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Ph.D Thesis

Church and Society in Sătmar County

(the second half of the nineteenth century - beginning of the twentieth century)

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Summery

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Key words: Church, greek catholic church, society, region, Satu Mare, organization, archdeaconry, deanery, parish, affiliate, jurisdiction, Gherla, Oradea, Muncaci (Mukacheve in Ukrainian), origin, education, marriage, identity, confessional, seal, documents, building, granary, credit, fire.

The paper entitled *Church and Society in Sătmar County (the second half of the nineteenth century - beginning of the twentieth century)* is divided into four chapters, to which the introduction, conclusions, bibliography and annexes are added.

In the *Introduction*, the motivation behind the choice of the subject discussed is presented: a wish to portray a part of the history of the Romanian Church in Sătmar region, from the second half of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century. This thesis is to be read as a history paper, based, mainly, on the research of archival documents.

Located at the confluence of the Hungarian element, the Ruthenian element, a little of the German element, through the several waves of Swabians settled there, and the Romanian element, the Sătmar region played an important role in the evolution of ecclesiastical life and in the development of cultural life. Unfortunately, it remained a relatively unknown topic within Romanian historiography. One of the causes might be a poor acquaintance with documentary sources, though they are spread across a large area, which lead to difficulties in the research. Moreover, due to the assignation of the Sătmar area to the bishopric of Muncaci, only in the more recent years have the Ukrainian authorities become more cooperative and accepted to take part in projects together with the History Museum in Satu Mare. If in the Communist era the Greek-Catholic Church was prohibited, the pursuit of a line of study on this subject was impossible. After 1990, a series of serious and objective papers discussing this topic were published, outlining the difficult life of the Romanian people throughout the ages.

The introductory part also contains the *sources* used in the research carried out for this paper, which were divided into: "Archive funds", "Written sources" and "Published papers", followed by a brief summary of each chapter.

The next part contains a geographic presentation of the researched region of Sătmar, which covers a large area, from Gutâiului Mountains in the east, towards Țara Chioarului to the north, beyond the Tisza, overcrossing a part of Ugocea county, in the west up beyond Mátészalka and

Száabolcs county – today's Hungary, in the southeast to the river Eriu, where Bihor starts, and to the south bordering Solnoc county.

The first chapter, entitled *Church structures in Sătmar: organization, functioning, territorial jurisdiction*, discusses the organization of the Church in Sătmar area in the first half of the nineteenth century. By mid-nineteenth century, three Satu Mare archdeaconries can be identified, two Romanian and one Ruthenian, which belonged to Gherla, Oradea and Muncaci bishoprics. In the nineteenth century, we are witnessing an accelerated Magyarization of Muncaci bishopric, which became the centre for the establishment of a Hungarian Greek-Catholic bishopric.¹ This is the period when Romanians lost many parishes: Satu Mare – Mintiu, Petea, Dara, Vetiş, Micula, Căpleni, Domăneşti, and the parishes from today's Hungary: Porcsalma, Csengerujfalu, Csegöld. All these Greek-Catholic parishes remained like this to this day and use Hungarian in church services.

For the remaining Romanian parishes, salvation came from great bishop Samuil Vulcan's successful attempts, who in 1824 managed to retrieve 72 parishes from the Muncaci bishopric; following the 1848 Revolution, the Austrian authorities themselves deciding to divide the Muncaci bishopric – which became a fort of Magyarization – again, in an attempt to weaken the Hungarians.

The establishment of Gherla bishopric and the retrieval of the Romanian parishes located north of Someş meant, for many of them, the salvation from the Magyarization process. The reorganization of the deaneries and the parishes from Sătmar area that took place after the two major processes of recovery of 1824 and 1853 was broadly maintained during the second half of the nineteenth century; thus, in 1900, there were 2 Romanian archdeaconries and a Hungarian archdeaconry, assigned to Muncaci, with 15 deaneries, 123 parishes, 114 affiliates with 140.096 Greek-Catholic parishioners.

One specific feature of the Sătmar region, in the period discussed here, was exactly this: that on its administrative territory there were, from the organizational point of view of the Church, three Greek-Catholic archdeaconries, each of them assigned to a different bishopric. The novelty of the discussion in the first chapter of the paper is represented by a parallel analysis of the evolution of archdeaconries from Sătmar, at parish level, but also in relation with the higher

¹ Viorel Ciubotă, *Vicariatul Național Român din Carei*, Satu Mare, 1997, pp.6-11.

Church authorities: the deaneries and the bishoprics. We tried to identify, as accurately as possible, the number of priests in every parish who served during the period researched, sometimes over bigger time spans of time, even a century, and we also presented significant moments from their activity in the parish and their family life where the archival materials made it possible. Important moments such as the birth of the priests' children, their marriage, the death of the loved ones were considered worthy of being mentioned.

The archdeaconry in Sătmar which was under the jurisdiction of Oradea bishopric had a very well organized structure in as far as the deaneries were concerned, since the diocese witnessed major territorial reassignments in 1824, with only the number of parishes and affiliates being sometimes variable. Since the Diocese of Gherla was newly established in 1853, the deaneries from Sătmar which were subordinated to the bishopric met with frequent organizational changes, parishes being assigned either to a deanery or to another. We can only discuss about jurisdictional stability starting with 1867, when the Archdeaconry of Satu Mare had a well-defined structure, being composed of 6 deaneries with a total of 47 parishes. The Archdeaconry will retain this structure, namely 6 deaneries and 42 parishes, until 1900, increasing the number of affiliates and parishioners.

The Archdeaconry of Satu Mare which was assigned to Oradea bishopric was larger from an organizational perspective, more extended, with a number of 7 deaneries, while the Archdeaconry of Satu Mare that was under the jurisdiction of Gherla had 6 districts. In the period discussed, each of the Archdeaconries of Satu Mare increased the number of believers, with no major events in the area to disrupt church activity.

Numerically, the archdeaconry subordinated to Gherla had more parishioners in its 6 deaneries, 46 parishes and 63 affiliates; thus, at the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a total number of 67.961 people, while the archdeaconry of Satu Mare subordinated to the bishopric of Oradea had 7 deaneries, 60 parishes, 55 affiliates and a total of 56.823 believers. Over the last three decades, as statistics have shown, the archdeaconry subordinated to Oradea registered a 23% increase in the number of parishioners, while in the archdeaconry subordinated to Gherla the increase was of 13 %. Both increases are significant, considering the fact that in the period studied the region of Sătmar was plagued by a cholera epidemic that decimated a large number of the population. Additionally, infant mortality contributed to a decrease in the number of believers.

Ecclesiastical life becomes more and more dynamic and materializes itself through the building of churches, parish houses, cantorial houses, religious schools. There is an increase the number of pupils attending schools, and priests are more and more involved in school activities and education. Teachers are better educated, many of them graduating training courses.

In 1900, the Archdeaconry of Satu Mare subordinated to Gherla had 68 churches in parishes and affiliates, of which 15 were made of wood and 52 of stone. Of these 52 stone churches, 32 were built between 1850-1900.

The situation in the Archdeaconry of Satu Mare subordinated to Oradea in 1900 was the following: 75 parish and affiliate churches, 12 in affiliates; 62 were made of stone, from which 32 were built between 1850-1900. An interesting observation is that a similar number of stone churches were built in the two archdeaconries.

The churches in the archdeaconry assigned to Gherla had the following patron saints: the „Holy Archangels” - 26, „The Birth of the Virgin Mary” - 12, „The Ascension of Virgin Mary” - 11, „Saint Demetrius” - 5, „Saint Paraskevi” - 3, „Saints Peter and Paul” - 2, „Saint Elian” - 1, „Saint Stephen” - 1, „Saint Nicholas” - 1, „The Ascension” - 1, „The descent of the Holy Ghost” - 1, „The Holy Trinity” - 1, „Saint Basil the Great” - 1, „The Three Hierarchs” - 1, „Saints Joachim and Anna” - 1. We note that the churches dedicated to the „Holy Archangels” prevail, followed by those dedicated „The Birth of the Virgin May”, then the „Ascension of the Virgin Mary”.

The churches in the archdeaconry of Satu Mare subordinated to Oradea had the following patron saints: the „Holy Archangels” - 46, „Saint Nicholas” - 9, „The Birth of the Virgin Mary” - 8, „The Ascension of Virgin Mary” - 4, „Saint George” - 2, „Saint Basil the Great” - 1, „The Three Hierarchs” - 1, „Feast of the Cross” - 1, „Saint Paraskevi” - 1, „The Transfiguration” - 1, „St. John the Baptist” - 1. Here one can also notice the prevalence of the churches dedicated to the „Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel”, followed by those dedicated to „Saint Nicholas” and the ones dedicated to „The Birth of the Virgin Mary”. We believe that another contribution to the topic studied is identifying the churches existent at the beginning of the twentieth century in the two Romanian archdeaconries in Satu Mare, highlighting the large number of places of worship erected in half a century: 64. Divine Providence made their number equal for each archdeaconry: 32 churches in each one were erected to the glory of God. It is a large number of buildings given the limited material possibilities of the parishioners and the difficulties in

starting such a grand project: the building of churches. Let us not forget that in this period parish houses, schools, and cantorial houses were also built, and all through the effort of the believers. In some cases, for the completion of the constructions, financial aid was obtained through fundraisings organized by the bishopric, but the greatest contribution was still that of the parishioners.

Churches had various patron saints. Most were under the protection of the "Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel", 72 in number, a number of 35 dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and those dedicated to Saint Nicholas are in number of 9. It is interesting to note that some had less ordinary patrons like „Saints Joachim and Anna” - 1 „Saint John the Baptist” - 1 „Elian Prophet” -1, „Basil the Great” - 1 „The Three Hierarchs” - 1 „The Feast of the Cross”- 1, „Transfiguration of the Lord ”- 1 etc.

In order to highlight the importance of these churches, built in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which are characterized by a unique style and unique beauty, a project consisting of pilgrimages to churches dedicated to the Virgin Mary in Țara Oașului or Codrului area is proposed. Touristic-religious circuits to churches dedicated to the "Holy Archangels" in the former county of Satu Mare, including parishes in Satu Mare, Maramureș and Sălaj counties, and even the former parishes of Satu Mare that are in today's Hungary would also be of interest. Touristic circuits that would cover churches from the three main Christian denominations, Orthodox, Greek-Catholic, and Roman-Catholic, would also be relevant. A few wooden churches that still exist in the counties of in Satu Mare, Maramureș and Sălaj might also be integrated into the circuits.

This paper uses, as a technique to approach the subject discussed, the archival document. We intended to shed light upon registers, papers, documents of the time, to wipe the dust of oblivion from those obsolete pages, to restore some of the thoughts, emotions, events, experiences of our ancestors who lived in these places. Simple remarks such as during „during the time of... there was a great frost” pinpoint events that marked the life of a whole community at that time. Now, after more than a century, it is time to bring them to light, make them known.

The second chapter, entitled *The clergy in Sătmar, origin, intellectual formation, career coordinates, cultural concerns*, tackles the issue of the clergy in Sătmar, starting from its origin. The vast majority of priests came from old clerical families, with at least 2-3 generations of priests in each family. We can talk about the existence of priest „dynasties”, in parallel with that

of priest „castes”. The first notion, that of „dynasties”, was used to outline the fact that priesthood was something inherited from father to son, while the notion of „castes” was employed to pinpoint that when the daughters of priests married theology graduates, there was a continuation of the tradition of priesthood on a female line. Of the marriages that took place in Sătmar over half a century, 95% of the ones having daughters of priests as brides were with theology graduates.

The novelty consists in the use of the concept of „dynasty” in parallel with that of „caste”, in order to maintain the family tradition on the female side as well.

Over time, from generation to generation, the training of clergy becomes increasingly complex, and it is held at the following schools: Oradea, Gherla, Blaj, Satu Mare, Muncaci, Ungvar, Budapest, Tarnavia, Strigoni, Vienna and Rome.

Popp family is emblematic for the region of Sătmar, as it pastored uninterrupted for 80 years in Căuaş town. From this family we are left with a number of educational documents, manuscript books, religious books and sermons.

The cultural work of Satu Mare priests is intense. In this paper we emphasized the cultural work of three priests: Dimitrie Sfura, George Marchiş, and Petru Bran. They are less known local personalities.

In the third chapter, entitled *Confessional identities and relations*, we analyze the Greek-Catholic Church in relation to existing denominations in the second half of the nineteenth century in the area of Sătmar. Living in a „multi-ethnic and multi-denominational territory”, at individual level mixed marriages appear to be a natural relationship with „the other”, who can be of a different ethnicity or religion. There were no major religious mutations in the studied period. The Orthodox community was nonexistent in the period under review in Sătmar, with merely a few students who came from Orthodox families. Switches from Greek-Catholicism to Orthodoxy did not take place, even if some parish communities threatened to switch to the „others” in times of conflict with the priest. Factually, there has been no switch. The switch to Roman Catholicism of Romanian and Ruthenian Greek-Catholics was made solely through intermarriage, the knowledge of the Hungarian language being a favorable element in the loss of national identity. The case of the Reformed was the same, switches being made only through intermarriage, the Hungarian language being an element that favored the loss of national identity.

We observed that over time, at least in Sătmar, Ruthenians were instrumental in the amplification of the Magyarization phenomenon through faith and school.

Jews have experienced the same fate, as they were Magyarized and lost their national identity, but not their religious one.

The novelty in this section is represented by the particular situation in which the Greek-Catholics in Sătmar were in relation to other denominations and religions.

At the level of education and school training, young people of different denominations and different religions were attending the elite schools of Sătmar, without discrimination. The elite high schools in Satu Mare were, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Roman-Catholic Gymnasium for boys and the Reformed High School for boys, both having teachers educated at universities in Europe. The number of students enrolled increased year by year, large numbers of children from Greek-Catholic families also being allowed to enroll. The number of Greek-Catholic boys attending the Roman-Catholic Gymnasium who came from priest families was impressively high. Fewer children of priests were attending the Reformed High School. Those who completed secondary school were able to take the exam of maturity. This was a serious and pretentious test. If they graduated from high school, young people could enroll into Universities across Europe. During the period studied by us, after much effort, a Romanian language department is established at Satu Mare, whose first teacher was Petru Bran.

Girls were also adequately instructed, as they were attending, in large numbers, the courses of the Roman-Catholic Elementary School in Satu Mare. An important number of girls from Greek-Catholic families were enrolled in this school. It is worth mentioning that in addition to the Roman-Catholic Elementary School for girls, there was also a kindergarten, called nursery. Fortunately, here we could also find children from Romanian Greek-Catholic families. Another aspect of great significance concerning the achievements of Romanian education in Satu Mare is that in this part of the country Petru Bran proposes in 1862, for the first time in Transylvania, the initiative of organizing a Congress of Romanian teachers and professors in Transylvania and of „learning congregations”.² These learning associations would include all Romanian teachers under the chairmanship of one of the Romanian directors of gymnasiums and they should meet

² Onisifor Ghibu, *Congresul profesorilor români*, in *Luceafărul*, 1910, nr. 9, p. 220.

every holiday and have a program through which they could communicate their experiences, ideas, opinions and beliefs about a general plan about the books that should be employed...³

The end of the nineteenth century will be marked, in terms of Satu Mare school life, by a great personality, dr. Vasile Lucaciu, professor of Romanian at the same gymnasium where Petru Bran taught. Given that his work is well-known and many books and studies were written about his life and work, I will emphasize only one aspect: he was particularly concerned for the „development and improvement of the organizational framework of education in the town of Satu Mare”⁴ through the establishment of the „Meeting of the teachers in the county of Satu Mare” and a "Romanian boarding-seminar for talented students", besides the Roman-Catholic Gymnasium in Satu Mare.

We try to provide a picture of the situation of the Romanian Sătmar school as an expression of a permanent struggle to preserve Romanian identity and spirituality. Over half a century, we have undoubtedly made remarkable progress in the development of Romanian confessional education, and all the efforts of priests in Satu Mare county were not in vain. They will always remain in the local consciousness as the fiercest fighters for the preservation of national identity, whether they served in the "Fortress" or in any other countryside parish.

Ecclesiastical institutions, in order to strengthen their authority over their subordinates, but also as a guarantee that documents issued by them had a certain value and official power, had a signature and a seal. The Greek-Catholic Church in the area of Sătmar, like other churches, used this confirmation seal, which at parish level was characterized by the legend, an iconographic symbol and the connection to the patron saint of the church. Over time, some parishes might have had 2-3 different seals. The symbols on the seal often coincide with the town church patron saint.

In the last chapter, entitled *Realities and demands of the ecclesiastical administration*, an analysis of all administrative activities of the priest in the parish is made, including his dealings with parishioners, building churches, the annual preparation and completion of documents to be submitted to the church authorities and the state, the involvement in local religious school work as director and catechist. The instruction given in people's schools tried and succeeded in

³ Doru Radosay, *Aspecte ale învățământului românesc din secolele XVIII-XIX în Satu Mare*, în Satu Mare, Studii și Comunicări, IV, Satu Mare, Editura Muzeului Sătmărean, 1980, pp.175-176.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 178.

offering the knowledge needed to increase the living standards of peasant families. We refer here to the theoretical explanation and practical demonstration in such courses as: tending trees, beekeeping, raising animals and cultivation of grape-vine. From the involvement at individual level, the shepherd of souls passes then to the involvement in the community through personal example and active participation in the organization and management of forms of local associations: granaries, cooperative associations, institutes of credit and banking institutions.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the institution "Granary" in the parish community knows a great development. Initially, they had a simple form of organization, which held its rules of operation, so that later, close to the twentieth century, they become real joint stock companies.

The organization of the first Romanian cooperative institutions in Satu Mare was preceded by an intense propaganda in the spirit of cooperative activity. In an open letter to the newspaper „Tribuna” of Sibiu, referring to the importance of economic development of the Romanian people, Father Vasile Lucaciu declared that „it is a necessity imposed by the very nature of things and the developing social policy of our time, that people who aspire to the future and the country should create means to promote their material welfare and their natural progress.”⁵ He thought that of all the possibilities offered by the land economically, the most suitable for people is „the establishment of institutes of credit and savings, to which the national capital of our people is added, so that the addition of moral capital immediately follows, through progress regarding culture and civilization”.⁶

One of the most important credit unions which functioned in Sătmar, an example of organization for all credit unions in northwestern Transylvania, proved to be the credit cooperative "Perșeiul" in Chiuzbaia.

Sătmar area credit institutions reached their intended purpose as long as they worked to „promote the spirit of mercy” for the biggest part of the population and develop the citizens' economical spirit. Through the wide range of operations, the economic strength possessed, seeking continuous economic consolidation, through their entire activity, they stood out in the economic and financial landscape of the period discussed.

⁵ Viorel Ciubotă, *Cooperația și sistemul bancar românesc în județul Satu Mare la sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea și începutul secolului al XX-lea*, in „Satu Mare”, Studii și comunicări, Satu Mare, XIII, 1996, p. 145.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 145.

Given that most churches, parish houses, cantors' homes and schools in mid-nineteenth century were built of wood and vulnerable to destruction by fire, actions to protect them were initiated by those who used them or in whose care they were. Their destruction meant huge damage to the community and the head of the church. Cooperation was therefore necessary between civil and ecclesiastical authorities for finding the best methods for security and fire prevention. The causes of fire could be diverse: negligence, intentional fire set by arsonists, fire caused by unknown causes, fire caused by lightning.

Most often through the effort of the community, the church was equipped with objects necessary for religious worship. In this paper, we highlighted the sacrifice made by believers to equip the church with those books without which church services could not take place. Through analyzing them, we outlined the beauty and sublimity of liturgical texts, in order to argue that their material value justifies the effort of Christians who procured books from publishing houses in: Sibiu, Blaj, Gherla, Bucharest, Buda, Râmnic, Iași, Buzău and Vienna.

Despite all the political storms, the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church from Sătmar carried out its normal development, fulfilling its call with respect and dignity. The Church, through her servants, was placed at the service of the faithful whom it shepherded, whom it guided through schools, the parishioners for whose salvation all sacramental acts were performed.