

BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY
DOCTORAL SCHOOL “HISTORY.CIVILIZATION. CULTURE”

SUMMARY

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Cluj-Napoca

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Orthodox Communities in the Bihor Space.
Clergy and Parishioners (1779-1848)

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INTRODUCTION

The research topic is the Orthodox Church in the Bihor area at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries, focused on parish life as it is reflected in the documents of the era issued by the church. We tried to concentrate on parish priests and parishioners, being interested in the priests' training and behaviour, demographics and onomastics, the relationship between priests and churchgoers concerning economic issues (endowment of churches, managing parish goods) or disciplining (either the parishioners, visible in marriages control, or the priests in cases of appointing or removing parish priests).

The Bihor space comprises the villages that were part of the former Bihor county that had different borders than nowadays. Apart from the localities that form today Bihor County, the former one had also some villages from the nowadays Hungary. In addition, the former Bihor County had two parishes that are included today in Cluj County (BuceanadNegreni) and the Beliu area, situated in the southern part of the county that is today part of Arad County.

From the timeline perspective, the inferior limit of our research is 1779, while the superior limit is 1848. Why 1779? This is the year when Vienna approved the *Ecclesiastic constitution of the Orthodox Serbian and Romanian nations under Karlowitz Metropolitan* that contained a series of decrees concerning the organization and deployment of the Orthodox church life (Serbian and Romanian alike), among which were included the Bihor parishioners. Moreover, other two events at the end of the century impacted the Orthodox Church of Bihor: the issue of the Edict of Toleration of Joseph II that, according to the Emperor, had the aim to "transform the Christianity for all confessions that were enemies till now into a religion of love", on the one hand, and the founding of the Orthodox Consistory in Oradea- Velența in 1793, on the other. The three events shaped the organization and development of church life in Bihor County. This inferior limit of research was not set only according to the aforementioned events. An important role had the sources that we had access to from the last decades of the 18th century. We chose the year 1848, as the Romanian Revolution brought about changes regarding the Serbian hierarchy of Karlowitz and the Arad Diocese. The Vienna court promoted a new political regime, neo-absolutism, and noticed changes in the relationship between the two Romanian churches within the Habsburg Empire.

Sources and Methodology

We can classify our sources into two categories. The first one comprises fewer documents: the collection of documents of I.D. Suciu and R. Constantinescu - *Documents concerning the History of the Banat Metropolitan Church*, tom I-II, Timișoara, 1980; Ed. I. Găvănescu, *Romanian Testimonies from the Arad Eparchy in the 18th Century*, Arad, 1940. We found some documents in *The History of the Church of Bihor Romanians* by Ștefan Lupșa (vol I, Oradea, 1935) and the annexes of Ioan Godea's work – *Wooden Churches in the North-Western Transylvania* (1990) and in the annexes of the work *The Austrian State and the Transylvanian and Hungarian Orthodox Church in the Modernizing Effort of the Romanian World (second half of the 18th and the first decades of the 19th centuries)* by Cristian Apati. The following sources were fundamental in writing the thesis: the documents from the funds of the *Orthodox Diocese of Oradea* and the fund *Registers of Civil Status of Oradea* within the National Archives, Bihor County Direction. Parish registers are complex sources that offered us information on the historical demographic and other areas (toponyms, social history, economic history and especially onomastics).

From the methodological view, we used the quantitative analysis and the qualitative one. When it came to church inventories, we analysed them mostly from a quantitative perspective. For the parish registers we used non-nominative processing, quantifying the information referring to christenings, marriages and deaths in the studies communities over years and decades.

Our research aims to convey an image of the Orthodox parish life in Bihor communities at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries. Our work is a monograph that contains the most important aspects of the traditional Romanian society that had the church in the centre. Our doctoral thesis also mirrors the changes imposed by the Habsburg rule. We were also interested in depicting the priest's role in the community and the relationship within the church – between the priests, between the priests and parishioners, and between the priest and the archbishop.

Structure of the Thesis

Chapter I

The first chapter discusses the creation of the Orthodox Diocese in Arad at the beginning of the 18th century and the Orthodox parishes of the Bihor county under its

jurisdiction. Moreover, we presented important dates about the bishops that occupied the chair in 1706-1848 and their activity to maintain the Bihor area under their jurisdiction, fighting against religious unification.

Chapter II

The second chapter is dedicated to the priest and the path of an aspiring young person to the cloth in 1779-1848. The first part of the chapter is focused on the formation of the future priest, with the involvement of the state and the Serbian hierarchy. We presented the ordination process and receiving a parish, being named in a parish. Ordination had several stages, as the future priest had to present the certificate of graduating from a school, of being christened in the Orthodox Church and an attestation from the village, proving that the inhabitants wanted him in the position of the priest. Then there was the priest's exam and then the ordination service and receiving the parish. The recommendations of the communities and archbishops to young men to be ordained described the desirable qualities: good behaviour, good faith or humility, kindness and good customs. The latter refers to the moral qualities of the priest, meaning a patient, non-violent, diligent person, with no vices (alcohol addictions or other addictions that would contradict the status of a priest). Kindness is a quality required by both communities and archbishops, meaning a kind person that offers his help unconditionally, has kind behaviour, is patient and has "fear and love for God."

The second part of the chapter presents information on the priest's family, the customary age of marriage and ordination, their children, and widowhood for the priest and his wife. We analysed priests' behaviour, the attempts of the state and the church to control the priest's misbehaviour and their attempt to create model priests for churchgoers. The registry of 1815 reveals some of the priest's vices: alcohol consumption, "bad habits", misbehaviour and immoral behaviour (adultery). These vices were impossible to eradicate, they could only be fought.

Chapter III

We tried to offer an image or a profile of the Bihor Orthodox parish. What does an image or profile contain? It refers to the dimensions of the parish (how many houses) and the data are from the official registries during 1769-1841. Thus, in the second half of the 18th century, the Bihor area was characterized by small and midsize parish, while at the beginning of the 19th century, the number of small parishes had considerably diminished. This period

was characterized by the midsize and big parishes. This feature was due to the natural space and the measures taken in 1779 and 1784 when the number of priests was conditioned by the number of houses (in 1784, a parish must have 100 houses to get a parish priest). However, the law was adapted to the specificity of the area. The Orthodox parishes had a demographic increase in the second half of the 18th century and the first decade of the 19th century. In the second decade of the 19th century, the number of parishioners decreased due to the famine. We also analysed the gender distribution of churchgoers.

Chapter IV

The fourth chapter provides information on the organization and endowment of parishes as they were found in the church inventories of the era, along with the church's state of preservation and construction materials used, the houses and territories that belonged to the church. Thus, we could form an idea of the functionality of the church. At the end of the 18th century, the inventories offer us an image of poor parishes, with a reduced number of books and garments, while most of the parishes had a modest income. Nevertheless, all the parishes had the main elements of the Holy Mass, the holy vessels: the chalice and the disk. The inventory of the fourth decade of the 19th century is telling for the richer parishes that had more books and garments, most of them made of silk, compared to the 18th century, when they were made of cloth or cardboard. It was also the period when the church became the main creditor in the villages, offering money at interest; this was allowed by the laws of the Habsburg Empire. The documents provide information on the churchgoers' attitudes toward the church and the collaboration with the priest. We combined information from inventories and registries, as well as other available documents to render a clear and ample image.

Chapter V

Registries of civil status helped us analyse the demography of Orthodox parishes in the Bihor area. Our analysis was conceived as a case study due to the fragmentation of sources and the huge amount of work. The chapter is divided into four parts. The first one analyses marriage from a demographic point of view. Thus, we presented the monthly distribution of marriages, the age at marriage and the civil status of those who married, along with endogamy and exogamy. When discussing the birth rate, we took into account the monthly distribution of births and whether the religious factor influenced the conception period of the children. We analysed the existence of children conceived outside the wedlock and their christening and the involvement of parents in this matter. Thus, there was a task

distribution concerning gender involvement in children's upbringing: women helped as midwives and men became godfathers. However, the documents of the beginning of the 19th century certify a bigger involvement of women in christening babies, especially in the urban space.

The third part of the chapter observes mortality and its monthly distribution, causes of death and the age groups. The last part is dedicated to onomastics, using the parish registers for christenings at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries. These registries helped establish the factors that influenced the children's names and their popularity, as well as the occurrence of original names. There was also a fashion of names, as some periods had frequent names in some communities. Concerning the surnames, we concluded that they were derived from people's occupations, birthplace, father's name, or some physical or behavioural features.

Chapter VI

The last chapter is concerned with marriage and its issues, starting with the couple's formation till divorce. We were interested in the way the local clergy was involved in couple's lives either neglecting the church norms or punishing the deviant behaviour. We used marriage documents from the Fund Orthodox Diocese of Oradea.

CONCLUSIONS

The research on the parish life of the Orthodox communities of Bihor at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries offered an image of the traditional society at the border between tradition and novelty/ change. This world had been in a constant fight for survival and had to face multiple challenges, from climate issues to diseases, from administrative to judicial changes imposed by Vienna.

Documents reveal a reforming state in a world guided by local customs and an ecclesiastical hierarchy involved in the effort of implementing the reforms. The regulations issued by the ecclesiastical hierarchy stand as proof of the misbehaviour of priests in some parishes. Thus, we may conclude that the reform of the clergy at the beginning of the 19th century was done from below, by archbishops and even churchgoers whose desires or requirements concerning the priest-vicar coincided with the church's.

The reform of the priests meant a long process that started in the middle of the 18th century, while the results started to occur in the third decade of the 19th century. The change concerned the formation of a priest – from an apprentice to a priest who graduated from a clerical school, following curricula and studying textbooks. This change was difficult to implement in the poor areas with mountains, where the inhabitants could not afford to send their children to school. Some priests, and deacons started to own and inherit books, a fact that reflects the change in attitudes toward books as emotional and economic values and the usefulness of the sacred space.

The Vienna court imposed moral and social behaviour for priests appropriate for their status and reflected the community's needs, the diocese's requirements and the state's necessities. Repeated registries and statistics referring to the incomes and expenses or investments of parishes made priests more responsible toward their parishioners and lay authorities. The gradual habit with administrative registries also meant becoming familiar with the specific vocabulary and assuming roles as clerks in the state's service.

The increase of parish churches was modest but the 18th century was the period of building new churches with the same materials. Sometimes the wicker church was replaced by the wooden, only rarely there were stone churches. This building process continued in the early 19th century but in the late 18th century most of the newly built churches lacked sacred books or garments. The priest wore in many communities only a vestment, which was the most spread piece of clothing at the end of the 18th century. From the economic point of view, some communities did not own parish land. This fact led to a difference between the mountain localities and those from fields or nearby towns. The first was modest, less arable land or no land at all, while the latter had arable land aplenty. Financially speaking, many parishes had a modest income from selling candles and reinvesting in their acquisition of sacred vessels, garments, incense and ointment. Toward the middle of the 19th century, documents picture an image of a richer parish with many books, most priests had garments and silk became more frequent for their manufacturing. This is the period when the church became the main creditor in the village. There was another sign of change in the rural economy: parishes gain more income by investing money in parish land.

Demographically speaking, the Bihor communities had considerable growth in the 19th century (as was the case within the Habsburg Empire and in the rest of Europe) with a slight decline in the second decade. However, the increase was maintained till the middle of

the 19th century. The parish registries offer us a world with a high birth rate and high mortality, especially in baby cases.

Marriage followed the rules of traditional societies although the age at marriage became increasingly bigger for both genders, being influenced by two calendars - the religious and agrarian. However, at the end of the 18th century, when most marriages were done in January-February, in the 19th century, they were mostly taking place in October-November and in spring and autumn, especially in the field communities near Oradea. There were communities open to exogamy. We observed mostly Christian names when studying the parish registries; the most frequent names were of the saints from the Bible; nevertheless, each community had its onomastic fashion.

The relationship between the priest and the churchgoers was determined by the local background and various events, as it becomes clear when reading the archives (conflicts or complaints concerning clandestine marriages). Villagers had a say in naming or removing the priest in their parish; they contributed to the building or repair of the church, as well as covering the living expenses of the priest. Priests accepted to be godfathers and intervened in the couple's conflicts, trying to make spouses more responsible. Sometimes there was solidarity among priests and parishioners in breaking the church norms, as some documents reveal the issue of clandestine marriages. A clandestine marriage was performed at night when two young people did not have the approval of their families. Traditional society was somehow permissive when it came to re-marriage without asking for proof of the former spouse's death. It wasn't difficult to remarry and then go back to the first spouse. There are cases of women with strong character that took their destiny into their own hands and fought against the "bad living" in marriage by running away, filing for divorce and speaking out, writing to the ecclesiastical authorities about their issues. As documents show, these women mostly had the support of their families in the community. Even men took their side and filed complaints against the violent husband.

The middle of the 19th century offers us an image of bigger parishes, some of them richer, with more priests that graduated from an ecclesiastical school and archbishops that do not neglect the priests' misbehaviours but report them to the consistory.