

Redrawing the Lines of Loyalty: The Habsburgs, Russia, and the Transylvanian Orthodox during the Seven Years' War

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Abstract:

From the turn of the eighteenth century onward the Habsburg Monarchy and Russia became major players on the Lower Danube in their pursuit of war against the Ottomans. Despite their colliding ambitions over the region, higher stakes in Europe kept the two powers allied with each other for much of the period. Nevertheless, keen to further its political agenda, Russia employed a range of tactics to destabilize its Balkan competitor. Public diplomacy was used creatively to recruit the aid of Serbs and Romanians who inhabited the eastern parts of the Habsburg Monarchy. Their discriminated Byzantine Orthodox faith gave Russia a leverage, as it advertised itself as the single most powerful patron of the tsar's afflicted coreligionists. This strategy reached its climax during the Seven Years' War, when renewed attempts to gain Serbian settlers for the border regions of Russia and reiterated interventions with the court in Vienna in support of the Orthodox demands for toleration in Habsburg Transylvania strained relations between the two empires.

By focusing on the news and calls coming from Transylvania in the 1750s and early 1760s, my paper follows the interplay between politics, religion, and society to measure how influential Russia was in the province. On the one hand, there is the very tangible Russian engagement with the Orthodox Christians—from the money contributed to renovating the largest church in the suburbs of Braşov, to the backing offered by ambassadors Bestuzhev-Ryumin and Keyserling to the demands submitted to the court in Vienna. Under stress, the Habsburg bureaucracy began conflating every single incident in Transylvania as part of a Russian conspiracy, to which disparate evidence seemed to point. The Orthodox Romanians themselves added to the pressure by exploiting the existing fears that the Monarchy might lose a significant share of its taxpayers if they chose to migrate to Russia.

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