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The Religious Life of the Romanian Orthodox in Hungary – a Fundamental Component in the Work of Elena Csobai

Abstract

We believe that the reconstruction of the history of Romanians from the diaspora cannot be achieved without the synthetic presentation of micro-works of some researchers who have approached a certain community in different studies/books. The examination of the Romanian historical-theological historiography, apparently legitimately, includes Mrs. Elena Csobai in this less visible group. Through our study, we can propose a (re)classification of the elites in the field of Romanian Church History. The books and studies published by Mrs. Csobai fully prove this truth.



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Keywords

Hungary, Budapest, Gyula, The Romanian Orthodox Church, Elena Csobai

Of all the contemporary authors who have discussed the religious life of the Romanians in Hungary, researcher Elena Csobai is the most prolific one both in terms of the spiritual topics addressed, and the quality of the historical-theological researches published. The abundant documentary and bibliographic repository prepared (and edited) by the “Wallachian” elite in the Hungarian space accurately reflects the consistency, the depth, but especially the eagerness to restore to historiography the clarification of fundamental components of the (spiritual) history of some communities. The effort made through the careful and extensive concern to save and systematize the (ROC) documents and pieces existing in the Hungarian space and edited by the researcher Csobai reflects the important and necessary concerns to enrich our historical sources.

The curated archive, however, also provided her with unique sources for the elaboration of materials with a clear form of uniqueness. The registers of the baptized, married, dead; Protocols of parish council meetings; Income and expenditure registers; Inventories; Records of churches, schools and people from church communes; Protocols related to food; Reports submitted by priests to senior leadership structures; Correspondence, etc., have represented the basis (the primary source) for the reconstruction of the ecclesiastical history of the Romanians in Hungary.

From the materials collected or drafted by Mrs. Csobai we readily notice that she did not limit herself to informing in detail about historical stages, but she strived to understand the opera-

tional *mechanism* of the church structures to further form a relevant opinion. Like the other contemporary researchers, Csobai considered (in her writings) that it was the Romanian Orthodox Church as an institution that allowed the Romanian identity to be preserved. Moreover, Csobai considers that this Orthodox belief (in the Hungarian space) also meant Romanian presence, or that the cultural life within the Romanian communities in Hungary depended to a large extent on the Orthodox priest and the teacher of the denominational school. Therefore, Mrs. Elena Csobai's efforts to save what was left of the remains of the ROC in Hungary, but also the subsequent massive writings she has authored, deserve to be carefully considered and evaluated.

Through the sustained effort to promote the (Romanian Orthodox) Church, Elena Csobai brings to the scientific circuit solid arguments (archival documents) that evoke the activity of foundations or individuals – rich Romanian Orthodox churchgoers who have supported, in one way or another, the Church's activity. By promoting these documents, Mrs. Csobai condemns the Hungarian historiography that imposes a false image of the Romanian Orthodox in Hungary, namely that all were poor¹.

From the synthetic material presented below, despite the many shortcomings noted throughout the ages, the author substantiates the historical-theological writings in this already underlined truth: Romanian presence in the Hungarian space is inextricably linked to the Orthodox faith².

¹ E. Csobai, „Rolul Bisericii Ortodoxe în păstrarea identității la românii din Giula”, *Comunicările celui de al VII-lea simpozion al comunității cercetătorilor români din Ungaria*, (Giula, Ungaria: Editura Noi, 1998) p. 85.

² *Ibidem*, p. 82.

Starting from this noted reference, our objective is to *radiograph* the scientific concerns of some authors, less *visible* in theological historiography, but without which the overall image of the History of the Romanian Orthodox Church remains blurred.

*The scientific-theological portfolio*³ – of the venerable lady – targets three research directions: *portraits of clerical elites*⁴, *the issue of the churches in Hungary* (renovations, paintings, church objects)⁵, and *the issue of the Romanian communities in*

³ Idem, *Românii din Ungaria. Studii de istorie*, (Giula, Ungaria: Nyomás, kötés, Dürer Nyomda Kft., 2013), p. 272.

⁴ Idem, „David Voniga în presa românească”, *Lumina. Revistă socială, culturală și științifică a românilor din Ungaria. Fondată de David Voniga în 1894*, (Békéscsaba, Ungaria: Tiparul Mozi Nyomda, 2003), pp. 24-26; Idem, „Simion Cornea, luptător pentru organizarea parohiilor ortodoxe române într-o eparhie”, *Comunicările celui de al XX-lea simpozion al comunității cercetătorilor români din Ungaria*, (Giula - Békéscsaba, Ungaria: Nyomatás Mozi Nyomda Bt., 2011), pp. 100-114 f.

⁵ E. Csobai, E. Martin, *Vestigiile Bisericii Ortodoxe Române din Ungaria*, Ediția a II-a, (Giula, Ungaria: Nyomás, kötés: Dürer Nyomda Kft., 2013), 128 p; E. Csobai, E. Martin, „Colecția bisericilor ortodoxe române din Ungaria”, *Comunicările celui de al II-lea simpozion al comunității cercetătorilor români din Ungaria*, (Giula, Ungaria: Editura Noi, 1994), pp. 52-57; E. Csobai, „Efectul distructiv în renovarea bisericilor ortodoxe române”, *Lumina. Revistă socială, culturală și științifică a românilor din Ungaria. Fondată de David Voniga în 1894*, (Békéscsaba, Ungaria: Tiparul Mozi Nyomda, 2001), pp. 27-35; Idem, „Renovarea bisericii ortodoxe române din Otlaca Pustă”, *Lumina. Revistă socială, culturală și științifică a românilor din Ungaria. Fondată de David Voniga în 1894*, (Békéscsaba, Ungaria: Tiparul Mozi Nyomda, 2010), pp. 31-37; Idem, „Un ansamblu de piese din biserica ortodoxă română din Giula”, *Lumina. Revistă socială, culturală și științifică a românilor din Ungaria. Fondată de David Voniga în 1894*, (Békéscsaba, Ungaria: Tiparul Mozi Nyomda, 2011), pp. 32-36; Idem, „Biserica din Bichișciaba a fost pictată conform canoanelor bisericii ortodoxe”, *Lumina. Revistă socială, culturală și științifică a românilor din Ungaria. Fondată de David Voniga în 1894*, (Békéscsaba, Ungaria: Tiparul Mozi Nyomda, 2014), pp. 50-54.

Hungary⁶. The clerical elites – in the interwar period – were at the forefront of public life. The analyses made by Csobai pro-

⁶ E. Csobai, „Comuna Chitighaz – Kétegyhaza”, *În amintirea lui Iosif Ioan Ardelean. Chitighaz. Pagini istorico-culturale*, Redactor și editor responsabil Maria Berényi, (Budapesta, Ungaria: Editura Comp-Press Kft.), 1993, pp. 6-12; Idem, „Comuna Bătania. Aspecte istorico-culturale”, *Bătania. Pagini istorico-culturale*, Redactor și editor responsabil Maria Berényi, (Budapesta, Ungaria: Editura Comp-Press Kft., 1995), pp. 4-26; Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Micherechi”, *Micherechi. Pagini istorico-culturale*, Redactor și editor responsabil Maria Berényi, (Giula, Ungaria: Editura Schneider Kft., 2000), pp. 5-47; Idem, „Rolul Bisericii Ortodoxe în păstrarea identității la românii din Giula”, *Comunicările celui de al VII-lea simpozion al comunității cercetătorilor români din Ungaria*, (Giula, Ungaria: Editura Noi, 1998), pp. 78-86; Idem, „Aspecte din istoria românilor din Giula”, *Comunicările celui de al VIII-lea simpozion al comunității cercetătorilor români din Ungaria*, (Békéscsaba – Giula, Ungaria: Nyomtatás Mozi Nyomda Bt., 1999), pp. 65-74; Idem, „Comunitățile românești din Giula în perioada interbelică”, *Comunicările celui de al XV-lea simpozion al comunității cercetătorilor români din Ungaria*, (Békéscsaba - Giula, Ungaria: Nyomtatás Mozi Nyomda Bt., 2006), pp. 89- 100; Idem, „Comunitatea română din Giula germană în secolul al XIX-lea”, *Comunicările celui de al XIV-lea simpozion al comunității cercetătorilor români din Ungaria*, (Békéscsaba – Giula, Ungaria: Nyomtatás Mozi Nyomda Bt., 2005), pp. 68-85; Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Cenadul Unguresc”, *Comunicările celui de al X-lea simpozion al comunității cercetătorilor români din Ungaria*, (Békéscsaba – Giula, Ungaria: Nyomtatás Mozi Nyomda Bt., 2001), pp. 108-115; Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Cenadul Unguresc între cele două războaie mondiale (1910-1945)”, *Comunicările celui de al XI-lea simpozion al comunității cercetătorilor români din Ungaria*, (Békéscsaba – Giula, Ungaria: Nyomtatás Mozi Nyomda Bt., 2002), pp. 95-108; Idem, „Comunitatea ortodoxă din Bichișciaba în toamna anului 2008”, *Lumina. Revistă socială, culturală și științifică a românilor din Ungaria. Fondată de David Voniga în 1894*, (Békéscsaba, Ungaria: Tiparul Mozi Nyomda, 2008), pp. 36-42; Idem, „Românii din Bichișciaba”, *Annales. Publicație a Institutului de Cercetări al Românilor din Ungaria*, (Giula, Ungaria: Editura NOI, 1996), pp. 50-70); Idem, „Aspecte din istoria comunității ortodoxe române din Bichiș”, *Comunicările celui de al XVIII-lea simpozion al comunității cercetătorilor*

mote clerical figures with individual merits concerning the promotion of the Church's goals. The Romanian Orthodox priesthood, even though subjected to numerous constraints

români din Ungaria, (Békéscsaba – Giula, Ungaria: Nyomtatás Mozi Nyomda Bt., 2009), pp. 90-99; Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Bichiș în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea”, *Comunicările celui de al XIX-lea simpozion al comunității cercetătorilor români din Ungaria*, (Békéscsaba – Giula, Ungaria: Nyomtatás Mozi Nyomda Bt., 2010), pp. 118-130; Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Jaca”, *Comunicările celui de al XXI-lea simpozion al comunității cercetătorilor români din Ungaria*, (Békéscsaba – Giula, Ungaria: Nyomtatás Mozi Nyomda Bt., 2012), pp. 86-92; Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Darvaș”, *Comunicările celui de al XXII-lea simpozion al comunității cercetătorilor români din Ungaria*, (Békéscsaba – Giula, Ungaria: Nyomtatás Mozi Nyomda Bt., 2013), pp. 178-186; Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Peterd”, *Comunicările celui de al XXIII-lea simpozion al comunității cercetătorilor români din Ungaria*, (Békéscsaba – Giula, Ungaria: Nyomtatás Mozi Nyomda Bt., 2014), pp. 123-133; Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Apateu”, *Comunicările celui de al XXIV-lea simpozion al comunității cercetătorilor români din Ungaria*, (Giula, Ungaria: Nyomtatás Schneider Nyomda Kft., 2015), pp. 59-66; Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Săcal”, *Comunicările celui de al XXV-lea simpozion al comunității cercetătorilor români din Ungaria*, (Giula, Ungaria: Nyomtatás Schneider Nyomda Kft., 2016), pp. 62- 68; Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Homorogul Unguresc”, *Comunicările celui de al XXVI-lea simpozion al comunității cercetătorilor români din Ungaria*, (Giula, Ungaria: Nyomtatás Schneider Nyomda Kft., 2017), pp. 134-144; Idem, „Românii din Altea”, *Comunicările celui de al V-lea simpozion al comunității cercetătorilor români din Ungaria*, (Békéscsaba – Giula, Ungaria: Nyomtatás Mozi Nyomda Bt., 1996), pp. 112-119; Idem, „Românii din Ciorvaș”, *Comunicările celui de al VI-lea simpozion al comunității cercetătorilor români din Ungaria*, (Békéscsaba – Giula: Nyomtatás Mozi Nyomda Bt., 1997), pp. 76- 90; Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Veherd”, *Comunicările celui de al IX-lea simpozion al comunității cercetătorilor români din Ungaria*, (Békéscsaba – Giula, Ungaria: Nyomtatás Mozi Nyomda Bt., 2000), pp. 92-105; Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Otlaca Pustă”, *Annales. Publicație a Institutului de Cercetări al Românilor din Ungaria*, (Békéscsaba – Giula, Ungaria: Nyomtatás Mozi Nyomda Bt., 2000), pp. 83-102.

and, obviously, with a *clerical body* reduced in number, managed to impose itself in historiography through the activities carried out and recorded. In general, the researcher Csobai gives historiography a broad picture of priestly portraits. Simion Cornea, Dimitrie Sabău, David Voniga, Iosif Ioan Ardelean, etc., complete the image of the activity of the Church in the interwar period in Hungary.

For example, the article *Personalități marcante. Iosif Ioan Ardelean (1849-1920)* introduces us to popular poetic creation. The poetry volumes, but also the pioneering work “Monografia comunitii Chitighaz” written by the clergyman Ardelean in *the format of the times*, remain, after all, cultural-scientific *specimens*. Through his writings, Father Ardelean enters the scientific bibliography of the Romanians in Hungary. The evocations of his personality (as shown by Mrs. Csobai) and the quotations from the following decades represent honor images in the historiography of the Church⁷.

Remaining in the cultural realm, many of Csobai’s considerations regarding the endeavors of Romanian priests to get involved in the cultural development of Romanians can be found in a documented article entitled *David Voniga în presa românească*. The emotional involvement is evident since both Voniga and Mrs. Csobai had a common goal: *Light*. David Voniga was the editor of the magazine near the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and Elena Csobai leads the destinies of the magazine a century later at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. From the rich material edited by David Voniga, Elena Csobai insists on “Lexicon Biblic, Bisericesc și

⁷ Idem, „Personalități marcante. Iosif Ioan Ardelean (1849-1920)”, *În amintirea lui Iosif Ioan Ardelean. Chitighaz. Pagini istorico-culturale*, Redactor și editor responsabil Maria Berényi, (Budapesta, Ungaria: Editura Comp-Press Kft., 1993), pp. 21-23.

Teologic” in 12 volumes, in which the reader could discover 16,000 articles. The volumes, reviewed by contemporaries – the scholar priest Victor Aga and Archpriest Meletie Șora from Timișoara, are presented as “a monumental encyclopedic work”⁸. Along with the presentation of the work, Csobai evokes the modesty of Father Voniga and his constant concern for cultural enrichment⁹.

In the study entitled *Simion Cornea, luptător pentru organizarea parohiilor ortodoxe române într-o eparhie* and written in 2010, Elena Csobai selects from the church archive a series of documents that bring to the fore the priest from Bătănia, the leader of the Romanian clergy in Hungary. Of his 64 years of life (1868-1932) and 35 years of the priesthood (1897-1932), the last 10 he *devoted* to the Church. Hundreds of documents prove this truth. The sacrifice of Priest Simion Cornea is presented by Mrs. Csobai as follows: “Simion Cornea (...) dared to fight against the Hungarian government, in the interest of the Church, for the Romanians in Hungary, often endangering his own life”¹⁰.

These considerations reflect Mrs. Csobai’s complex optics on the efforts of priests born in Hungarian parishes who have made substantial contributions to the preservation and promotion of ancient values.

Along with the carefully analysed clerical staff, a series of articles refer to church buildings, which come into Mrs. Csobai’s (scientific) attention, especially after the efforts in the field in order to collect ROC relics from Hungary.

⁸ Idem, „David Voniga în presa românească...”, p. 25.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ Idem, „Simion Cornea, luptător pentru organizarea parohiilor ortodoxe române într-o eparhie...”, p. 112.

On the occasion of the Second Symposium (Gyula, 28-29 November 1992), Elena Csobai and Emilia Martin presented the communication *Colecția Biseriilor Ortodoxe Române din Ungaria*¹¹. Due to the study evoked and published by systematizing the archive, the ancient objects of worship, the old church books, etc. – ROC relics from Hungary were saved from ruin. These values were in the process of *disintegration*. The church components have aroused interest during the congress of the Democratic Union of Romanians in Hungary since 1983¹². Subsequently, the actual *labor* was initiated on 13 September 1989 after the Romanian Orthodox Vicariate in Gyula gave its approval, and was concluded on 13 October 1991. Later, all the collected components were deposited at the Romanian Orthodox Vicariate in Gyula¹³.

The pieces inventoried in the Gyula parish are seen as bearers of some documentary-historical values¹⁴. Without Mrs. Csobai's care, the standards of the industrialists and the plowmen would have remained, forever or for a long time, unacknowledged. The pages that evoke the sanctification of these standards, the suggestive photographs of Father Dimitrie Sabău, surrounded by the believers in Gyula are *festive images* which convey – despite the vicissitudes of the times – communion and joy¹⁵. In that year (1948), in Romania, many of the Orthodox priests were in prisons, and the Greek-Catholic Church was abolished.

It is worth noting that the author bitterly evaluates some renovations of the churches in Méhkerék, Békéscsaba, Kétegyháza,

¹¹ E. Csobai, E. Martin, „Colecția bisericilor ortodoxe române din Ungaria...”, pp. 52-57.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 52.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 53-54.

¹⁴ E. Csobai, „Un ansamblu de piese din biserica ortodoxă română din Giula...”, pp. 32-36.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 34-35.

Apateu, Hungarian Cenad and Puszaotlaka. Dominated by the not so easily concealable indignation felt in relation to the unhealthy forms of restoration of the church in M hker k (1991), she wondered: "What happened to the old iconostasis, even if it was damaged? What happened to the old chairs?"¹⁶. Answers, but also a series of new questions are given in the passage that evokes the restoration of the church in B k csaba: "On the occasion of the renovation of the church, in 1993, valuable pieces of the old interior were thrown at the city's dump, to be replaced by the new ones. With the removal of the old chairs, each provided with a plate on which the name of the owner was inscribed, some of the most important testimonies of the history of Romanians in B k csaba were erased from the church. (...) Why has the Church's leadership allowed such a thing to happen? Who is responsible for erasing the traces of the Romanian Orthodox? (...)"¹⁷.

The above passage expresses as clearly as possible the author's pragmatic vision of the role of the church edifice in the lives of believers and researchers. The same pragmatism has also instilled in her the conviction that "the documents related to the building and interior arrangement of the churches, kept in the archives of the parishes, give us a lot of information, which can be useful to us in renovation works"¹⁸.

Regarding the presentation of the church communes, in broad lines, Csobai structures her information insisting on the following references: documentary attestation of the locality; information related to the construction of the church; the patrimony of the church; the role of foundations in preserving Orthodox

¹⁶ Idem, „Efectul distructiv  n renovarea bisericilor ortodoxe rom ne...”, p. 27.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ Idem, „Renovarea bisericii ortodoxe rom ne din Otlaca Pust ...”, p. 31.

spirituality; the denominational school (establishment; presentation of teachers; tables with number of students, etc.). In this “section” of her corpus, the Romanian researcher has evaluated with special care, for example, the issue of denominational schools.

In the interwar period, the denominational school was *in full process of dissolution*. However, the reconstitution of the activity carried out by the denominational school offers the perspective of an educational institution that endeavoured to imprint values of Eastern spirituality between the 18th and 20th centuries. Therefore, the interwar period is seen to have been detrimental to the education system using Romanian as a teaching language.

After the First World War, Kétegyháza no longer has a teacher, and the educational activities in Romanian are ceased¹⁹; in Darvas, the denominational school operated for almost a century and a half (1791-1933), with 60-100 students enrolled in each school year. In 1898, Angyal Janos’ widow donates several buildings and a pasture to the Church – intended for the upkeep of the denominational school²⁰; the archival documents from Jaca mention a didactic activity at the beginning of the 19th century, with classes ceasing only in 1932²¹; documents from Bichiş mention “the teacher’s payment” in 1794, which proves the existence of the school at least that year, managing to operate until 1929²²; by the dissolution of the denominational school in Békéscsaba in 1920, the Church becomes powerless –

¹⁹ Idem, „Comuna Chitighaz – Kétegyháza”, *În amintirea lui Iosif Ioan Ardelean. Chitighaz...*, p. 11.

²⁰ Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Darvas...”, pp. 179, 183-184.

²¹ Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Jaca...”, p. 91.

²² Idem, „Aspecte din istoria comunității ortodoxe române din Bichiş...”, p. 92.

the author notes – to preserve the Romanian language. The interwar period is identified as a period of acceleration of the assimilation of the Romanian Orthodox ethnic groups²³; the archival documents from Apateu do not show when the school was established but mention teacher Ioan Dimbrea in 1846, and the *Register of Church incomes and expenses* indicates between 1886-1907 the expenses for different repairs (fountain, fence, oven, windows, doors) or upkeep (coal, wood, lime, brooms)²⁴; a document from Peterd mentions the shortcomings of the school between 1880 and 1907²⁵; in 1908, in Körösszakál, because of the advanced state of degradation of the buildings, new ones were erected for the school and the teacher's residence, and there is a subsequent information stating that the 1917/1918 school year had six grades with 99 students²⁶; the year of the establishment of the educational institution in Vekerd is also not known, but it is mentioned in a document prepared by Sigismund Bejan in 1883. Also, information is provided regarding the number of students at the end of the 19th century (between 64-73) and the dissolution of the school around 1920²⁷; in Csorvás, in 1933, Priest Ioan Magdu recorded the urgent needs for repairs that had to be carried out at the school²⁸, etc.; in Hungarian Cenad, an exchange of letters between different institutions is seen during the interwar period complaining of the appointment of teachers (Papp Ágoston and Papp Ilona) who did not know the Romanian language at the

²³ Idem, „Românii din Bichişciaba...”, p. 66.

²⁴ Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Apateu...”, p. 63.

²⁵ Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Peterd...”, pp. 128-129.

²⁶ Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Săcal...”, p. 64.

²⁷ Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Vecherd...”, pp. 99-101, 104.

²⁸ Idem, „Românii din Ciorvaş...”, p. 87.

denominational (Romanian) schools²⁹, etc. From the information gathered, researcher Elena Csobai concludes, with arguments, that the cultural life in Cenad until the First World War “has always largely depended on the Orthodox priest and the teachers of the denominational school”³⁰.

Based on the archival documents, Elena Csobai confirms that on the eve of the Second World War the denominational schools are dissolved (some earlier, others later) in the localities inhabited by Romanians. Officially, the nationalization of denominational schools in Hungary takes place on 15 June 1948. However, other state schools were established that also taught in Romanian³¹.

The patrimonial passages provide *samples* regarding the financial situation of the Church. At the end of the 19th century, the Darvas parish had 55 jugera of land (to which the donation of Angyal Janos’s widow will be added)³²; at the end of the 18th century, over 1,500 Romanians lived in the Jaca parish who managed to support two priests. A century later, the *Food Fund* provides an image of the financial possibilities of the churchgoers in this locality³³; at the end of the 19th century, the Peterd parish managed with difficulty to maintain the church and school³⁴; the Pusztaotlaka parish is financially reinvigorated by Ștefan Rusu through a donation of a 34-jugera land, but also by

²⁹ Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Cenadul Unguresc între cele două războaie mondiale...”, pp. 100-102.

³⁰ Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Cenadul Unguresc...”, p. 115.

³¹ Maria Berenyi, „Școala din Micherechi”, *Micherechi. Pagini istorico-culturale...*, p. 75.

³² Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Darvaș...”, p. 179.

³³ Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Jaca...”, pp. 88-89.

³⁴ Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Peterd...”, p. 125.

the subsequent financial support³⁵; the Vekerd parish at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries had a flourishing financial situation, as part of the revenues was lent at interest, and an amount of money was kept in the bank³⁶; the M  hker  k parish at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries “was a consolidated commune in terms of material condition” admits Mrs. Csobai³⁷; the Apateu parish in the register of the “church’s accounts” confirms that the church had money, lending various amounts to parishioners³⁸. The Hungarian Cenad church commune was even richer³⁹. Mostly Romanian, the Hungarian Cenad parish had enviable financial prosperity at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century. These realities were carefully collected from archival documents: in 1878, the Romanian community paid 12,250 fl. to the Serbians to leave the church and school in the exclusive property of the Romanians; at the end of the 19th century, the parish purchased over 1,000 cadastral jugera (575 hectares) of land; the church (3200 fl.), the two schools (1200 fl.) were renovated; a classroom was built for the local school (1000 fl.); a house with land (820 fl.) was bought; 100 cadastral jugera were purchased in the vicinity of the church, etc⁴⁰. Therefore, it is not by chance that the Bishopric of Arad admitted in the newspapers from

³⁵ Idem, „Comunitatea rom  neasc   din Otlaca Pust  ...”, pp. 85-94; Idem, *Istoricul rom  nilor din Ungaria de azi*, (Giula, Ungaria: Editura Rotapress, 1996), pp. 9-10.

³⁶ Idem, „Comunitatea rom  neasc   din Vekerd...”, p. 94.

³⁷ Idem, „Comunitatea rom  neasc   din Micherechi...”, p. 16.

³⁸ Idem, „Comunitatea rom  neasc   din Apateu...”, p. 61.

³⁹ Idem, „Comunitatea rom  neasc   din Cenadul Unguresc...”, pp. 108-115; idem, „Comunitatea rom  neasc   din Cenadul Unguresc   ntre cele dou   r  zboaie mondiale...”, pp. 95-108.

⁴⁰ Idem, „Comunitatea rom  neasc   din Cenadul Unguresc...”, p. 111.

that time that the Hungarian Cenad parish was one of the richest in the entire bishopric⁴¹.

Until the beginning of the interwar period, a general upward trend in the number of churchgoers is noted in the Romanian parishes in the Hungarian space. In Darvas, for example, in 1904 there were 109 families with 447 congregants, and in 1919 there were 126 families with 528 congregants. An increase of approximately 18% in the number of Orthodox congregants⁴²; at Jaca, the assimilation of congregants became evident at the turn of the two centuries. In 1880, 2,690 people lived in Jaca, of which 533 were Romanians. Three decades later (1910), out of the 3,331 persons counted, 108 stated they were Romanian, and in 1920, out of the 3,516 persons, only 49 stated they were their Romanian⁴³; in Bichiș, many Romanian Orthodox youth married Hungarians of another denomination (Roman Catholic, Reformed, Lutherans), *renouncing* their forefathers' faith⁴⁴; in Apateu (with dependent churches), the Orthodox priest recorded 680 congregants in 1880, and 1,050 in 1919 (in the 40 years, a 50% increase is seen. In 1919, the Romanian population represented over 50% of the total residents)⁴⁵; the priests Teodor Botto and Georgiu Pirtea from Peterd carried out a census in 1897 which recorded 451 congregants (with 611 congregants added from the dependent churches). In 1907, the number of congregants decreased slightly to 435 (down to 456 persons in the dependent churches)⁴⁶; in 1914, Father Vasile Bodor notifies the Bishopric of

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 112.

⁴² Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Darvaș...”, pp. 180-181.

⁴³ Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Jaca...”, pp. 90-91.

⁴⁴ Idem, „Aspecte din istoria comunității ortodoxe române din Bichiș...”, pp. 96-98.

⁴⁵ Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Apateu...”, pp. 64-65.

⁴⁶ Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Peterd...”, pp. 126-127, 130-131.

Arad that Körösszakál had 596 congregants, and Magyar-homorog 535. The number of Romanians would decrease in statistics from 1949 from about 70% to 25% of the total population⁴⁷; in Csorvás, in 1931, 610 congregants were recorded, etc.

The authorities in Budapest officially record a drastic percentage decrease in the number of Romanians after *Trianon*. For example, if in the second half of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century Peterd had over 60% Romanians, in the 1910s and by 1920 their number would decrease to about 23% of the entire population, dropping to 5% in 1949. Through these massive “official” decreases, the census reader has only a few options for understanding these processes: either the Romanians were assimilated, or they left the locality, or a massive number of Hungarians settled in the locality counterbalancing this percentage in their favor, or the questions in the censuses aimed to decrease the percentage of Romanians. In this sense, an unusual situation (curious for us) is offered by Mrs. Csobai: “in 1990, on the occasion of field research, carried out within the historical and ethnographic research camp, approximately 50% of the entire population of the commune stated to be of Romanian origin and Orthodox”⁴⁸. In the Hungarian censuses of the same year (1990), 619 persons were recorded in Peterd, of which 604 Hungarians and 2 Romanians⁴⁹. Sic!

The Körösszakál parish may also be in a similar situation. Between 1880 and 1920, about 70% of the population in the locality was Romanian Orthodox. Three decades later (1949) the percentage of Romanian Orthodox inhabitants decreased to

⁴⁷ Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Săcal...”, pp. 65, 67.

⁴⁸ Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Peterd...”, p. 131.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

about 25%⁵⁰. Mrs. Csobai also gives us the *ecclesiastical* motivation: “as the statistics show, although until 1920 the Romanians were the majority in the commune, in 1949, after the parish was left for 17 years without a priest, the number of the Romanian population decreased by almost 50% percent”⁵¹.

The words above, inserted by Mrs. Csobai, are edifying. The Romanian Orthodox clergy made an overwhelming contribution to the coagulation of the Romanian culture and spirituality in the parishes they pastored.

The interwar period was defined as obscure for the Romanian ethnics in the Hungarian area. After 1944-1945, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe (implicitly Romania and Hungary) were in a full process of communization. Paradoxically, *the process of communisation* offers new perspectives to the cultural-ecclesiastical reality. Years after the end of the Second World War, the (new) Budapest policy inscribes the Romanian-Hungarian (church, cultural) relations rather in a form of optical anisotropy.

Elena Csobai admits that the actions taken by the Hungarian politicians (in the Romanian issue) were only in appearance; by them, Hungary wanted to be included in the select club of the nations that respected their minorities⁵². However, something happened, and the Romanian-Hungarian relations *stepped* into another dimension. In the period between 1920-1945, we are talking about a Romanian community without church and cultural structures. The two attempts, to set up an Orthodox patriarchal structure in Hungary, failed. Horthy’s idea was stifled by

⁵⁰ Idem, „Comunitatea românească din Săcal...”, p. 67.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

⁵² Idem, „Românii din Ungaria după 1945”, *Comunicările celui de al XVI-lea simpozion al comunității cercetătorilor români din Ungaria*, (Békéscsaba – Giula, Ungaria: Nyomtatás Mozi Nyomda Bt., 2007), p. 86.

the Ecumenical Patriarchate. After the Second World War, the resumption of Horthy's idea was shattered by Russian leaders. The Moscow secular and clerical authorities (Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin and the Russian Patriarch Alexius I) found it appropriate to decline the Budapest proposal to receive the Romanian parishes in Hungary under the canonical jurisdiction of the Russian Patriarchate. This refusal led to the official recognition of the Romanian vicariate (which operated since 27 March 1946)⁵³. At about the same time that the Gyula vicariate was recognized, in Bucharest, the communist leader Andrey Vyshinsky had installed Petru Groza as head of the government (6 March 1945).

In parallel with this win, on 21 September 1945 in Budapest, and on 20 November 1945 in Bucharest, the Hungarian-Romanian and Romanian-Hungarian Associations were established. The Moscow consent is obvious: the general meeting held on the occasion of the establishment of the Budapest association was presided over by historian Szegfű Gyula – the Hungarian Consul General in Moscow⁵⁴.

Mrs. Elena Csobai considered that the year 1948 was shaping under positive auspices. By the establishment of the Cultural Union of Romanians in Hungary and the election of Priest Dimitrie Sabău from Gyula as executive president, the Romanian Orthodox Church in Hungary retained its capacity as a leader and cohesive agent in Hungarian cultural realities⁵⁵.

Last but not least, in the author's view, newspapers printed in the Romanian language of the 19th century "became more and more widespread among Romanians in Hungary *due to the ac-*

⁵³ *Ibidem*, pp. 87-88.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 78-80.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 82-86.

tivity of the church (emphasis mine)⁵⁶. Another merit attributed to the Church is the *supervision* at the establishment of “reading circles, choral and theatrical ensembles, folk dance ensembles”⁵⁷. However, these values dissipated during the interwar period, as a large part of the Romanian intellectuals took refuge in Romania⁵⁸. By this, the author notices that a weakening of the Orthodox Church was taking place. This spiritual devitalization is considered a major problem because the Orthodox Church is “the most important institution preserving the Romanian identity”⁵⁹.

An expert on the ROC’s history in Hungary, researcher Elena Csobai has become a leader in the historiography devoted to religious issues in the Hungarian space. Through the contributions presented above, which prove a consistent contribution to the development of the bibliography in the field, as well as the enormous work made to keep the old church values intact, we can say she is easily included in the small group that managed to offer *Romanian Orthodoxy* a past, present, but also a future.

⁵⁶ Idem, „Rolul Bisericii Ortodoxe în păstrarea identității la românii din Giula...”, p. 80; Idem, „Aspecte din istoria românilor din Giula...”, p. 66.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 81; Idem, „Asociațiile culturale din Chitighaz și rolul acestora privind cultura română”, *În amintirea lui Iosif Ioan Ardelean. Chitighaz...*, pp. 43, 45; Idem, „Comuna Bătania. Aspecte istorico-culturale”, *Bătania. Pagini istorico-culturale...*, p. 20.

⁵⁸ Idem, „Aspecte din istoria românilor din Giula...”, p. 66.

⁵⁹ Idem, „Comunitățile românești din Giula în perioada interbelică...”, p. 94.

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