

Russian Icon Marketing in Transylvania as a Means of Political and Social Destabilization

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Abstract:

The sale of mass production Russian icons in Transylvania is known only through the events at the time and after Horea's Uprising of 1784-1785. Quite at the beginning of the uprising, a group of three Russian icon merchants is caught in the plaza of Aiud, being suspected of having spread among the Orthodox Romanians in the Principality the news that an imminent attack of the Russian army will happen. A large-scale investigation was ordered by the Aulic Chancellery on March 31, 1785, to determine whether the rumor of the imminence of this attack was true. The documents issued by this investigation allow for the reconstruction of the route taken by Russian pedlars in 1784, offer minimal information on the selling strategy, which only partially confirms the fear of the authorities, as well as on the appearance of the pedlars and the icons they sold. Finally, the Aulic Chancellery recommended a ban on trade with Russian icons, and on July 28, 1785, the imperial decree banning Russian pedlars from entering the Habsburg Empire in the future was issued. Traces of their passage through the Principality have been found in insignificant numbers, whereas the ban helps to date to the last decades of the 18th century the few Russian mass production icons identified in museum collections and as a result of field research.

Keywords: *Russian merchants, Franz Neuhauser the Younger, Remondini, Governor Brukenthal, Aulic Chancellery*