns were turned into mendicant clusters, where Dominican, Franciscan and even Austin friars influenced the spiritual and daily lives of their communities. However, mendicant monks chose to develop cloisters also in smaller settlements or even in rural ones, especially during the 15th century, when this wasn’t seen as an exception anymore.

After analyzing the different stages of mendicant presence in Transylvania, we have identified also a particular sequence in their final period. Except those mendicant establishments that were abandoned because of economic reasons, prior to the 16th century or during the early years of the same century, the overall dissolution of convents can be traced back to particular decades in the 16th century: between 1533-1543, during the 1550s and after the year 1560.

The Order of St. Paul the First Hermit was the only one to emerge from inside the Hungarian kingdom from the coming together of several hermit communities around the year 1225. After Benedictines and Franciscans, the Pauline monks rapidly became the third important religious order in medieval Hungary, most likely also as a result of its roots inside the realm. These roots were identified in the region of the central mountains of Bakony, Pilis and Zemplén. At a structural level, the hermits received papal approval only in the 14th century. The era of the Anjou dynasty was most favorable to their development and the order was part of the political program of royal consolidation. In the following century and at the turn of the 16th century the monks’ situation was rather uncertain, marked by the kingdom’s division, by the approaching Reform and the growing tension showed by the nobles towards religious orders. There where Pauline establishments managed somehow to survive the Ottomans, the
monks were banished by the landowners and their properties were confiscated. In spite of this, the order succeeded in maintaining its ground in some areas, such as Maramureș, eastern Slovakia and Pozsony.

Between the 14th-15th centuries, the total number of Pauline monasteries in Transylvania had sometimes seemed uneven, proving once again the difficulty of our scientific endeavor regarding this very little debated topic. Connecting narrative information, charters and other medieval documents, as well as information from the field literature, we have managed to assess the Pauline network in Transylvania. Thus, between the last decades of the 13th century and the early 16th century we have come upon a number of six monasteries belonging to the order, namely in Nușfalău (Mureș county), Patalani (a settlement that has disappeared and presumed to have been located near Hodişu, Cluj county), Sâncraiul de Mureș (Mureș county), Tăuți (Alba county), Bărăbanț (at present a neighborhood in Alba Iulia) and Păuca (Sibiu county).

Whilst completing our scientific research, dedicated to the history of Mendicant Orders in Transylvania. The Order of St. Paul the First Hermit and the religious landscape between the 13th-15th centuries, we consider that the way we approached this topic has contributed in achieving its aims, namely shaping a perspective upon the emergence of Catholic monasticism inside the Hungarian realm at the same time with the strengthening of the Arpadian dynasty and the spread of these religious communities towards the kingdom’s eastern territories, including Transylvania, thus helping set the premises for the arrival of the mendicant orders during the 13th century. Another central aim of our thesis was to coin the term mendicant within present day Romanian field literature. Also, an increased attention was given to the connection between urban development and mendicant presence, to the relation and subordination of mendicant communities and both royal and papal authority, as well as towards elements of regional power. In order to achieve all of the above, we set out to depict all known mendicant convents and to offer a general overview upon their history, thus laying the ground for future research. Bringing the history of the Pauline order under the spotlight was undoubtedly a must, the Romanian historiography never benefitting of a strong foundation regarding this topic.

Keywords: Hungarian Realm, Transylvania, 13th-16th centuries, mendicant orders, Order of St. Paul the First Hermit.
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**Lista abrevierilor**

- **ACGOP** - Acta capitulorum generalium ordinis praedicatorum, vol. I (1220-1303)
- **DAP** - Documenta Artis Paulinorum. A magyar rendtartomány monostorai
- **DIR C** - Documente privitoare la istoria românilor
- **DRH. C** - Documenta romaniae historica. C. Transilvania
- **EO** - Erdélyi okmánytár
- **UB** - Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürigen
- **VF** - Vitae fratrum eremitarum ordinis sancti Pauli primi eremitae