

UNIVERSITATEA „BABEȘ-BOLYAI” CLUJ NAPOCA
FACULTATEA DE TEOLOGIE ROMANO-CATOLICĂ
ȘCOALA DOCTORALĂ - RELIGIE, CULTURĂ, SOCIETATE

PhD Thesis Summary

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Cluj Napoca

2025

Keywords: *Tradition, faith, Greek Catholic liturgy, Greek Catholic religion, Transylvania, Byzantine rite*

Summary

The fundamental objective of the present dissertation is to present the specific identity, conditions of survival, and challenges of the Hungarian Greek Catholic community living on the territory of Romania, placing them in a historical and social context. The research into the hundred-year history of the parishes follows the situation of the community's religious, linguistic, social and socioeconomic life from 1912 up to the present day. One aim of the historical study of the mentioned parishes was to emphasize that the Hungarian Greek Catholics in Romania have been and still are present on the geographical map and in the history of the Church, yet their significant topicality calls for further research. The very wide time span, which also reveals hidden details that, upon recognition and thorough analysis of the topic, encourage readers—and especially researchers—to seek answers pro and contra to the questions uncovered here. Naturally, there is room for criticism and contradiction as well.

During the research, especially important was a kind of terminological clarification, since such terms as “minority,” “nationality,” “language,” “Hungarian” or “ungur,” as well as “Hungarianization” and “Romanianization,” carry not only linguistic or semantic significance, but may also serve as sources of historical-political conflicts, misunderstandings, and even social tensions. Therefore, the dissertation examines not only religious affiliation but also national and cultural identity questions, considering ecclesiastical, political, and linguistic aspects alike.

The doctoral dissertation provides a comprehensive and gap-filling study of the 20th-century history of Hungarian Greek Catholic communities in Romania, taking into account identity changes, church-organizational transformations, and the constantly shifting political-social context. The main time frame of the paper spans the century between 1912 and 2012, which begins with the founding of the Hajdúdorog Diocese and concludes in the period after

the fall of the communist regime when Greek Catholic communities—previously forbidden religious communities—could reorganize their life. The central question of the dissertation is how the Greek Catholic communities in Romania that practised their religion in Hungarian managed to survive, develop, or even decline throughout the 20th century under political regime changes, dictatorship and assimilation pressures, church-structural transformations, and identity-forming factors, not least under border changes, and how they experienced their religion, language, and culture.

The title of the dissertation—“Hungarian Greek Catholics in Romania”—in itself points to complex conceptual and historical questions: do such communities exist at all, and if so, how do they define themselves?

The studied period is from 1912 to the present, which begins with the establishment of the Hajdúdorog Greek Catholic Diocese and ends in the post-regime-change era when the Hungarian Greek Catholic communities, although newly allowed, continued in minority existence. The interval—1912 to the present—was consciously expanded to such a wide frame and includes the historical movements and transformations of Hungarian Greek Catholic communities. The term “present day” covers two aspects: it marks the end of the period discussed, and it also indicates that research accessibility into this part of history will take years more. The topic selection builds on the complex, layered identity of Hungarian

Greek Catholicism: ethnically, religiously, and culturally it is a distinct community located at a sensitive intersection of Romanian and Hungarian histories.

The core research questions are: Do distinct “Hungarian Greek Catholic” communities in Romania exist, or are there merely Hungarian-speaking Greek Catholic faithful within other non-Hungarian communities? How did these communities experience their religious and national identity in the various political eras? Which social, cultural, and ecclesiastical mechanisms aided or hindered their continuity?

The research methodology applied an interdisciplinary approach—including church history, sociology, demography, and identity theory. Sources used include archival materials (bishopric circulars, parish archives, *Historia Domus* records, scholarly literature, observations based on fieldwork), census data, contemporary press sources, memoirs, and interviews.

The first chapter clarifies the key terminological concepts that frame the research: minority, nationality, Hungarian/ungur designation, liturgical language, church–state relations, Byzantine rite, etc. In this light, it becomes apparent that the category “Hungarian Greek Catholic” carries not only religious but also ethnic and cultural complexity in terms of national, linguistic, religious, and liturgical identity.

The designation is not uniformly accepted among Romanian church authorities nor among community members—thus identity labels themselves become research questions.

The actual historical background: the formation of Hungarian Greek Catholicism. In the 18th–19th centuries, communities emerged where Hungarian Byzantine Rite Catholics appeared in contiguous settlements, especially on the fringes of Partium and Szeklerland. The 1912 founding of the Hajdúdorog Diocese was a watershed moment, as it was the first time an independent, Hungarian-majority Greek Catholic ecclesiastical structure was created. This provided a dedicated structure for Hungarian-language Byzantine Rite Catholics. After the Treaty of Trianon, Hungarian Greek Catholic communities in Partium and Transylvania became part of Romania, where the organizational presence of the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church ceased. Subsequently, these parishes gradually came under Romanian leadership, while trying to preserve their liturgical traditions and language under different ecclesiastical and political circumstances.

In 1948, the Romanian state outlawed the Greek Catholic Church and forcibly absorbed it into the Orthodox Church. As a result, Hungarian Greek Catholics found themselves vulnerable not only in religious terms but also in linguistic and cultural identity: many sought refuge in Greek- or Roman- Catholic or Reformed communities, while others tried to preserve their rite and faith secretly. Many were forced to convert to the Roman Catholic or Reformed Church, while others practiced their faith in private, family settings. The dissertation refers to this epoch as “the years of silence.” During the interwar period, Hungarian Greek Catholic faithful strove to preserve their language, rituals, and communal structures. However, the Romanian Greek Catholic hierarchy often approached them with a Romanianizing mentality, and the use of the liturgical Hungarian language faced obstacles.

The period of rebirth began after the December 1989 “revolutionary” events, when religious freedom allowed the re-establishment of the Greek Catholic Church. Nevertheless,

Hungarian-language Greek Catholics did not receive an independent structure but were incorporated into Romanian-majority dioceses. This consistently created tensions in pastoral care, language use, and identity expression. A notable observation is that the level of return was low, and a considerable portion of the community no longer identifies with Greek Catholicism but as Roman Catholic or secular. Legal rehabilitation occurred, but the majority of the faithful did not return to the church, and Hungarian-language Greek Catholicism continued to decline.

One of the greatest strengths of the dissertation lies in presenting parish-level and personal life stories. In the examined municipalities where Hungarian Greek Catholic communities once existed, the signs of survival reflect the current situation, thus closing the circle encompassing the first century identified in the title and investigated period. The survival signs not only manifest but seem to continue living on in the status of Hungarian-language Greek Catholicism in Romania. The numerous communities that exist today completely or partially, or are already vanished—including those in Partium, Transylvania, and Székelyland—are presented in this sequence: Székelyland (Homoródalmás, Gyimesbükk, Lázárfalva, Csíkszentdomokos etc.); Érmellék (Éradony, Almaszeg, Érkörtvélyes, Gálospetri etc.); Partium (Nagykároly, Kismajtény, Csengerbagos, Domahida etc.); Máramaros–Szatmár (Szatmárnémeti, Nagypeleske, Szárazberek, Csedreg, Túrterebes etc.).

The case studies describe the communities' formation, social circumstances, clergy shortage, rite changes, and the factors leading to survival or disappearance.

The dissertation concludes that the survival of Hungarian Greek Catholic communities—even if in scattered form—is demonstrated. Their historical existence, cultural heritage, liturgical practice, and linguistic-community identity preservation represent a challenge for the future. It confirms that Hungarian Greek Catholic communities have indeed existed and still exist in Romania, continuously facing challenges. Hungarian-speaking Byzantine Rite faithful can play a bridging role between Hungarian and Romanian ecclesiastical life, but this is conditional on church leadership recognizing and supporting their specific features. The presentation of the histories of the studied parishes not only provides insight into the communities' past but consciously points to research opportunities yet to be explored. Thus, it remains an open question for those wishing to investigate the micro-history,

demography, and liturgical life of certain parishes in even more depth, encouraging further research.

The value of the dissertation and the uniqueness of the analyses lies in being one of the first scientific works in its field to approach Hungarian Greek Catholicism in Romania from an internal perspective, motivated personally and emotionally yet methodologically rigorous, relying on documents and on-site research, thereby bringing a previously neglected area into academic discourse. The Greek Catholic Church—thanks to its Byzantine character—is capable of serving as a bridge among nationalities, languages, religious denominations, cultures, and rites; however, this can only become real if the peculiarities of minority communities are recognized and supported.

The uncovered source material—clerical minutes, ecclesiastical archives, demographic data, and diocesan documents—helps draw the picture of a relatively cohesive Hungarian Greek Catholic community that has preserved its identity in spite of historical storms and thus serves as a kind of stronghold for survival. The research revealed the material and spiritual losses caused by political state power, as well as the challenging process of revival which played a decisive role in the survival of the Hungarian Greek Catholic community in Romania. The source materials that formed the basis of the research—parish registers, reports, minutes, church property records, and school data—were indispensable for historical reconstruction. The dissertation emphasizes the moral responsibility of church actors, officials, clergy, and faithful, whose conscientious duty is to preserve and transmit the past after an era that aimed to eliminate the parishes.

The work contributes to the development of Hungarian and Romanian ecclesiastical history, religious studies, minority studies, and identity theory—not merely as a historical curiosity but as a living testimony that religious, national, and cultural identity, intertwined, can survive political storms—and that religious pluralism, ecumenical dialogue, and linguistic-cultural diversity can foster social peace and preserve shared historical values. These parishes are not only historically significant but living examples that Hungarian-language Byzantine Catholic identity can endure and be rebuilt even in minority existence. The future of the parishes, however, depends on social acceptance, safeguarding linguistic rights, and the practical realization of ecclesiastical autonomy. Church reorganizations, social impoverishment, cultural loss, nation-state homogenization efforts, and forced rite changes

all contributed to marginalization. The only long-term chance for their preservation lies in renewed efforts in education, pastoral work, and academic research to map out and strengthen Greek Catholic Hungarian identity in Romania.