

THE «CRUSADE» OF THE EXCOMMUNICATE VOIVODE: THOMAS SZÉCSÉNYI IN FALL 1330

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Abstract: On 10 January 1331, Pope John XXII demanded from Andrew Szécsi, bishop of Transylvania, and the cousin of Denis, former ban of Severin, not to publicize the excommunication of the voivode of Transylvania, Thomas Szécsényi. The pope acted at King Charles-Robert of Anjou's request, who had urged him to forgive the voivode and convinced him – after the excommunication – that the voivode had acted in the king's rightful interest. John XXII did not say anything about the reasons that had led to Szécsényi's excommunication, although he mentioned that this was not the first time that Szécsényi had been excommunicated by Szécsi.

On 6 January 1331, Pope John XXII, at Thomas' demand, had already granted the voivode a full remission of his sins in the eventuality of his death, provided that the voivode would not commit his previous crimes. "In both Papal registers in which the remission was preserved, it was entered after the message sent by the pope to Bishop Szécsi. We can only speculate as to the reasons of the "delay". John XXII was not exactly completely open towards his Hungarian correspondents. Additionally, Charles-Robert had just returned from a disastrous campaign in Wallachia. Furthermore, Transylvania already had its fair share of "private conflicts".

According to Louis I of Anjou's *Illuminated Chronicle* (late 1350s), in autumn 1330, Thomas Szécsényi († 1354) and Denis Szécsi († c. 1341), former ban of Severin, had instigated Louis' father, Charles-Robert († 1342), to attack Basarab, voivode of Wallachia, in autumn 1330. According to John XXII, in 1327, Basarab, alike Thomas himself, was one the 'Catholic princes' under Charles-Robert's arch-royal authority. In this framework, the letters published here widen the complexity of otherwise well-known royal troubles of 1330.

Keywords: Pope John XXII, Andrew (András) Szécsi (bishop of Transylvania), Thomas (Tamás) Szécsényi (voivode of Transylvania), King Charles-Robert of Anjou, Papacy, Hungary, Transylvania, excommunication, crusade.

According to King Louis I of Anjou's *Illuminated Chronicle* (late 1350s),¹ Thomas Szécsényi († 1354), voivode of Transylvania,² and Denis Szécsi († c. 1341), former ban of Severin,³ instigated Louis' father, King Charles-Robert,⁴ to attack Basarab of Wallachia⁵ in autumn 1330⁶. According to more recent theories (late 1990s-2010s),⁷ Charles-Robert's campaign (which ended in disaster for him in November 1330)⁸ was in fact a crusade against the 'schismatic' Basarab, a 'tsar' moreover.⁹

Archaeology (the princely church in Argeş was not burnt down by Charles' troops, unlike the nearby residence of Basarab)¹⁰ and documents (for Pope John XXII, Basarab was a devout Catholic prince, just like Thomas Szécsényi,¹¹ and the same pope then refused to endorse Charles' vengeance against Basarab¹²) contradict such militant and forceful "grand designs".¹³ Nevertheless, the churchly context of 1330 is worth a closer inspection, from a Western, however,¹⁴ and not an Eastern point of view, considering both the conflicts within the (Avignonese) Latin rite Church¹⁵ and the fact that the information discussed was seemingly known since the days of World War II (prior to 1942).¹⁶

¹ Kersken 2018, IX-XXIV; Lucherini 2015: 58-72. *The chronicle ended with Louis' enthronement in the summer 1342 and did not deal with any of the subsequent events.*

² Wertner 1893: 119-134, Kovács 2005: 78-85.

³ Zsoldos 2011, 311-313; Farkas 2022: 18-45, at 23-28.

⁴ Bagi 2021: 131-143.

⁵ Schmitt-Ursprung 2021, 9-218 (at 61-72), and 269-326 (at 286-292).

⁶ We cite the Romanian edition of the text: Popa-Lisseanu 1937, 109-110.

⁷ Cazacu-Mureşan 2013. See also Pippidi 2008: 5-20, at 17-18.

⁸ See also Bonfini 1936, 201-202; Thuróczy 1985, 113-114; Michael 1997, 278.

⁹ The idea predates in fact World War I (e.g. Haşdeu 1893, CLXXXII).

¹⁰ Constantinescu 1984, 145.

¹¹ Pascu et alii 1977, no. 9, p. 20, nos. 21-22, pp. 44-47.

¹² Simon 2014: 59-76; Piti 2016: 381-392, at 384 (note 25);

¹³ The problem can also be ascribed to the immediate post-Trianon context (e.g. Minea 1925: 404-405 and 410).

¹⁴ E.g. Jamme 2014, 279-341

¹⁵ Simon 2023: 30-72.

¹⁶ Pascu 1945, here at 24-25. The text read (in both editions): [...] *Regele ungar voia să pedepsească pe Toma, dar voevodul, aşteptându-se la aceasta, ia măsurile necesare, cerând intervenţia papei. Papa, la rândul său, scrie episcopului Transilvaniei să intervină în favoarea lui Toma, să-l împace cu regele, iar regelui îi scrie să-l ierte pe voevod*⁷². *Că aceste fapte erau consecinţele războiului, reiese clar: războiul se sfârşise în luna Noemvrie a anului 1330, iar voevodul trebuia să scrie papei în aceeaşi lună sau în cea următoare, pentruca răspunsul să fie*

On 10 January 1331, Pope John XXII demanded from Andrew Szécsi, bishop of Transylvania, and the cousin of Denis,¹⁷ not to publicize the excommunication of voivode Thomas Szécsényi.¹⁸ The pope acted at Charles-Robert's request, who had urged him to forgive the voivode and convinced him – after the excommunication – that the voivode had acted in the king's rightful interest.¹⁹ John XXII did not say anything about the reasons that had led to Szécsényi's excommunication, although he mentioned that this was not the first time that Szécsényi had been excommunicated by Szécsi.

On 6 January 1331, Pope John XXII, at Thomas' demand, had already granted the voivode a full remission of his sins in the eventuality of his death, provided that the voivode would not commit his previous crimes.²⁰ “In both Papal registers in which the remission was preserved, it was entered after the message sent by the pope to Bishop Szécsi.”²¹ We can only speculate as to the

trimis în luna Ianuarie 1331 [...]. In translation: [...] ‘The Hungarian king wanted to punish Thomas [for instigating him to attack Basarab], but the voivode, expecting this, took necessary measures, asking for the pope's intervention. The pope, in his turn, wrote to the bishop of Transylvania to intervene in Thomas' favour, to reconcile him with the king, and to the king he wrote to forgive the voivode’⁷². That these deeds were the consequences of the war is evident; the war had ended in the month of November of the year 1330, and the voivode had to write to the pope either in that month or in the following one, for the response to be sent in the month of January 1331’ [...]. The references in footnote 72 were: *Reg. Av. vol. 37, f. 270 și 303 și Reg. Vat. vol. 98, f. 197 și 201*. Strangely enough (for a scholar of Pascu's stature, in spite of the – largely later – controversies surrounding him), the sources do not support Pascu's reading. The discrepancy between them and Pascu's interpretation is so evident that we must conclude that his error was deliberate. The word “excommunication” could not have been overlooked, not even by someone with a more modest education.

¹⁷ Eszterházy 1866: 90-94; Temesváry 1922, 141-147; Hegi 2019: 69-94, at 74, 78.

¹⁸ Archivio Segreto, Vaticano, Vatican City (ASV), Registra Vaticana (Reg. Vat.) [no.] 98. 1330-1331, f. 197^v. Photocopy: Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, Országos Levéltár (MNL-OL), Budapest, Diplomatikai Fényképgyűjtemény (DF), no. 291538.

¹⁹ The document was calendared in *Lettres communes de Jean XXII (1316-1334)*, ed. Guillaume Mollat, X. 5 septembre 1330-4 septembre 1331 (Paris, 1914), no. 52,295, p. 115, and in *Anjou-kori oklevéltár. Documenta res Hungaricas tempore regum Andegavensium illustrantia 1301-1387*, XV. 1331, ed. Ildikó Tóth, Szeged, 2004 (AOkl.), no. 28, p. 19.

²⁰ ASV, Reg. Vat. 98, f. 201^v; MNL-OL, DF 291539. Alike in the case of the cited Papal letter to Szécsi, the references in AOkl., XV, no. 11, p. 12, are mingled. The cited folios (f. 270^v and f. 303^v) belong to the coeval copies in the ASV, Registra Avenionensia (Reg. Aven.), reg. 37. 1330-1331 (cf. Pascu 1945, 25, note 72).

²¹ ASV, Reg. Aven. 37, ff. 270^v (10 January 1331), 303^v (6 January 1331); Reg. Vat. 98, f. 197^v (10 January 1331), 201^v (6 January 1331). The “late addition” is more than visible in the case of the folios of Reg. Aven. 37.

reasons of the “delay”.²² John XXII was not exactly completely open towards his Hungarian correspondents.²³

Roughly a month later (15 February 1331), Szécsényi was one of the Hungarian notabilities addressed by John XXII²⁴ in order to convince both Charles-Robert and his wife, Elisabeth Piast, not to further delay the marriage of their first-born (Louis) with the daughter (Joanna) of the late Duke of Calabria, Charles (the son of Robert the Wise, king of Naples).²⁵ Things had rather rapidly returned to normal between pope and voivode, as – certainly for the former – Italian (Angevine)²⁶ affairs took precedence over the events and deals at the eastern borders of the (Angevine) Kingdom of Hungary.²⁷

There, Charles-Robert had most likely moved against Basarab with an excommunicated voivode of Transylvania at his side, as indicated by the king’s request to “hold” the excommunication²⁸. Due to the distances between Avignon and Buda (not to mention Transylvania),²⁹ the request could have been made the soonest after the ill-fated royal expedition (late November-early December 1330).³⁰

²² Charles war certainly afraid that Basarab might cross the Carpathians (into Transylvania/ into the Banat) and kept his remaining troops concentrated until mid-January 1331 (Piti 2016, 384, note 25, with additional data). *An excommunicated voivode was certainly a major royal inconvenience under such (potential) circumstances.*

²³ Due also, both in 1330 and in 1331 too, for financial (tax) reasons (e.g. Augustin Theiner, *Vetera Monumenta Hungariae Historica*, I. *Ab Honorio P.P. III usque ad Clementem P.P. VI*, Roma, 1859, nr. 816, p. 527, nr. 830, p. 536; nr. 836, p. 540), or to the – not so un dissimulated – Papal support granted to the anti-Angevine rebel Salomon, Saxon count of Braşov (see also Sălăgean 2007, 178).

²⁴ The source, never published in full, was last calendared in AOKl., XV, no. 62, p. 36.

²⁵ Kelly 2003, 33, 39. Joanna later married Louis’ younger brother, Andrew.

²⁶ On 4 December 1330, Robert I had named Joanna, and her younger sister, Mary, as his rightful heirs (Casteen 2015, 9-10). For a while, Pope John XXII had been planning to move from Avignon to Italy, if not to Rome, then to Bologna (Borghi 2017: 121-141, at 133-134). For this, John XXII needed Naples on his side, even if only “via” Buda.

²⁷ Eventually, Charles-Robert’s retaliation campaign against Basarab had to be cancelled (AOKl., XV, no. 100, p. 58).

²⁸ We must emphasize that the pope did not lift the excommunication, but only had halted its proclamation (public reading).

²⁹ Some 1 500 km separated Avignon from Buda (2 000 km stood between the Holy See and Alba Iulia, the seat of Szécsi). In 1331 (March/ April-June/ July), Papal tax collectors covered the distance without haste in two-three months (Á. Maleth, “The Career of the Papal Tax Collector *Raimundus de Bonofato* in the Light of Unedited Documents in the Vatican Apostolic Archives,” in Pécout-Mathieu 2024, 219-226, at 223, 225). In Balkan comparison (Krekić 1952: 113-120), couriers connecting Ragusa to Constantinople (nearly 1300 km apart) easily reached their destination in three weeks.

³⁰ A strange deed: Almasi,-Kőfalvi 2004, pp. 347-348.

Aside from the personal conflict between Andrew Szécsi and Thomas Szécsényi³¹, the reasons for the intriguing excommunication remain cannot be separated from the complex – Papal and royal Hungarian – issue of the Transylvanian Saxons.³² The voivode was certainly at odds with Salomon, Saxon count of Braşov,³³ listed in 1327 by John XXII as one of the ‘Catholic princes’ under Charles-Robert’s arch-royal authority (like Basarab of Wallachia or Thomas himself).³⁴ Transylvania had its fair share of private conflicts that could influence grander policies,³⁵ such as the feud brutally settled by Lack, count of the Szeklers and the founder of the “Lackfi dynasty”, while Charles-Robert and Thomas Szécsényi were on campaign in Wallachia (normally, Lack should have been with them).³⁶

The issue(s) that had triggered Szécsényi’s excommunication was/ were beyond doubt profound. Not even Louis, who deeply disliked the voivode of Transylvania (his mother’s favourite),³⁷ did not mention the matter,³⁸ though he placed the responsibility his father’s Wallachian disaster on Thomas and explicitly admitted that Basarab had not wronged Charles-Robert prior to the royal expedition.³⁹

Appendix

I. Pope John XXII to Thomas Szécsényi, voivode of Transylvania (6 January 1330)

Archivio Segreto, Vaticano, Vatican City, Registra Vaticana, [no.] 98. 1330-1331, f. 201^v
(Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, Országos Levéltár, Budapest, Diplomatikai Fényképgyűjtemény,
[no.] 291539).

³¹ A conflict usually neglected in Hungarian historiography (e.g. Varga 2003, 215-226).

³² E.g. Popa-Gorjanu 2006, 143-177.

³³ See also Zimmermann-Werner 1892, p. 448; no. 494, p. 449.

³⁴ Tăutu 1962 pp. 182-184.

³⁵ See, under the circumstances, the deed issued by Charles-Robert for the royal city of Cluj on 10 July 1331, following his explicitly mentioned transalpine campaign and the interferences of voivode Thomas Szécsényi (Jakab 1870, pp. 41-42; AOKl., XV, no. 267, p. 152).

³⁶ Pascu et alii 1977, no. 36, pp. 66-67.

³⁷ For a more positive image: Zsoldos 2017, 188-192.

³⁸ We could thus speculate that Szécsényi was excommunicated after entering Wallachia. Caution is gravely advised.

³⁹ Lucherini 2015, 109-110. The Romanian edition abruptly and wrongfully ends with the so-called battle of *Posada*.

Dilecto filio nobili viro Thome Woyuode Transilvano salutem.// Prouenit ex tue deuotionis affectu quo nos et Romana ecclesia rederis ut petitiones tuas⁴⁰ illas presertim que anime tue salutem respiciunt, ad exauditionis gratiam admictamus. Hinc est quod nos tuis supplicationibus inclinati ut confessor tuus quem duxeris eligendum omnium peccatorum tuorum de quibus corde contritus et ore confessus fueris eam plenam remissionem quam Romani pontifices consueverunt interdum per speciale priuilegium personis aliquibus impartiri tibi quatenus clauis ecclesie se extendunt et gratum in oculis diuine maiestatis extiterit semel tratum in mortis articulo auctoritate apostolica concedere ualeat, deuotioni tue tenore presentium indulgemus. Sic tamen quod idem confessor de hiis de quibus alteri fuerit satisfactio impendenda, eam tibi per te si superuixeris uel per heredes tuos si tunc forte transieris faciendam iniungat, quam tu uel illi facere teneamini ut prefertur. Et ne quod absit propter huius gratiam reddaris procliuor ad illicita imposterum committenda, volumus quod si ex confidentia remissionis huius aliqua forte committens quod ad illa predicta remissio tibi nullatenus suffragetur. Nulli quoque (?) et cetera nostre concessionis et voluntatis uise (?) et cetera. Datum Auinione VIII Idus Januarii anno quintodecimo.

II. Pope John XXII to Andrew Szécsi, bishop of Transylvania (10 January 1330)

Archivio Segreto, Vaticano, Vatican City, Registra Vaticana, [no.] 98. 1330-1331, f. 197^v
(Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, Országos Levéltár, Budapest, Diplomatikai Fényképgyűjtemény, [no.] 291538).

Venerabili fratri ..⁴¹ episcopo Transilvano salutem.// Significauit nobis carissimus in Christo filius noster Carolus rex Vngarie illustris, quod tu pro eo in dilectum filium nobilem virum Thomam Woiuadam Transilvanum excommunicationum sententias aliquotiens fluminis (?) minus iuste quia idem Thomas prout honori regio conuenit et ad compescendum nephandos ausus quamplurimum expedire dinoscit in officii per eundem regem sibi commissi executione procedit. Cum autem si est ita in hac parte tam regi quam Thome prefatis inferre grauem uidearis iniuriam nec censure debite sic excedere limitem deceat iusti iudicis grauitatem, fraternitati tue pera postolica scripta mandamus, quatenus taliter a premissis absteineatis, quod nos super hiis non oporteat remedium adhibere. Datum Auinione IIII Idus Januarii anno quintodecimo.

⁴⁰ Unfortunately, no preserved Papal supplication registers predate the pontificate of Clement VI (Bossányi 1916).

⁴¹ The Pontifical chancery commonly marked with two dots (..) the names of ecclesiastical figures in the registers, where the copies of the Papal messages sent to them were entered.

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