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### Between Vienna and Moscow: the Protopope and the General Vicar Nicolae Pop Balomiri (c. 1700 to c. 1764)

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#### Abstract

This article explores the life of Nicolae Pop Balomiri, a Greek-Catholic Protopope and Orthodox Archimandrite. Appointed General Vicar by the exiled Bishop Inochentie Micu-Klein in 1747, Balomiri fled Transylvania shortly afterwards when the Court in Vienna refused to acknowledge his appointment, instead supporting his predecessor, Petru Pavel Aaron. Early on in his exile, Balomiri converted to Orthodoxy, and was later made Archimandrite of the Monastery of Curtea de Argeş. From exile in Wallachia, he continued to campaign for the rights of Romanian Orthodox Christians in Transylvania, lobbying Russian Empress Elisabeta Petrovna to intervene with the Viennese to request a non-United bishop for Transylvania. Many historians have glossed over Balomiri's importance, possibly because of his controversial role as an apostate priest.

**Keywords:** Nicolae Pop Balomiri, Nicolae Balomireanul, protopope, Greek-Catholic Church, Moscow, Empress Elisabeta Petrovna.

#### Preamble

An important figure in the Romanian church is that of Protopope Nicolae Pop, born in Balomir (Alba County). He is also known by the name of his native village: “Balomiri” / “Balomireanul”, “of Balomir”. There is not much specific academic research on him, apart from two dedicated studies, one published seven decades ago (Badiu, 1943), the other more recent (Dobrei, 2010), both presenting a Christian-Orthodox perspective rather than a historical one. Because no discussion of the confessional dispute between the Orthodox and United believers in eighteenth century Transylvania may exclude his name, Romanian historiography highlights his role and activity and his importance to the Romanian church, sometimes giving him the credit he deserves. Nevertheless, historians seem to have avoided creating a complete profile of the man, probably because Balomiri was accused of apostasy. This may partially explain the attitude of historiographers; from a confessional point of view, Balomiri is no model and nor is he an easy subject. Our study takes a historical perspective on this individual, who was known by the names Nicolae Pop Balomiri and Nichifor Balomireanul, presenting his complexity, ambition and influence as he served the Romanian nation as a senior member of the clergy.

#### The beginning of his career in the United Archiepiscopate of Balomir (1739?–1747)

Nicolae Pop Balomiri was born around 1700, probably in Balomir village, a name he was later connected to. The Franciscan Iosef Michaud describes him as a tall man (Chindriş, 2005: XXV; Chindriş, Iacob, 2009: 37). The precise date he entered the clergy is unknown. It is only certain that his name is not mentioned among the United priests from Balomir in 1733 under Inochentie Micu-Klein's presidency (Bunea, 1900: 387). Fl. Dobrei suggests that Balomiri took the holy orders in 1733 or 1734 (Dobrei, 2010: 56), but this is mere supposition. Documents from the period mention the priests Popa Groza, Popa Ionaşc, Popa Petru, Popa Vasile and 66 Greek-Catholic families. It is also the period when the name of the first Protopope

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of Balomir, Popa Ion and the existence of *Archi-diaconatus Bălomiriensis* are first registered (Togan, 1898: 203). The United Archiepiscopate of Balomir followed the Archiepiscopate of Cugir and is known to have existed between 1733 and 1750. After this period, its headquarters moved to other localities within the Transylvanian Saxon district of Orăștie. It held a relatively humble position in the Transylvanian hierarchy, with only 15 localities, although all possessed a church (Miron, 2004: 120, nota 6; p. 322).

Early information on Balomiri is uncertain. Among the participants of the Synod of Blaj on 25 May 1739, under Inochentie Micu-Klein's presidency, the name of an protopope called Ion is mentioned, identified with the Protopope of Balomiri (Dănilă, 1998: 17), but the hypothesis suggesting this may refer to another clergyman cannot be excluded. Greta M. Miron suggests that the protopope was Ioan Szabo, from Căseiu (Miron, 2007: 370). Two years on from the Synod, in 1741, we know that Micu-Klein gave the Protopope of Balomiri a mission – the first we know about. Together with Protopope George of Juc, he was to collect from the eparchy of Sovaroș money for building the monastery of Blaj (“*dăjdii, pominoace și birșaguri*”). The success of this mission led to an acknowledgement of the two protopopes for “the gold collected to build the Monastery” (Bunea, 1900: 22, 138; Pâclișanu, 1924: 114; Meteș, 1936: 11; Bunea, 2012: 65, 152). On 3 May 1742, Nicolae Pop Balomiri and Matei from Armeni were appointed by the Greek-Catholic Synod to ask the Micu-Klein to present to the people the second Leopoldine Diploma (Bunea, 1900: 151; Bunea, 2012: 162; Bodale, 2012: 392). A year later, in 1743, Balomiri sent his superior, Micu-Klein, an informative note regarding confessional problems in Romos and Turdaș, villages on whose behalf he ask for, the following year, the emission of acts from the Aulik Chancellery of Transylvania (Stanciu et al., 2009: 188, doc. nr. 65, foto 0321-0322).

There are several relevant events recorded in 1744 in the district Orăștie, which was superior to the Archiepiscopate of Balomiri. This was the year of the anti-Unionist movement, successfully led by Visarion Sarai in the areas of Hunedoara and Orăștie. After numerous complaints from the United clergy under his supervision, the Protopope Balomiri decided to ask the army to intervene. General Theobald von Czernin sent a lieutenant and four soldiers to calm the local people. In one case, on the 24 November 1744, Balomiri had to request the help of additional armed forces against the judge of Șibot village, who had occupied the church, removed its ornaments, dug under the building and replaced the soil for purification, and appointed an Orthodox priest, who had taken the holy orders “beyond the mountains”, to replace the Greek-Catholic one. This is just one example for the events happening in Transylvania at that time. Although Balomiri had received promises from the inhabitants that the church would be protected, he warned that without drastic actions, United priests in the area of Orăștie would be expelled (“*Hic uniti sacerdotes subsistere non valemus*”) (Lupaș, 1943: 216-217; Săsăujan, 2002: 226). It seems probable that he was using the opportunity presented by these events to demonstrate his courage and skills in managing a crisis situation to Micu-Klein.

A map from 1739, representing Balomir village, where the Protopope's House was established, represents an important source document, because it illustrates certain realities of the medieval period (Image 1/1) which no longer existed shortly after this time, because the village was moved in 1769–1773. The place of the old village is marked by the toponymal *Satu Vechi*, where the archaeologists identified a medieval locality known under the name of *Polgradia* (Popa, 2011: p. 406, 417, 420, 423, 441, 488-489, 673, nr. 8, fig. 51/1, pl. 190-191) (Diagram 1/2). The map shows a stone medieval church in the neighbourhood of the market. On the right upper corner there is a big court with an entrance gate situated between two buildings facing the main street. A possible noble curia may be represented by a very close second building. It is here we can locate the Protopope's House and the possible house of the protopope Nicolae Balomiri (Popa, 2011: 442, 473, 562, fig. 51/4; 58).

The hierarchical position in the Archiepiscopate, later in the United Church from Transylvania – through the position of general vicar during Inochentie Micu-Klein's exile –, is, in our opinion the results of his appurtenance to the class of the nobility in Transylvania. The name used often in documents, *Nicolaus Balomiri/Balameri*, suggests his noble rank, probably Armalist, as Francisc Pall observes, sometimes translating the name as *Nicolae Pop of Balomir* (Pall, 1997a: 67).

### **“I appoint as general vicar the much respected Nicolae Pop ...” From the Protopope to the Greek-Catholic General Vicar (1747–1748)**

The confessional dissensions of 1744 in Transylvania led to the exile to Rome of the Greek-Catholic Bishop Inochentie Micu-Klein. An ongoing correspondence began the following year between the bishop and Nicolae Pop Balomiri. During the first year of Micu-Klein's exile, his letters from Rome show a relationship of trust between the two clergy men (Prodan, 1998: 213). The first letter is dated 23 March 1745 and the bishop writes that he works “day and night in Rome for his poor abandoned nation” (Prodan, 1998: 213; Stanciu et al., 2009: 132, nr. doc. 99). After a while, another letter, dated 10 September 1745 (Pâclișanu, 1924: 28, XII; Ghitta, 2007a: 185), shows the bishop's desire to prepare his comeback as head of his Church, through a Synod which was destined to read the letter of excommunication of the Jesuit Josephus Balogh. About a year after this, in a letter from 19 November 1746, the Protopope of Balomir and the Protopopes Avram Pop of Daia and Gheorghe Dimandi of Juc are tasked with making informative notes for Rome on the activities of Petru Pavel Aaron, Vicar of Blaj, who replaced Micu-Klein (Hurmuzaki, 1900: 158; Pâclișanu, 1923: 158; Pâclișanu, 1924: 56-57, XXII; Pall, 1997a: 65; Chindriș, 2005: XXI-XXII; Chindriș, Iacob, 2007: 27-29; Dobrei, 2010: 57). On 17 December 1746, Micu-Klein wrote a letter to Balomiri motivating the halt of a synod

convoked by (Pâclișanu, 1923: 158; Pâclișanu, 1924: 61, XXVIII). The next spring, the letter from 9 April 1747 bears witness to the bishop's Petru Pavel Aaron hatred of Aron and his Jesuit supporters (Pâclișanu, 1923: 158, nota 2; Pâclișanu, 1924: 65-66, XXXIV; Chindriș, 2005: XXII, nota 133; Chindriș, Iacob, 2007: 30, nota 133; Stanciu et al., 2009: 157, doc. 150, foto 027-029). The entire correspondence is a mirror for the tensions growing within the Transylvanian United clergy, the pontifical environment and the Austrian administrative authorities, justifying the inevitable events to come.

In the context of the bishop's exile, in the villages of Balomir Archiepiscopate, the common people were agitated, demanding the return of Inochentie Micu-Klein as bishop if they were to switch to the Greek-Catholic confession (Pall, 1997a: 54, nota 3). In the neighbouring Archiepiscopate, the Romanians around Sebeș were pressured by the Transylvanian Saxon inhabitants to switch to the United Church lest they be "invaded by Germans, who will take their skin off the bodies and cut them in pieces" (Lupaș, 1943: 226). Nicolae Pop Balomiri did everything possible to keep the villages around him within the Union. We know, for example, that on 16 April 1747 he issued a permit to the Orthodox priest Vasile to continue religious services for two days in a United church in Orăștie, under the obligation that eventually the priest would join the United Church (Pall, 1997b: XVIII, 212, 315; Miron, 2004: 481; Stanciu et al., 2009: 167, doc. 180).

The Greek-Catholic confessional elite responded in various ways to the situation caused by Inochentie's exile. Most of them (Grigore Maior, Silvestru Caliani, Gheorghe Pop from Dobra, Ioan Săcădate, Gheorghe Timandi and others), as supporters of the national programme, remained faithful to the exiled bishop, led by the Protopope Nicolae Pop Balomiri, as Micu-Klein wanted. On the other side, Petru Pavel Aron's supporters were highlighting the compromise reached with the United Transylvanians regarding intent to gain rights as a nation (Câmpeanu, 2009: 191-200). Taking another point of view, Stanciu suggests considering Balomiri, together with Marsinai, the manager of the Archiepiscopate, as distinct from both parties (Stanciu, 2012: 230-231). It is clear that Balomiri's trustworthiness was repaid through his appointment as general vicar after Inochentie Klein proclaimed the apostasy of the functioning vicar, Petru Pavel Aron. Balomiri's new position was declared in a decree issued by Inochentie on 25 August 1747, enumerating the responsibilities of the role, including hearing and deciding upon problems related to religious matters, establishing new parishes, appointing new priests to available positions and executing the bishop's orders (Bunea, 1900: 223, 225; Pâclișanu, 1924: 99-101, LVI-LVII; Stăniloiaie, 1973: 92-93, 95; Bârlea, 1983: 87; Mureșanu, 1996: 139; Pall, 1997a: 97-99, 240; Pall, 1997b: 291-292; Prodan, 1998: 214; Damsa, 1994: 132; Chindriș, 2005: XXIII; Chindriș, Iacob, 2009: 31; Stanciu et al., 2009: 47, 165, nr. doc. 174, foto 0001-0004; Dobrei, 2010: 58; Stanciu, 2011a: 222, 225; Bunea, 2012: 215-216). The newcomers from the school of Rome, Silvestru Caliani and Gregorie Maior, were solicited by the exiled bishop to support Balomiri (Pâclișanu, 1923: 161; Pâclișanu, 1924: 96-97, 101, LV, LVIII). An eloquent fragment from his letter to Caliani states, "I have expelled Petru Aron from his position because he is incorrigible; I have suspended him from the holy orders and excommunicated him. I commend his canonical avoidance. I appoint as general vicar the much respected Nicolae Pop, Archdeacon of Balomiri; I commend you to leave in his hands everything related to execution and information" (Albu, 1983: 205). In parallel, Inochentie sent another two letters, one to the Greek-Catholic clergy and the other to Petru Pavel Aron (Bunea, 1900: 223).

For the safety of their correspondence, Bishop Inochentie asked Balomiri to send any letters to the address of the Rector of the Church Madonna del Pascolo (Bunea, 1900: 226, nota 1; Pall, 1997a: 151). Letters dated 9 and 30 September 1747 show the help Inochentie needed in his daily life, for example, asking Balomiri to do everything possible to stop the new Ruthenian bishop passing over the authority of Făgăraș diocese (Bunea, 1900: 227; Bunea, 2012: 217). Following a meeting where a number of protopopes gathered in Sebeș in August 1747, on the 12 September, in Daia Română, Petru Pavel Aron was suspended from his position as vicar, a decision presented to him by Nicolae Pop Balomiri and the Protopope Dragoș of Turda (Pall, 1997a: 110; Stanciu et al., 2009: 170, doc. 188). The same participants on the same date inscribed a letter to Inochentie asking him not to renounce his role and return soon. The letter was signed, among others, by Nicolae Pop Balomiri, under the name *Nicolaus Pop archidiaconus Ballamirensis* (Pall, 1997a: 110-111; Pall, 1997b: 304-305; 320, nota 5). By the end of September 1747, correspondence between Nicolae Balomiri and Inochentie reveals the bishop's desire for a church of peace because "God will soon send his defender" (*jam Deus mittet defensorem*) (Bunea, 1900: 227). The exiled bishop was clearly living with ongoing faith in better times to come, and that his return to Transylvania is only a matter of time.

Appointed as general vicar, Nicolae Balomiri became the second-highest authority in the religious hierarchy, though unrecognised by the Court of Vienna, a problem which spread agitation through the Austrian administration as well as within the United Church (Bunea, 1900: 231-232; Bunea, 2012: 221). In practical terms, the situation meant that Transylvania had three heads of the Greek-Catholic Church, none of them functioning (!) (Miron, 2004: 120, 94; Chindriș, Iacob, 2009: 32). Under these circumstances, a rapid and durable solution was required.

After hearing on 4 October 1747 about his imminent excommunication and replacement by Balomiri (Pall, 1988: 313; Pall, 1997b: 316), Aron informed Haller, the Governor of Transylvania, of his dismissal the following day (Pall, 1997b: 319). Within a short time, Haller had informed Empress Maria Theresa of the situation, mentioning the imminent convocation of a Synod in Blaj with the aim of announcing the dismissal Aron (Stanciu et al., 2009: 167-168, nr. doc. 181). On 18 October, Balomiri communicates to Governor Haller that he only desires the peace of the nation (Stanciu et al., 2009: 168, nr. doc. 182). Hurrying the procedure

along as much as possible, between the 8 and 19 October 1747 Nicolae Pop Balomiri convoked a synod ("săborul cel mare") in Blaj, without informing Aron, (Pâclișanu, 1924: 106, LXIV; Ghitta, 2007b: 54; Stanciu et al., 2009: 169, nr. doc. 186, foto 0014-0026). A letter sent by Balomiri to Protopope Lațcu of Colun states clearly that refusal to participate was punishable with suspension from the holy orders (Miron, 2004: 110, nota 192; p. 173, nota 95). This reflects the importance given to the meeting by the "party" dedicated to Micu-Klein. The synod lasted three days (19–21 October), and was "required by the absolute necessity of the clergy". After the end of the religious service, Balomiri gathered all the protopopes in the church to read them the letter announcing the appointment of the new general vicar. In spite of unjustified reservations, the synod (with three exceptions) recognised Balomiri as general vicar and, first of all, as the representative of Inochentie Micu-Klein. A solemn vow followed the meeting. A delegation, formed of Nicolae Balomiri and the Protopopes Gheorghe of Dobra and Maniu of Ormeniș were tasked with informing the Governor of Transylvania about the synod's decisions. At the same time, following the wishes of the exiled Inochentie, Balomiri was to send Inochentie 200 florins, part of the requested sum resulting from donations from the priests gathered for the synod. In a letter dated 19 October, Balomiri informed the bishop-in-exile of the synod's decisions and asked him not to renounce his role as bishop (Bunea, 1900: 225-226; Iorga, 1902: 244; Pâclișanu, 1923: 162; Pall, 1997b: 324; Chindriș, 2005: XXIII). An important step in this process was the sending of a delegation headed by Protopope Gheorghe of Dobra to Vienna with a memorandum asking for the return of the exiled bishop to his diocese (Pall, 1988: 315; Pall, 1997a: 114).

Balomiri's appointment as vicar did not receive governmental or papal acceptance. Aron made complaints to the imperial court, accusing the protopopes, especially Balomiri, of betrayal (Micu, 1995: 295r; Stanciu, 2011a: 227, nota 130). Balomiri, together with Protopope Ioan Dragoș of Turda, read the act of revocation to Aron (Stanciu et al., 2009: 168-169, nr. doc. 184), a fact that was interpreted as amounting to a coalition with the schism; the approval given to an Orthodox priest to preach in a Greek-Catholic church in Orăștie was considered supplementary proof of this (Stanciu et al., 2009: 47, 167, doc. nr. 180). Balomiri's situation was subject to a firm position from the Habsburg authorities, Dr Nilles calling him a "pseudo vicar" and, more serious, an "apostate priest" and a "betrayed" (Nilles, 1885: 593-594, 600). Aron's excommunication produced agitation among United believers (Pall, 1997b: 328), showing that opinions on his appointment were in fact divided. Empress Maria Theresa, without any authority in the field, tried to obtain a solution from Rome, sending a letter to the Papal Nuncio, Serbelloni, expressing her concern about the split of the United Church in two parties, the biggest and the most influential under the leadership of Nicolae Pop Balomiri (Bunea, 2012: 227). As a last solution, Aron was appointed an *apostolic vicar*, a position unknown to the Romanians (Stăniloae, 1973: 103-104; Damsa, 1994: 134), with the intention of returning his lost authority to him.

As part of the same strategy, on 18 November 1747, Serbelloni sent Balomiri a letter, asking of him "*abstinence from the exercise of the position of vicar and recognition of the apostolic vicar!*" (Pall, 1997a: 116; Pall, 1997b: 346; Chindriș, 2005: XXIII). Balomiri replied with a negative answer, invoking his vow to Inochentie and the fact that recognising Aron as an apostolic vicar would lead to the ruin of the union for "the uneducated poor people" (Bariț, 1993: 437; Pall, 1988: 317; Pall, 1997a: 116; Pall, 1997b: 400-401; Miron, 2004: 120, 95).

After the appointment of Aron as apostolic vicar, Balomiri fell completely into disgrace. In a letter to Serbelloni, Petru Pavel Aaron presented details undermining Balomiri (Pall, 1997b: 367-368). In the middle of December 1747, the Aulik Deputy for the Transylvanian Problems, together with the Aulik Chancellery of Transylvania, decided, in a common act, to investigate the main accused regarding the delicate situation of the Greek-Catholic clergy. The inquiry into Nicolae Pop Balomiri, S. Caliani and Gr. Maior took place on 15 December 1747, before Governor Haller, the Jesuit Pallovcis and Aron (Pall, 1988: 319; Pall, 1997a: 117, 375-384; Ghitta, 2007a: 185; Ghitta, 2007b: 54-55; Stanciu et al., 2009: 171, nr. doc. 191; p. 173, nr. doc. 196, foto 0150-1053). As a last line of defence, Balomiri tried to highlight the aspect of a compromised Union in a letter to Serbelloni, written from his residence in Balomir on the 18 December 1747 (Pall, 1997b: 400). Throughout this period, confusion reigned throughout the entire Greek-Catholic community. Vicar Aron also wrote to Serbelloni, on 20 December, complaining that Balomiri and the Basilithan monks were still refusing to recognise him as the apostolic vicar (Pall, 1997c: 5).

Events from the beginning of 1748 can best be described by the remaining correspondence. We know that in February 1748 the connection between Balomiri and Micu-Klein still continued, in disregard of the interdictions imposed by the Austrian authorities (Stanciu et al., 2009: 174, nr. doc. 200, foto 0531-0538). We also know that around the same time, Balomiri was cooperating with the United Ruthenian Bishop Manuel Olsavszky, promising a general improvement in the situation of the churches in the south of Transylvania (Stanciu et al., 2009: 174, nr. doc. 202, foto 0042). The "Balomiri" case continued to remain a concern to the Austrian authorities: the Aulik Deputy for Transylvanian Problems and the ministerial conference drew attention to the unstable situation of the United diocese, issuing a series of measures intended to help the situation, while accusing Inochentie Micu-Klein, Balomiri, Caliani and Maior of responsibility for the situation (Pall, 1997c: 46-51; 54; Stanciu et al., 2009: 175, nr. doc. 203, foto 0076-0099). The meetings reached their point of highest intensity at the ministerial conference on 2 March 1748 (Stanciu et al., 2009: 175-176, nr. doc. 204-205).

In an attempt to resolve the situation, at the request of Empress Maria Theresa, a general synod met in Sibiu from 15–17 May 1748, with the intent of “excluding Protopope Balomiri” due to “his greater devotion to the bishop than to the papacy”. The undertakings of this synod were very important in terms of the decisions and the firm position of the United protopopes. Some of the topics debated included Bishop Inochentie Micu-Klein’s return from exile to Blaj, Equality between the Romanian United Church and the Roman-Catholic Church, Recognition of the Romanian nation, and the ability of Romanian noblemen to access administrative functions. The creation of a memorandum to be sent to Vienna outlining these problems represents one of the most important acts of Transylvanian Romanians in the fight for national emancipation (Bârlea, 1983: 91-92; Prodan, 1998: 217-218; Chindriș, 2005: XXV; Chindriș, Iacob, 2009: 35-36; Bunea, 2012: 232). However, for Balomiri, the synod in Sibiu was the nail in the coffin for his career as a high-ranking Greek-Catholic clergyman. The accusations brought to him and the lack of support from some protopopes forced Balomiri to announce his abdication, at the conclusion of a long speech (Ghitta, 2007a: 193; Ghitta, 2007b: 59; Dobrei, 2010: 59-60) which happened at the same time as Petru Pavel Aron’s appointment as vicar by the clergy and by the exiled bishop (Miron, 2009: 79; Stanciu et al., 2009: 183, nr. doc. 222, p. 185, nr. doc. 229, p. 186, nr. doc. 230; Bunea, 2012: 244).

Due to the fact that Nicolae Pop Balomiri was not well thought of by Empress Maria Theresa, she attempted to resolve the situation as quickly as possible, asking Balomiri to present himself in Vienna. The Empress’s hostile attitude towards him was observed in an eloquent manner in the text of a letter dated 28 March 1748, in which Maria Theresa communicated to Bishop Olsavszky the need to bring Balomiri, Caliani and Maior to Vienna, under threat of imprisonment for refusal (Damșa, 1994: 136; Stanciu et al., 2009: 180, nr. doc. 215, foto 0100-0109). Later, a decree issued in May 1748 does not recognise the position Inochentie Micu-Klein was appointed to (Bunea, 1900: 247). Ironically, Balomiri was supposed to be a member of the 1748 deputation to Vienna presenting the memorandum outlining the grievances of the United clergy of Transylvania. He was replaced by Protopope Gheorghe Pop of Dobra (Dragomir, 1920: 197; Pall, 1988: 328; Pall, 1997a: 130, 138; Pall, 1997c: 91, nota 2; Stanciu et al., 2009: 182, doc. nr. 219).

### The Apostasy (1748)

For Balomiri, Vienna was transformed from a capital of hopes into one of disillusion. His ego wounded, he left the religious union (Miron, 2004: 174). Disappointed and hunted by the authorities, he also left Transylvania, crossing the mountains via one of the illegal hidden passes, choosing to exile himself in Wallachia, together with some of the supporters of his cause. In the opinion of some historians, this took place at the end of May or early June 1748 (Bârlea, 1983: 92), while some researchers suggest August as the month of his exile (Bunea, 1900: 249) and others even autumn of the same year (Lupaș, 1918: 118). The text of an inquiry into Ion Chirilă from Sibiu shines light upon two important aspects related to the time and the place of Balomiri’s exile. It is interesting to mention that Chirilă was accused of carrying Orthodox religious books printed in Râmnic into Transylvania (!) (Stanciu et al., 2009: 199, nr. doc. 255, foto 0051-0060; p. 208-209, nr. doc. 272). In the course of the interview, Ion Chirilă affirmed that he met Balomiri in Râmnic on Pentecost Day and spoke to him. Ioan Maxim, an inhabitant of Sibiu also under investigation, confirmed the meeting between Balomiri and Chirilă, recalling the existence of a letter instigating against Aron and for Balomiri (Stanciu et al., 2009: 201-202, nr. 258, foto 0100-0107). Thus, the two inquiries help us to reconstruct an otherwise unknown path for Balomiri’s flight to exile. He passed first through Oltenia, arrived in Râmnic and spent some time in the egumen’s Monastery in Curtea de Argeș, where he probably received his Orthodox mission. Whereas in 1748 the Pentecost Day was on May 22, we believe that Balomiri left Transylvania in May. This is also because on 7 June and again on 28 June, the Court of Vienna chastises the Governor for lack of vigilance at the borders (Stanciu et al., 2009: 186, nr. doc. 232). In the end, Balomiri, just like Micu-Klein who appointed him as vicar, was to suffer the bitter taste of exile (Bariț, 1993: 437; Dragomir, 1920: 177-178, 198; Pall, 1997a: 138-139, 241; Pall, 1997b: 386, nota 39; Pall, 1997c: 90, 93).

One of Balomiri’s duties during his short mandate as vicar was to attract Orthodox clergy toward the United Church, and we have evidence of four Orthodox bishops switching to the Greek-Catholic Church: Toader from Orba, Onul and Ion from Băla and Nicula from Iarcea (Laslo, 2000: 118; Dumitran et al., 2009: 132, 184, 186). Paradoxically, all Nicolae Pop Balomiri’s actions after the summer of 1748 would be anti-Unionist missions, intended to weaken the United Church and to bring about the return of the Romanian population of Transylvania to Orthodoxy. The level of anti-Unionist movements generated by Balomiri’s exile was even greater than that caused by the sermons held by Visarion Sarai (Chindriș, Iacob, 2009: 37). For Balomiri, switching to Orthodoxy was in fact a *return* to this confession (Nistor, 2002: 583; Dobrei, 2010: 60). Even though he was born in an environment deeply affected by Greek-Catholicism, he belonged to a group of theologians from Blaj who were previously Orthodox priests.

In 1750, when the Habsburgs met again to discuss the consequences of Balomiri’s actions, Governor Haller represents him as an ambitious man who likes to order, but never to listen: “*Acta enim omnia illius satis ostendere, inquietum ingenii hominem fuisse, qui praeesse semper, non parere cupiebat, et ideo etiam profugit, quod alter vicarius apostolicus declaratus, ille vero renunciare coactus fuerit. Vereri ergo eundem, qui jam in juventute majora ambiit, Graecumque etiam fermentum jam imbibit, in Transylvania vix contentum futurum, qui forte superioribus continuo negotium facesseret, imo plebeculae venenum propinaret*” (Bunea, 2012: 233, nota 352). A. Bunea considers that Balomiri’s act of abandoning the Union is

generated by this attitude and by the attempt to bring Micu-Klein back to Transylvania through spurring agitation among United believers (Bunea, 1900: 248; Bunea, 2012: 233).

### **The Orthodox Archimandrite at the Monastery of Curtea de Argeș (1750–1764) and a new name: Nichifor Balomireanul**

Nicolae Pop Balomiri switched to Orthodoxy, probably when he took refuge in Râmnic in June 1748. We believe that he was solicited to occupy a position in the monastery in Curtea de Argeș, where he became Father Superior and Archimandrite. He made his pledge of monkhood under the name Nichifor Balomireanul (Ionescu, 1893: 4; Hurmuzaki, 1900: 173; Bunea, 1900: 252; Iorga, 1908: 130; Iorga, 1932: 127; Bodogae, 1944: XXIII, nota 3). Tradition mentions his exile together with his relatives and supporters, establishing a new location in Ungureni hamlet, near Flămânzești village, close to Curtea de Argeș (Mateescu, 1909: 7, nota 3). N. Iorga asserts that Balomiri was accompanied across the Carpathians mountains by his administration, a fact that is unverified (Iorga, 1969: 60).

In October 1748, Balomiri, playing the last card in his already exhaustive diplomatic game, reached Moldavia and from there continued to Russia, probably in 1749 (Hurmuzaki, 1900: 171; Dragomir, 1920: 198; Ionașcu, 1943: 365; Bezviconi, 1962: 146; Pall, 1997b: 386, nota 39). At that time, the confessional conflict in Transylvania expanded beyond its borders to Wallachia, where the Protopope Brașov also took refuge. Balomiri was received for an audience with the Russian Empress, Elisabeta Petrovna, daughter of Peter the Great. Some erroneous opinions state that this meeting took place in [Santkt] Petersburg (Hurmuzaki, 1900: 172; Iorga, 1932: 127; Lupaș, 1933: 301; Bezviconi, 1962: 145-146; Iorga, 1969: 60; Popa-Andrei, 2009: 148 și nota 65). The place was in fact clearly confirmed in the translation of a letter sent by Elisabeta to Vienna: “We found out here, in Moscow...” (Bariț, 1993: 724). Complaining about his former situation in Transylvania, Nicolae Balomiri confessed to the Czarina, laying blame at the feet of the religious proselytism of the United Church. Presenting the privileges gained by the Orthodox from the Calvinists, Balomiri asked, among other things, for the establishment of a non-United bishop in Transylvania (Ionescu, 1893: 3; Hurmuzaki, 1900: 172-173; Iorga, 1902: 248; Iorga, 1916: 140-141; Lupaș, 1918: 118-119; Dragomir, 1920: 178; Meteș, 1936: LXXXIV; Ionașcu, 1943: 366; Albu, 1983: 212; Bârlea, 1983: 92; Chindriș, 2005: XXV; Buzalic, 2006: 84). As an immediate reaction to Balomiri’s confession, a diplomatic intervention was made in 1750 by Empress Elisabeta to Mihail Petrovici Bestuzev-Riumin (Pretlach, in the opinion of other sources), the Russian Ambassador in Vienna (Iorga, 1917: 149-150; Stanciu et al., 2009: 231, nr. doc. 314; Câmpeanu, 2009: 199; Stanciu et al., 2009: 54; Stanciu, 2011a: 229), presenting Balomiri’s requests (Bariț, 1869: 273-274; Soloviev, 1963: cartea XII, tom 23-24, p. 55-56) (annex 1). The Russian Ambassador was given a tough mission, but nevertheless, he asked for details from the Court of Vienna, showing interest in Transylvania’s Orthodox population. Vienna issued an official answer (Stanciu et al., 2009: 233, nr. doc. 314). Meanwhile, in Bucharest, as mentioned in a letter from the Franciscan Iosef Michaud, Nicolae Pop was planning “an affair” in Constantinople as well (Bunea, 1900: 252; Bunea 2012: 235), probably with the intent to submit to the Orthodox Patriarchy a complaint similar to that presented in Moscow.

Some historians consider Elisabeta’s actions, spurred by Balomiri’s intervention, as interference from Russia in the ethnical and confessional politics of Transylvania. At her own expense, the Russian empress built the Church of St. Nicolae in Șchei (Brașov) (Bariț, 1869: 273; Iorga, 1932: 127); some historians believe that Balomiri insisted on this matter, too (Nistor, 2002: 583). After 1746, Elisabeta asked for the protection of Transylvania’s Orthodox population; S. Dragomir asserts that Balomiri played a decisive role in encouraging Russian involvement in this matter (Dragomir, 1920: Popa-Andrei, 2009: 148, nota 65). On one hand, the Russian intervention is seen as the greatest support given to the Transylvanian Orthodox, together with that from Karlowitz (Ionescu, 1893: 3-4). On the other hand, Gh. Bariț calls it “Russian intervention in the religious affairs of the Romanians from Transylvania”, associated with the Serbian intervention and leading, in the end, to the deterioration of the Transylvanian Orthodox community (Bariț, 1869: 273). The same year, another line of action took place, involving the Orthodox believer Nicolae Oprea from Săliște sending petitions to Vienna (which were refused by the Austrian authorities) asking for the protection of the Russian Ministry in Vienna (Lupaș, 1927: 265; Popa-Andrei, 2009: 147, nota 62). For his assumed role as representative of the Romanian Orthodox in Transylvania and due to his relations with Russia, Nicolae Oprea was arrested and imprisoned (Popa-Andrei, 2009: 148).

Balomiri’s gesture came as a continuation of an older practice. Before him, two Orthodox metropolitans from Transylvania, Iorest and Sava Brancovici had, in the seventeenth century, complained to the Russian court (Bunea, 1910: 154). Practically, when solutions for the Orthodox complaints were not forthcoming, Russian support had been requested (Popa-Andrei, 2009: 148). Returning to the period under discussion, in 1758, an Orthodox priest, Popa Iuon from Aciliu, escaped to Russia, causing the authorities to fear a massive migration of the Transylvanian Orthodox population to Russia. The monk Nicodim arrived in Russia in 1757 and asked Elisabeta to annex the Transylvanian Orthodox Church to the Holy Synod of the Russian Church (Ionașcu, 1943: 368-381; Lupaș, 1927: 265; Săsăușan, 2002: 193-194). The Ulfeld report, issued by the Austrian authorities in 1758, was a consequence of these actions and highlighted the need for the truth about Transylvania to reach Russia, because Orthodox Transylvanians had a different statute, being tolerated, unlike other schismatic groups in Hungary, bearing rights not granted to other countries (Bunea, 1902: 140-147).

In reality, due to Russian influence, one of the two decrees Empress Maria Theresa issued on 7 November 1750 (not published for Romanians until 1759) shows the religious tolerance of the Empress, through allowing the free practice of the Orthodox cult in churches in the south of Transylvania (Bunea, 1900: 253-255; Lupaş, 1918: 120-121; Săsăușan, 2002: 165, 170; Bunea, 2012: 236-238). The second decree issued by Maria Theresa illustrates a hidden plan of the Viennese court: a Jesuit plot to attract Balomiri to Transylvania for incarceration, with a reward of 200 gold coins for his capture (Hurmuzaki, 1900: 173-174; Bunea, 1900: 253; Lupaş, 1918: 119; Dragomir, 1920: 207; Ionaşcu, 1943: 366; Albu, 1983: 211; Dobrei, 2010: 62; Bunea, 2012: 236-237). This plan is also presented in a note from the Aulik chancellery dated December 1750 (Stanciu et al., 2009: 237, nr. doc. 321). Every aspect of the plan was carefully prepared such that relations with Russia would remain safe. The Machiavellianism of the plot is underlined in a resolution from a conference in Vienna occasioned by the letter of the Russian empress, the text being synthesized by Gh. Bariţ as follows:

A rescript should be issued for this matter, to permit the Transylvanian Governor to respond with the enumeration of all the many outlaw acts committed by the non-United Romanians [...] the Governor must fiercely prevent Balomiri or his allies gaining access to such secret documents. On the contrary, the protectors of the Union must do everything possible to capture Balomiri or at least his correspondence (Bariţ, 1869: 273-274; Ionescu, 1893: 3-4; Bariţ, 1993: 437).

In spite of all this, the former vicar was not betrayed.

Balomiri's thoughts and actions immediately after his decision to escape Transylvania were full of intimidation and revenge. At the same time, similarly to the bishop in Rome, he thought that putting pressure upon the Transylvanian authorities and menacing those Romanians returning to Orthodoxy would produce results that would help him and Inochentie to return in Transylvania. In fact, Balomiri was acting according to the promise made to Bishop Micu-Klein in 1744 at the synod in Blaj. The authenticity of the menace is doubtful, playing a role in the suppositions related to the "Orthodoxy" of the bishop Micu-Klein, who, in fact, proved to be a better Catholic than his followers in the position of bishop (Nedici, 2013). The maintenance of the Eastern (Byzantine) rite by the Greek-Catholics was constant in this confession, with one inconsistency related to the Latinity in the understanding of the dogma. In his scenario, Balomiri based his actions partially on a mass migration of Transylvanian Romanians to Wallachia. This would have been a good opportunity to put supplementary pressure on the Austrians to accept Inochentie Micu-Klein's return from exile (Bunea, 1900: 251). However, the decision was not a consequence of anti-Unionist movements, such as the movement initiated by Visarion Sarai, as Şt. Meteş affirms (Meteş, 1971: 158). We mentioned above the episode in 1744, when Balomiri himself asked for the intervention of the army to calm tensions in his Archiepiscopate against the Orthodox.

A document probably dating from the summer of 1748, from the Transylvanian Aulik Chancellery to the Gubernia, flagged up that Nicolae Balomiri had left Transylvania for Wallachia. This communication came with the proposal that a replacement should be found most urgently. The Protopopes Avram from Daia, Gheorghe from Dobra, Zacharias Csóka Hunyadiensis, Basilius Fogorasiensis and Mány Órmény Szebesiensis were the authority's preferred candidates (Stanciu et al., 2009: 194, nr. doc. 250). The document demonstrates the Habsburg Court's desire to resolve the situation as quickly as possible.

During the first months of 1749, correspondence between the Aulik Council for War and General Platz shows the initiation of deliberate acts by Balomiri aimed at Transylvanian Romanians (Stanciu et al., 2009: 200, doc. 256, foto 84-87; p. 208, nr. doc. 271). Balomiri's departure from Transylvania provoked fresh confusion and anti-Unionist agitation among the masses, contributing, together with a lack of new clerical appointments, to a decrease in the number of United priests. The consequences of Balomiri's intervention in the Russian court generated, through the spreading popularity of the Russian Empress in Romanian villages, many pro-Orthodox reactions (Hurmuzaki, 1900: 173; Bunea, 1900: 252; Dragomir, 1920: 199-204; Pall, 1997a: 139, 169; Stanciu et al., 2009: 226, nr. doc. 309, foto 0306-0309). On 25 April 1750, Empress Maria Theresa complained about the state of the United religion in Transylvania ("the Union decreases day by day"). Aron, who was now firmly installed as Bishop, had no solution, although Balomiri was considered the main culprit, accused of apostasy and agitating the masses in Transylvania from exile in Wallachia (Bunea, 2012: 242, 248-249, annex II). The reformed Transylvanian clergy shared this perspective on the situation. In 1760, in his memoirs, the nobleman Gheorghe Rettegi notes the appointment of an Orthodox bishop of the "schismatic" Transylvanians, due to the influence of the Russian Empress following Balomiri's complaints (Sipos, 2007: 197).

Balomiri remained in Russia for more than a year, leaving on 17 November 1749 (Dragomir, 1920: 198). After his return from Moscow, the former Protopope and general vicar became Archimandrite and Father Superior of Argeş Monastery. He remained here between 1750 and 1764, taking the monachal name of Nichifor (Bariţ, 1869: 273; Ionescu, 1893: 4; Bunea, 1900: 252; Lupaş, 1918: 119; Dragomir, 1920: 207; Lupaş, 1933: 302; Ionaşcu, 1943: 366-367; Bârlea, 1983: 92; Dobrei, 2010: 62). He maintained a secret correspondence with his faithful supporters from Transylvania (Bariţ, 1869: 273), later stopped by the only efficient measure the Austrian court took against Balomiri (Dragomir, 1920: 207).

### The consequences of his actions

From the group Micu-Klein appointed in Blaj as Balomiri's supporters, many men left the capital and some abandoned the Union. Daniil Marsinal (Marginai), an Armalist who took the path of Orthodoxy in the 1750s, followed the closest path to that of Balomiri. A nobleman, he was a member, as manager, of the Archiepiscopal Court, in the team of the former general vicar of Blaj, Balomiri. From Karlowitz, Marsinal instigated Transylvanian Romanians to appoint a non-United archbishop. (Stanciu, 2009: 169, 174; Stanciu et al., 2009: 49-50, 54; Stanciu, 2011a: 229; Stanciu, 2011b: 18-25; Stanciu, 2012: 231), T. Bodogae called him "a second Nicolae Balomireanul" (Bodogae, 1944: XLIII).

"The right hand of the Bishop" Inochentie Micu-Klein, as Fr. Pall calls him (Pall, 1997a: 169), was so discrete in the last years of his life that there is little information regarding his destiny. Information about him becomes harder to discover once his activities became more distanced from the Transylvanian desiderates. For example, there is no further information about the energy he spent in the field of confessional disputes between Transylvanian Romanians. His isolation is relative, most of the time a consequence of his departure from the forefront of the Transylvanian religious life, and the fact that his name is not frequently mentioned in local correspondence, unlike the Wallachian correspondence.

One of Balomiri's plans at the time he left Transylvania was for demographic destabilisation, with the Romanian population from the south of the Principality emigrating to the south of the Carpathians Mountains. He proposed a deal to the Wallachian ruler in which 16,000 Transylvanian Romanians were to be helped to pass over to Wallachia, in exchange for some assurances (Hurmuzaki, 1900: 170; Iorga, 1902: 248; Meteş, 1936: LXXXIV; Meteş, 1971: 159; Roman, 1971: 903; Prodan, 1998: 220; Stanciu et al., 2009: 200, nr. doc. 256; Dobrei, 2010: 62). The ruler refused for a while to endanger his relationship with the Habsburg House, being on good terms with the Catholics who had settled in Walachia (Hurmuzaki, 1900: 170-171; Albu, 1983: 207). Nevertheless, this attempt from Bucharest resulted in a written answer dated 14 May 1750, in which Balomiri receives approval from Grigore Ghica II for the Transylvanian Romanians who had made it to Wallachia to settle down on the territory without a landlord, to choose their own judge and to pay the local taxes (Dragomir, 1920: 89-90; Lupaş, 1927: 265; Ionaşcu, 1943: 366; Prodan, 1998: 220 și nota 80; Stanciu et al., 2009: 226, nr. doc. 309, p. 227, nr. doc. 311). There is no evidence for migration until the 1760s, when census calculations for 1761-1767 show a number of Transylvanian Romanians close to that proposed by Balomiri (Meteş, 1936: LXXXIV; Roman, 1971: 903). The establishment of border regiments in the south of Transylvania was a consequence of this situation.

Information about Balomiri's last years of life, exclusively from Wallachia, suggests a character willing to be appointed to an important position in the Orthodox Church and, at the same time, available to support the anti-Unionist movement in Transylvania. In 1763, he stood, without success, as a candidate for the position of Archbishop of Buzău, against Partenie, the Prior of Tismana Monastery and Cosma Popescu, the Protosinghellos of the Bucharest Mitropoly (Ionaşcu, 1943: 366, nota 2; Dobrei, 2010: 62). This was the year of his last hope of returning to Transylvania, where the Orthodox Romanians had managed to appoint an Orthodox Archbishop, the Serbian Dionisie Novacovici. The Archbishop of Râmnic, Grigorie Socoteanu, intervened on Balomiri's behalf, asking that he should be allowed "to return to his native land and people" (Dobrei, 2010: 62). The request was refused, and Balomiri remained in Wallachia.

A less important, though remarkable, fact is that Balomiri left no written work, given that even in his generation – that of the first theologians of Blaj – senior clergy typically left a series of works for the next generations. There is a possibility that an unsigned manuscript, written shortly after 1750 as a response to *Floarea Adevărului* by P.P. Aron, is, at least partially, the work of Balomiri, who was at that time arguably the party most interested (as recent refugee in Wallachia and "inside man") to respond to the work of the Transylvanian United Bishop. The manuscript was published by Teodor Bodogae, who mentions the difficulty of establishing its real author (Bodogae, 1944: II-XXXII). Some arguments support its authorship belonging to Balomiri, others argue against this, the most important from the last category being that the manuscript was finished around 1765 and the last year in which we have direct evidence for Balomiri's continued existence is 1764.

Nichifor Balomireanul remains in the collective memory of the Orthodox world. His name appears in 1763 in a rhymed chronicle signed by the Hieromonk Efrem of Prislop, who highlights Balomiri's closeness to Inochentie and how he was chased from Transylvania (Efrem, 1898: 2-5; Dobrei, 2010: 60). Priest Mihail Popovici from Banat, travelling in 1770-1771 in Russia, recollects Balomiri's actions with Czarina Elisabeta (Dobrei, 2010: 61). In 1773, several Wallachian noblemen make appeal regarding the historical memory of relations with the Russian Court, where good relations were established by two Transylvanian priests "decorated for their services by the Emperor": Nichifor Balomireanu ("Argeşanul") and Sofronie of Cioara ("Vieroaşanul") (Dobrei, 2010: 63).

In Transylvania, after Balomiri left, the locality of Balomir had three United priests in 1750 and four in 1760-1762. As the conscription of the Greek-Catholic clergy of Petru Pavel Aron shows that year, Balomir lost its Protopope residence, which and moved to Vaidei (Josan et al., 1996: 77). An anathema written in 1752 with Cyrillic letters on an *Octoih* printed in Râmnic (1750) shows the existence of an Orthodox priest in Balomir named Popa Mihail (Dreghiciu, 1997: 374, poz. 28). The area Balomir village belonged to was subject to many anti-Unionist movements. Monk Sofronie was a native of Cioara village and a fervent activist against religious unification. It is also worth mentioning Nenadovici, who wrote in 1759, that "they had been fighting

the United fiercely like fighting wild animals for the last 15 years” (Bunea, 1902: 144-145). The petitions prove that these bad relations dated from before the beginning of the 1750s and were not strictly related to the anti-Unionist movements. Petru Dobra was appointed in 1744 as an inspector and “protector of the Union” (Lupaş, 1943: 225). In an attempt to temper these acts, an imperial order was issued in 1748 permitting the Orthodox believers in Orăştie district to preserve their confession if they were not willing to switch to the Greek-Catholic confession (*Serviciul Judeţean Alba al Arhivelor Naţionale, fond Mitropolia Greco-Catolică Română de Alba Iulia şi Făgăraş-Blaj. Arhiva generală. Acte neînregistrate, nr. 1/1748; Lupaş, 1943: 227*). Under the same Archbishopric, in 1757, the “schismatic priests” Stan and Toma of Cugir, Mihăilă of Şibot and Avram of Vinerea, during the agitation caused by the presence of Visarion Sarai in Transylvania, took the holy orders in “foreign provinces”, in Wallachia, or possibly even in Serbia (Bunea, 1902: 122).

The agitation produced by the movement of the priest Ioan from Aciliu spread through the former Archiepiscopate of Balomiri, where in 1758 the Romanian population took possession of the churches in Cugir, Şibot, Vinerea and Balomir by force (Bunea, 1902: 140). In the same year, the churches in Cugir and Balomir were retroceded (Bunea, 1902: 143). The scenario was repeated two years later, forcing the Empress Maria Theresa to admit that in some villages, Balomir among them, the masses, instigated by Sofronie of Cioara, had taken the churches from the United Church by force (Bunea, 1902: 176; Păclişanu, 1993: 33). In 1759, Ivan Demian and Mihul Băluş of Balomir forbade villagers from attending the church taken by the United Church from the Orthodox believers (Lupaş, 1944: 474, 483). Later, in 1767, another representative of Balomiri family is mentioned as priest in Balomir. His name is George (*Georgius Bálomeri*) and his name appears on the list of Orthodox priests, together with Mihai Samoilescu (*Samuel Balomiri*). The presence of his name in the registers of the School in Blaj in 1760 (Chindriş, 2005: LV, nota 437; Chindriş, Iacob, 2009: 106, nota 437) shows that he was also of the United Church. The names may reflect the passage of Balomiri family members to the Orthodox confession, beginning with Nicolae, although there did exist the same time several families with the same name, without connections to the family of the archbishop or connected to it only by alliance affinities. The case of the priest Mihai Samoilescu favours the last hypothesis, because although his last name was Samoilescu, he was later known as *Samuel Balomiri*, transforming the last name into a first name. We do not know if the priest George Balomiri, attested by the Greek-Catholic clergy in 1800 (Josan et al., 1996: 77, 226) is identical to the George mentioned in 1767 as family to another confession. We can only mention that during the eighteenth century, families called Balomiri were Greek-Catholic and became involved in prolific activity in the Transylvanian Saxon towns of Orăştie and Sebeş, being appointed to important administrative positions such as senator, imperial judge, mayor and so on.

In Transylvania, the actions of the former Greek-Catholic Protopope and Vicar Nicolae Pop Balomiri left their marks. The passage from one confession to another was clearly not a consequence of injustices and persecutions upon the Orthodox brethren, as Şt. Meteş proposes (Meteş, 1936: LXXXIV), ignoring the fact that Balomiri enlisted the help of the army to end the anti-Unionist movements in his Archiepiscopate. The internal fighting between Orthodox and United believers brought Russia into the fray. Balomiri played an important role in this through his direct intervention with Empress Elisabeth, pursuing a protectorate over Orthodoxy and the Transylvanian Romanians. The situation reached a level of tension the House of Habsburg had barely imagined possible and subsequently struggled to manage. Balomiri’s attitude was important in the events to follow, in that he was transformed from being a fervent supporter of the Union to the most active partisan within Orthodoxy. His refuge in Wallachia and his acceptance for an audience with the Russian Empress had the power to agitate the Romanians – Orthodox and Greek-Catholic believers alike (Bunea, 1900: 248-249; Miron, 2004: 174). For example, Nicolae Oprea from Sălişte, the Romanian Mandatory in Vienna for Romanians living in several districts in Southern Transylvania, was empowered by the Romanians in Orăştie to ask that they might be allowed to return to Orthodoxy (Bunea, 1900: 250, 261; Lupaş 1943, p. 241-252; Popa-Andrei, 2009: 147-148; Bunea, 2012: 234). We believe that Balomiri’s apostasy – which generated so much confusion and dissension, leading to the takeover and purification of churches by the Orthodox in the south of Transylvania through the exhumation of people buried by Greek-Catholic priests and their inhumation according to Orthodox rites (Bunea, 1900: 249; Bunea, 2012: 233) – may have been the starting point of a concerted anti-Unionist movement in 1751-1761 in this region. The migration of a significant number of believers to Wallachia led, without a doubt, to confessional and demographic destabilisation in Transylvania. As a result of these factors, and proving that the Austrian administration had finally given up, in 1761-1762, the Church of the Orthodox Romanians in Transylvania was officially recognised (Săsăujan, 2002: 72).

Those who had participated in Balomiri’s group in Transylvania suffered, over time, the consequence of their open political conflict with the authorities. Petru Maior, Gheorghe Cotore, Silvestru Caliani and Ioan Săcădate all suffered various consequences in 1764 for their attempt to reappoint Inochentie Micu-Klein as Bishop of Blaj (Câmpeanu, 2009: 199).

It is hard to find equilibrium in the confessional discourse upon Nicolae Pop Balomiri’s life and activity. Much depends on the provenance of the discourse. Resentments have taken the place of rigour in analysis of the facts, excluding from the Romanian pantheon an important member of the senior clergy, although, paradoxically, his destiny was intertwined with that of Inochentie Micu-Klein, whom he served devotedly until the end and whose plans he adopted, trying to bring about the exiled bishop’s return.

Nowadays, his actions as an apostate priest are seen from the perspective of his refuge in Wallachia; however, as his contemporaries observed, “if Visarion started the revolution against Union in the previous years, the next revolutionists were the main important members of United clergy, their protopopes” (Chindriș, Iacob, 2009: 33).

In reality, Balomiri played his best hand in the struggle undertaken by his generation for the recognition of the rights, often broken, of the Transylvanian Romanians during the period of the Habsburg domination. His complex personality has been evaluated erroneously from a confessional viewpoint. The moral rehabilitation of Protopope Nicolae Pop Balomiri is important, because he was not only a fighter for religion, but also a fighter for the Romanian nation. This reading of history is sustained by the activity of Balomiri’s family in the nineteenth century, who remained devoted to the Romanian cause, producing representatives such as Simeon Balomiri and Ioan Balomiri in who held posts in the Diet and in Parliament in Budapest (Salceriu, 1977: 594; Dănilă, 1996: 133). As one of the first generation of theologians from Blaj, fighters for the rights of the Romanians in Școala Ardeleană, Protopope Balomiri chose a different path in his last years of life, preferring not to be a privileged survivor. He chose instead to fight from the outside and change on the inside.

### Annexe 1

An order given by Empress Elisabeth of Russia, to his ambassador in Vienna, following alerts from Protopope Nicholas Balomir (original in Russian):

«Явился здесь в Москве из Трансильвании протопоп Николай Баломири и в нашем Синоде подал прошение, что он прислан сюда от клира и народа трансильвано-волошского просить милостивой защиты православным христианам в нестерпимых бедах и гонениях, претерпеваемых ими за непринятие унии с римскою церковью. Из поданных им бумаг, к вам пересылаемых, вы увидите, что издавна и до самого царствования императора Леопольда они пользовались совершенною свободою относительно веры и отправления богослужения, имели собственных греческой веры епископов и священников без всякого ограничения и принуждения к унии; но вдруг явились от папы римского духовные особы под именем богословов, которые сделали распоряжения к приведению народа в унию, также и от нынешней императрицы об этом некоторые указы последовали. Вы, рассматривая все это, прежде всего обстоятельно наведаетесь, подлинно ли протопоп Баломири послан сюда от всего народа с просьбою о защите и точно ли трансильвано-волошский народ находится в таких обстоятельствах, как он объявляет, и если окажется, что подлинно, то вы можете надлежащий мемориал сочинить и подать министерству императрицы-королевы: в этом мемориале вы будете домогаться, чтоб они по-прежнему были оставлены в греческой вере без всякого притеснения. Вы обратитесь к справедливости и великодушию императрицы, укажите, что в ее областях, во всех государствах и в нашей империи находятся разных наций и религий люди и церкви и к перемене веры не принуждаются. Впрочем, отдастся на ваше благоусмотрение, подавать мемориал или объясниться устно»

(after Soloviev, 1963)

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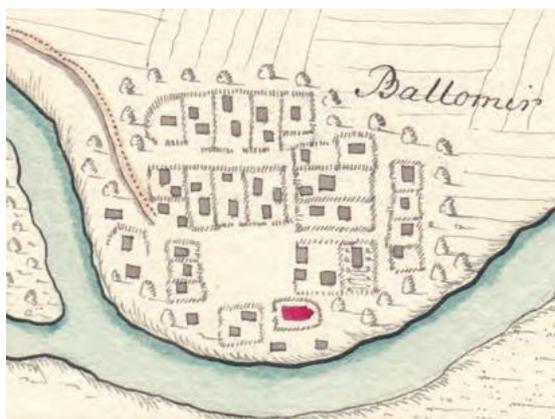
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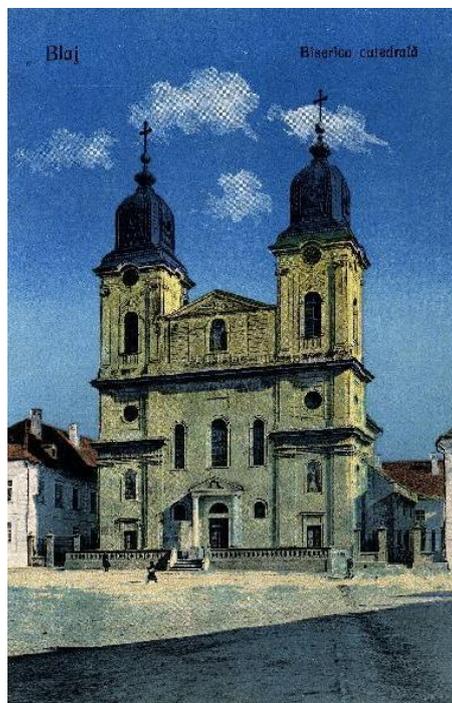


2

**Fig. 1.** The medieval and premodern location of Balomir village on a map from 1739, possibly representing the church of the Archbishop Nicolae Pop Balomiri, as well as the parochial house and the nobiliary curia (*Plan des Lagers auf dem Rück March aus dem Bannat bey Ballomir*, 1739, private map collection “Ovidiu Șandor”, Timișoara) (1); Josephinian map (1769-1773) of the village moved to the present location (after Popa, 2011)



1



2

**Fig. 2.** The Greek-Catholic Archbishop Inochentie Micu-Klein (1) and the Greek-Catholic Cathedral of Blaj, around the year of 1900 (2)

*Indignus Levit et Capitellanus*  
*Nicolay P. Ballamiri Vic. Ge*  
*neralijs qm.*

*Balomir Die 24<sup>ta</sup>*  
*Menſis JED A<sup>o</sup> 1748.*

**Fig. 3.** Document from 1748, issued in Balomir village, signed by the general vicar Nicolae Pop Balomiri (after Stanciu et al., 2009, foto doc. nr. 0042)



1



2

**Fig. 4.** Empress Maria Theresa of the Holy Roman Empire, Great Princess of Transylvania (1) Empress Elisabeth of Russia (2).



**Fig. 5.** Argeş Monastery, princely foundation, where Nichifor Balomireanu (Nicolae Pop Balomiri) served as Father Superior between 1750 and 1764 (after Dieudonné Augusta Lancelot-*The Pitoresque World-Scenes in many lands*, London, 1872)