

ABSTRACT:

THE EDICT OF TORDA

AN EARLY EXPERIMENT IN RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

IN EUROPE

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Issued 30 years before the world-famous Edict of Nantes, the Edict on Religious Tolerance of Torda (1568), in the principality of Transylvania, stands as the first decree of its kind in the history of modern Europe. In a period of history in which persecution, intolerance and war between states and princes because of religion was the general rule, this Edict also represents an unusually advanced political solution to the problem of increasing religious diversity and rivalry between religious and social factions, based on acceptance of difference as an enriching experience, and a clear precedent of more recent developments in the legalization of religious pluralism such as the American Constitution.

This short paper is a description of the unique political and sociological circumstances existing in the principality of Transylvania in the 16th century that allowed the political experiment of religious tolerance represented by the Edict of Torda to take place. There is a brief chronology of how the ideas of the Reformation arrived in connection to the different ethnic communities living together in that area, and how the influence of Michael Servetus's ideas in the Transylvanian royal court, through the Italian physician Giorgio Biandrata and the Hungarian preacher Ferenc Dávid, was a key factor in Prince János Zsigmond's decision to first freely debate and then explicitly tolerate all received religions in his country, and how the relevance of Michael Servetus's work is still emotionally relevant for Unitarians today.