

Beyond the Norms: Religious Practice in Late-Medieval and Early Modern Transylvania

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NEWSLETTER

November 2012

THE HISTORY OF A CONCEPT

The theoretical discussion of the concept of popular religion was the centrepiece of the activities undertaken by the members of the project during the second half of the year 2012. Circumscribable to one of the main objectives of our research project, namely to develop the conceptual framework and the methods for analysing the documentary sources available in Transylvania, this discussion developed over several phases. Starting with the identification of the bibliography, the research team succeeded in establishing a relevant reading list, from the perspective of the definitions and the debates generated by the topic of popular religion. The ensuing discussion was structured around some essential coordinates, for instance: the intellectual and historiographical context in which the concept of popular religion had been initially defined, the strong connections between these definitions and the tradition of the interest for the history of religion in the Italian, French or Anglo-Saxon areas, the difficulties in finding a comprehensive definition for popular religion, applicable to certain historical areas as well as to the most diverse categories of sources, and, last but not least, the evaluation of the controversies generated by the effort to arrive at the most adequate conceptual formulation.

The animated debate at the meeting on the 21st of June did not restrict itself to a theoretical discussion of a key-concept related to the research interests of the team members, it also explored the ways their work could benefit from the intense discussions conducted in western historiography during the 1970s. Finally, the research team explored the possible applicability of

these concepts to the written and visual sources available for medieval and early modern Transylvania (14th – 18th centuries). From this perspective, the preliminary observations emphasise the necessity of a critical view concerning the context in which the sources had been produced, in order to subsequently establish linking elements to the theoretical definitions of the concept of popular religion, articulated around the relationship between the religion of the elites, and the religion of the masses. This profound decoding of the local context becomes even more necessary, as the debates on the discussed concept focus on the tension existing at the level of the religious culture of the ecclesiastical elite. The latter cannot be considered to be a monolithic body, on the contrary, it was marked by transitions and differentiations with regard to receiving, respectively to delivering the religious message.

A detailed analysis of the historiographical tendencies concerning popular religion resulted therefore in a more profound understanding of the theoretical endeavours, and, from a wider perspective, proved to be essential in articulating a very distinctive approach adjusted to the specificity of the research our team has undertaken. The strong emphasis on the local context as well as the attempt to offer new definitions of popular religion according to these particularities can be considered the main accomplishments, a result of the quest for knowledge undertaken by the teams' members during the summer of 2012.

THE RELIGION OF THE LAITY – A POPULAR RELIGION?

Workshop 2nd of November 2012

The international workshop which took place in Cluj-Napoca on the 2nd of November 2012 as part of our project, substantiated the scholarly and organisational endeavour of our team. Following the call for papers launched earlier this year (more precisely in July), the configuration of the workshop highlighted a growing interest for discussing the concept of popular religion, both at national, and at regional, Central-European, level. The participants to this workshop come from the most diverse historiographical areas, Gabriella Erdélyi, from the Historical Institute of the Hungarian Academy, Cristina Codarcea, from the Institute of South-East European Studies in Bucharest, Fabrizio Conti, trained in

the Department of Medieval Studies of the Central-European University, Budapest, and Ülle Sillasoo from the University of Tallinn, Estonia. The members of the research team, Maria Crăciun, Carmen Florea, Ovidiu Ghitta, Mária Lupescu Makó, Ciprian Firea and Ünige Bencze were joined by Violeta Barbu from the “Nicolae Iorga” Institute of History, Bucharest, Alexandru Florin Platon and Elena Bedreag from the “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University, Iași and Ioan Albu from the “Lucian Blaga” University from Sibiu, as well as by several other scholars from Cluj, such as Raluca Betea, Anca Gogâltan, Ana Gruia, Elena Firea and Tünde Komáromi.

The discussions in the framework of the workshop had a starting point in the surveys of the literature from various historiographical areas. Thus, Gabriella Erdélyi analysed in her paper the Hungarian literature of the last decades related to the religion of the laity, highlighting the transition from a social-historical approach to the phenomenon, to one influenced by cultural studies. Fabrizio Conti's intervention underlined the priorities of the Italian historiography of the last three decades, emphasising the historiographical tendencies rooted in a view articulated around social classes (the dominant, educated vs. the subordinated, who shared a folk culture), the growing influence of ethnology and sociology in approaching the religiosity of the laity, and not least, the identification of cultural differences that resulted from the institutional development of the Church.

Ülle Sillasoo's presentation dedicated to the interest shown towards religious practices in the Estonian historiography underscored the particularities of this region with regard to the existence/survival of written sources, but also with regard to the extant analyses inspired by the particular situation of this area situated at the border of Latin Christianity. Last but not least, Cristina Codarcea's presentation of the religion of the Balkan communities in the early modern period spotted the nuances one can add to defining the relationship between the official and the popular religion.



The issues debated within the framework of this workshop underlay the conclusions formulated by Violeta Barbu. These concentrated on the ways an exploration of popular religion can be directed towards a comparative perspective by highlighting the common grounds existing in the regional research of the religious experience of the laity, as well as within general trends such as religious anthropology and social history, the relationship between

the sources and the way they are questioned, the temporal and the regional perspective, but also the effort towards an analysis which should emphasise in a dynamical manner the reference to micro-history and at the same time, the study of bigger communities.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Participations in international conferences:

Ciprian Firea attended the international conference International Medieval Meeting Lleida. Consolidated Medieval Studies Research Group 'Space, Power and Culture' (Spain, 25 June – 1 July 2012) with the paper Dispersed Parts of a Medieval Liturgical Ensemble. The Altarpieces of St. Mary Church in Sibiu/Hermannstadt (Transylvania).

Between the 15th and the 20th of July 2012, Mária Lupescu Makó took part in the Congress of the International Art History Committee, attending the section The Challenge of the Object. Die Herausforderung des Objekts. The congress took place in Nuremberg, Germany.

Between the 4th and the 6th of September, Maria Crăciun attended the Reformation Studies Colloquium, St Chad's College, Durham, UK where she presented the paper The Price of Sin: Crime and Punishment in Sixteenth-Century Transylvanian Towns.

Between the 17th and the 22th of October, Maria Crăciun and Carmen Florea participated in the conference Cuius patrocinio tota gaudet regio. Saints' Cults and the Dynamics of Regional Cohesion, organised in Dubrovnik by the Croatian Hagiography Society Hagiotheca and the Cultsymbol Project, developed within the framework of ESF EuroCORECODE Programme, as well as the OTKA Saints project, developed by CEU Budapest. Carmen Florea presented the paper Patrons in the Diocese: the Transylvanian Episcopate and the Channeling of Saints' Cults, and Maria Crăciun gave a paper entitled Elizabeth and the Saxons of Late Medieval Transylvania.

Mária Lupescu Makó delivered the paper in 'refrigerium anime ipsorum...' Középkori lélekváltás-ádományok at the national conference Ziua Culturii Maghiare în Transilvania (The Days of Transylvanian Hungarian Culture), organised by the Transylvanian Museum Society which took place in Cluj-Napoca between the 23rd and 24th of November 2012.

Maria Crăciun gave a lecture entitled Lutheran Liturgical Practice as a Marker of Confessional Identity at the Atelier des Médiévistes, EHESS, Paris, 27 November 2012.



Research visits

Between the 28th of July and the 4th of August Mária Lupescu Makó benefited from a research trip to Paris where she was able to use the François Mitterrand Library within the French National Library. She read especially periodicals (*Annales*, *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale*, *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*), but also literature on testaments and the religious and material culture at the end of the Middle-Ages.

Ovidiu Ghitta also benefited from a research trip to Paris between the 10th and the 24th of September 2012, where he visited the 'Bibliothèque – Centre d'anthropologie religieuse' and the 'Bibliothèque Publique d'Information' (Centre Pompidou). During these study weeks in Paris, he looked at the latest collections of specialised publications: *Revue Historique*, *Revue d'Histoire de l'Eglise en France*, *Journal of Modern European History*, *Religions et Histoire*, *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, as well as at works of French historians from the last two decades, analysing 'popular (rural) beliefs and cults' in various regions in the early modern period (Authors: Yvan Brohard, Solange Lebreton, Fr. Lebrun, M. Delpastre, Veronique Willemin, M. Venard); he also looked at recent historical literature concerning the relationship religion-culture in the early

modern Europe (Kaspar von Greyerz), coexistence and conflict in religious border areas (Keith Luria) and the terminology and analytical perspectives employed by the French and German historiography when at the core of their analysis lay the institutions, norms and religious practices in the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Century ('Religion ou confession. Un bilan franco-allemand sur l'époque moderne' Paris, 2010).

Ciprian Firea undertook a study trip in Budapest at the Medieval Studies Library of ELTE-CEU, between the 6th and 19th of November 2012. The books he was interested in focus on topics that are relevant for his research within the project, such as popular culture and questions of representation and self-representation of the laity in the late Middle-Ages.

Between the 26th of November and the 3rd of December Maria Crăciun benefited from a research trip to Paris, where she was able to use the INHA Library and consult the collections there, being particularly interested in works that discuss the art produced during the Lutheran Reformation and the involvement of craftsmen in the reforming process.



Publications of the team members:

Maria Crăciun

'Ora pro nobis sancta Dei genitrix': Prayers and Gestures in Late Medieval Transylvania' in Gerhard Jaritz (ed.), *Ritual, Images and Daily Life. The Medieval Perspective* (Wien, Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2012), pp. 107-138.

'Marian Imagery and Its Function in the Lutheran Churches of Early Modern Transylvania' in Andrew Spicer (ed.), *Lutheran Churches in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 133-164.

'Pietatea franciscană și impactul ei în Transilvania medievală târzie' (Franciscan Piety and Its Impact in Late Medieval Transylvania) in Ovidiu Cristea, Petronel Zahariuc, Gheorghe Lazăr (eds), *Aut Viam Inveniam Aut Faciam. In honorem Ștefan Andreescu* (Iași: Editura Universității Alexandru Ioan Cuza, 2012, pp. 393-416.

Mária Lupescu Makó

'Késő-középkori erdélyi végrendeletek joggyakorlata' Ablakok a múltra edited by Nagy Róbert – Rűsz-Fogarasi Enikő (Kolozsvár: Egyetemi Műhely Kiadó – Bolyai Társaság-Kolozsvár, 2012, pp. 84-105