THE IDENTITIES OF THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITIES IN THE 18TH CENTURY WALLACHIA

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Abstract:

The Catholic communities in the 18th century Wallachia although belonging to the same denomination are diverse by language, ethnic origin and historical evolution. The oldest community was founded in Câmpulung in the second half of the 13th century by Transylvanian Saxons. At the beginning of the 17th century the Saxons lost their mother tongue and adopted the Romanian as colloquial language. Other communities were founded by Catholic Bulgarians who crossed the Danube in 1688, after the defeat of their rebellion by the Ottomans. The refugees came from four market-towns of north-western Bulgaria: Čiprovcı, Kopilovci, Železna and Klisura. The Paulicians, a distinct group of Catholics from Bulgaria, settled north of the Danube during the 17th and 18th centuries. The homeland of this group was the Nikopolis region. Their ancestors, adherents of a medieval heresy, had been converted by Franciscans friars. Bucharest, the capital city of Wallachia, housed a composite Catholic community of distinct origins, which came into being during the last quarter of the 17th century. In this community the Catholic Armenians became predominant by the mid-18th century. The main object of our study is the history of the Catholic communities in a predominant Orthodox country under Ottoman rule.

Rezumat:

Deși aparțineau aceleiași confesiuni, comunitățile catolice din Țara Românească se deosebeau prin limbă, origine etnică și evoluție istorică. Cea mai veche comunitate a fost întemeiată la Câmpulung de sașii ardeleni în a doua jumătate a secolului XIII. La începutul secolului XVII sașii și-au pierdut graiul strămoșesc și foloseau doar limba română. Alte comunități au fost întemeiate de bulgarii catolici care au trecut Dunărea în 1688 în urma înfrângerii rebeliunii lor de către otomani. Refugiații erau originari din patru târguri din nord-vestul Bulgariei: Čiprovc, Kopilovci, Železna și Klisura. Pavlichienii, un grup distinct de catolici din Bulgaria, s-au așezat la nord de Dunăre în secolele XVII și XVIII. Ei erau originari din regiunea Nicopol. Strămoșii lor, aderenți ai unei erezii medievale, fuseseră convertiți de călugării franciscani. Bucureștii, capitala Țării Românești, adăposteau o comunitate catolică cu origini foarte diverse, constituită în ultimul sfert al secolului XVII. În cadrul comunității, armenii catolici au devenit majoritari către mijlocul secolului XVIII. Obiectivul principal al studiului nostru este istoria comunităților catolice într-o țară predominant ortodoxă aflată sub stăpânire otomană.

Keywords: Catholic communities, Wallachia, Saxons, Bulgarians, Paulicians, Armenians

The Catholic communities in Wallachia were denominational enclaves in the mass of the Romanian Orthodox population in a borderland of the Ottoman Empire, in close vicinity of the Habsburg Empire.

The history of these "islands of faith" between 1688-1763 is the topic of my post-PhD research project. The aim of my article is a brief examination of the main features of the identities of the Catholic communities in the 18th century Wallachia, namely their origin, historical evolution, ethnic and social structure, size and privileges.

1. The Catholic community in Câmpulung

The oldest Catholic community in the above-mentioned country was founded by the Transylvanian Saxons in Câmpulung (*Langenau*) in the second half of the 13th century. It was an outpost of the German *Ostsiedlung*.¹

Trade was the main economic activity of the Saxons in Câmpulung. A few craftsmen are also mentioned by the sources. In the second half of

¹ Alexandru Ciocîltan, "Colonizarea germană la sud de Carpați", *Revista Istorică* 22, no 5-6 (2011), 431-460.

the 15th century a massive Romanian population settled down in Câmpulung. As a result the urban landscape underwent an important ethnic and demographic change. The newcomers managed to penetrate into the town government.²

In 1557 the Saxons embraced the Lutheran denomination. In 1639 the Franciscan missionaries, backed up by the ruling prince, managed to convert the Lutherans to Catholicism. The entire Saxon community numbered 500 souls, which constituted about 20% of the town population. The conversion to Catholicism had important consequences for the community. By breaking off the denominational contact with the Transylvanian Saxons the acculturation process in the Romanian milieu had increased. The Franciscan missionaries discovered that the Saxons had lost their native tongue and spoke only Romanian. Despite losing their forefathers' tongue, they managed to preserve important elements of their own identity. The ethnic awareness was still present, a fact proved by the usage of the ethnic name *Sasul* ("the Saxon") during the whole 17th century. Other characteristic elements of the Saxon identity were still to be seen in costume, haircut and bakery.³

Two Saxon mayors are certified in the 17th century Câmpulung: Pătru Sasul and Andrea Județul ("the Mayor"). The first was mentioned in 1634, while the second was active in his function with interruptions from 1658 till the anti-Catholic persecution unleashed by the prince Șerban Cantacuzino (1678-1688) at the beginning of his reign. The persecution put an end to the participation of the Saxons in the government of the town. In the 18th century an important identity mutation occurred: the ethnic name *Sasul* was replaced with the appellative indicating the denominational affiliation, namely *Catolicul* ("the Catholic") or *Papistașul* ("the Popist"). As a consequence in the 18th century Câmpulung there are only descendants of the Saxons, but no more a Saxon community.⁴

² Idem, "Comerț și meșteșuguri la sașii din Câmpulung", *Pro Memoria. Revistă de istorie ecleziastică*, no 10-11 (2013), 126-146.

³ Idem, "Dispariția comunității germane din Câmpulung-Muscel", *Revista Istorică* 16, no 3-4 (2005), 131, 135-141; Idem, "Contrareforma la Câmpulung. Noi documente (1635-1646)", *Revista Istorică* 19, no 1-2 (2008), 103-105; Idem, "Iradierea Reformei transilvane în Țara Românească preponderent ortodoxă în lumina izvoarelor interne și externe din secolele al XVI-lea și al XVII-lea", in *Toleranță, coexistență, antagonism. Percepții ale diversității religioase în Transilvania între Reformă și Iluminism*, ed. Joachim Bahlcke and Konrad Gündisch (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Mega, 2013), 140-142.

⁴ Idem, "Dispariția comunității", 140-142.

The decline of the Catholic population could be traced throughout the 17th and 18th centuries: 200 parishioners in 1682, then 190 (1731), 170 (1736-1745) and 33 (1773-1775). The decline was caused by heavy taxes, religious oppression, plague and war.

The Catholic community in Câmpulung had gone through a difficult period in the 18th century. The economic situation was steadily deteriorating. As a consequence the community focused its efforts to obtain a privileged tax status, the so called *ruptoare*. It was a unique tax paid each year in a few instalments. The first such tax privilege was granted to the Catholics by Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu in 1710. According to the issued chart, the beneficiaries had to pay to the treasury each year 80 gold coins (*ughi*) by four instalments. Some of his successors renewed the chart: Ștefan Cantacuzino (1714 or 1715), Ioan Mavrocordat (1718), Nicolae Mavrocordat (1720), Mihai Racoviță (1731) and Constantin Mavrocordat (1736).⁵

The privilege marked the end of the tax equality between the Orthodox and the Catholic townspeople. It was a trigger for ethnic and denominational tensions. When the ruling prince was replaced in his office the privileged status came also to an end and new efforts had to be made to his successor to renew the chart. If the prince delayed or refused to grant a privilege to the Catholics, they had to pay tax together with the Romanian townspeople. When such a situation occurred the Orthodox imposed abusive taxes upon their Catholic neighbours. There is no information about a tax privilege for Catholics between 1742 and 1772. These three decades should be considered the most difficult period in the history of the Catholic community in Câmpulung. Plague and war hit the town only in 1770, while in the meantime it was free of such negative phenomena. In this quite peaceful time the Catholic population had decreased dramatically from 170 to only 33 souls. What happened? *The Franciscan Chronicle* of Blasius Kleiner mentioned frequent persecutions organised by the Orthodox against the Catholics living in Câmpulung. Such a situation occurred in 1765 when the mayor seized the houses of the Catholics who

⁵ N. Iorga, *Studii și documente cu privire la istoria românilor*, vol. 1-2 (București: Editura Ministerului de Instrucție, 1901), 287, doc. XXXV, 289-290, doc. XL, 311, doc. LXXXII, 312, doc. LXXXIV; Alexandru Ciocîltan, *Comunitățile germane la sud de Carpați în evul mediu (secolele XIII-XVIII)*, (Brăila: Editura Istros a Muzeului Brăilei, 2015), 271-272, 283-287, 402-403, 416-419.

were not able to pay the abusive taxes.⁶ In this difficult context some of the Catholics left the town, while others adopted Orthodoxy, the conversion being followed by tax facilities.

In the second half of the 18th century Germans and Hungarians from the Habsburg Empire settled down in Câmpulung, together with Bulgarians and Croats arriving from the Ottoman Empire. The newcomers became more numerous than the native Catholics, but they were not granted with tax privileges. In time the two groups intermarried. By the end of the 18th century the natives were assimilated by the newcomers.⁷ Only 50 Catholics were still to be found in Câmpulung in 1786 and 1799.⁸

2. The Bulgarian and Paulician Catholic communities

Another group of Catholics who settled in Wallachia were the inhabitants of four market-towns in north-western Bulgaria: Čiprovci, Kopilovci, Železna and Klisura. They entertained timeworn relations with the territory north of the Danube. The Bulgarian Catholic merchants developed an important trade activity in Wallachia. In 1654 Prince Constantin Șerban gave them the first commercial privilege. The chart granted them the right to trade freely throughout the country and to be exempted from tithes and ordinary taxes in exchange of an annual payment of 120 ducats to the prince. The successors of Constantin Șerban, except Radu Leon Tomșa, renewed the privilege.⁹

The actions of the Holy League, which resulted in the relieving of the besieged Vienna (1683), the conquering of Hungary and the occupation of Transylvania, aroused among the Catholics from Čiprovci the hope that their liberation from the Ottomans was a matter of days. The fall of Belgrade in the hands of the Austrians (6 September 1688) determined the aforementioned Catholics to rebel against the Ottomans. A military

⁶ George Georgescu, "Cronica franciscanilor din 1764, prima istorie a orașului Cîmpulung", *Verbum* 5 (1994), 335-337; Idem, "Câmpulung-Muscel în Cronica franciscanilor de la 1764", *Argessis. Studii și comunicări*, series history, 9 (2000), 254-255.

⁷ Ciocîltan, *Comunitățile germane*, 287.

⁸ Ieronim Iacob, "Catolicii din Valahia și Bulgaria de Nord în timpul episcopului Paul Dovanlia (1777-1804)", *Pro Memoria. Revistă de istorie ecleziastică*, no 3 (2004), 60, 66.

⁹ Karol Telbizov, "Liste des chartes de privilèges octroyés aux XVII^e-XVIII^e siècles aux compagnies commerciales des Bulgares de Ciprovec dans la Principauté de Roumanie, en Transylvanie et dans le Banat", *Études Balkaniques* 12, no 4 (1976), 64-65, 69-71; Gheorghe Lazăr, *Les marchands en Valachie (XVII^e-XVIII^e siècles)*, (București: Institutul Cultural Român, 2006), 126-129.

detachment of Catholic Bulgarians took part together with the Habsburg army in the conquering of Orșova.¹⁰ In 1688 the armed rebellion of the Catholic population was crushed by the Ottomans and only 3.000 inhabitants from Čiprovci, Kopilovci, Železna and Klisura managed to save themselves by crossing the Danube into Wallachia. Lacking the means of subsistence they faced hunger and a general climate of uncertainty.¹¹

Prince Șerban Cantacuzino allowed the refugees to settle down in his country. His successor, Constantin Brâncoveanu, offered them his protection: in 1691 he granted a privilege to the Catholic Bulgarians, which stipulated their right to settle down, to own houses and to trade freely in the whole country; they received general exemption of all ordinary duties and taxes owed by other inhabitants, in exchange for an annual payment of 200 ducats to the treasury. The privilege was also valid for the Bulgarians who would settle down afterwards in the country. The chart was renewed by Ștefan Cantacuzino and Nicolae Mavrocordat.¹²

The settling down of the Bulgarians was an important event in the history of Catholicism in Wallachia. They became the most numerous ethnic group among the Catholic population of the country. The Catholic Bulgarians established themselves everywhere alongside the Orthodox Romanian population. The actual establishment process is still difficult to reconstruct. Initially, the refugees scattered in many settlements. They lived not only in the western part of the country, which would be later called Oltenia or Little Wallachia. According to the Catholic archbishop of Sofia in 1689 most of the Bulgarians lived in Câmpulung.¹³ The Turkish and Tatar invasion of 1690 forced them to seek refuge in Transylvania.¹⁴ A letter written in 1695 by the Franciscan friar Giovanni Deanović mentioned no less than 24 Wallachian settlements in which Catholic Bulgarians also

¹⁰ Alexa Ivić, "Ansiedlung der Bulgaren in Ungarn", *Archiv für slawische Philologie* 31 (1910), 414-417.

¹¹ *Dokumenti za katoličeskata dejnost v Bălgarija prez XVII vek*, ed. Borislav Primov, Petăr Sarijski, Milčo Jovkov and Svilen Stanimirov (Sofija: Universitetsko Izdatelstvo „Sv. Kliment Ohridski”, 1993), 426-428.

¹² Telbizov, "Liste des chartes", 65-66.

¹³ Eusebius Fermendžin, *Acta Bulgariae ecclesiastica ab a. 1565 usque ad a. 1799* (Zagrabiae: Hartmann, 1887), 306-307, doc. CXCVII.

¹⁴ Ioan Moga, "Știri despre bulgarii din Ardeal", in Idem, *Scieri istorice 1926-1946*, ed. Mihail Dan and Aurel Răduțiu (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1973), 271-273; Telbizov, "Liste des chartes", 66.

lived.¹⁵ Later they gathered in three settlements: Craiova, Râmnic and Brădiceni.

1718, the year when Oltenia became a province of the Habsburg Empire, marked also the beginning of a very favourable period for the Catholic Bulgarians. The Austrian authorities decided to support a Catholic population which proved its loyalty during the war against the Turks. The Bulgarian merchants managed to control most of the provincial trade. They were organised in a commercial company. In 1727 the imperial privilege granted to the Bulgarian merchants marked their submission to the Court Chamber, the exemption of taxes, tithes and military service, in exchange of an annual payment of 10 florins for each family; custom facilities for the exported merchandises are also mentioned. In their home towns they had the right to organise weekly and annual fairs, to own shops and inns, and to use the pastures and the woods. They were allowed to hold, buy and sell personal estates and had the right to raise churches and schools. They also obtained the privilege of self-organisation, headed by a judge and four assessors elected and empowered to judge the causes within the community.¹⁶

In 1719 the Catholics were gathered in three settlements: Craiova (40 families), Râmnic (26 families) and Brădiceni (36 families).¹⁷ The Austrian authorities encouraged the settling down of Catholics in the new province, natives not only of the Habsburg, but also of the Ottoman Empire. Nicolaus Stanislavić, the Catholic bishop of Nikopolis, played an important role in this colonization process. He encouraged the settling of the Catholic Paulicians in Little Wallachia.¹⁸ The Paulicians were former Bogomil heretics living in the villages near the Danube, in the Nikopolis region.¹⁹ During the Austrian rule half of the Catholic population of the

¹⁵ Archivio Storico della Sacra Congregazione "De Propaganda Fide" (Vatican), Scritture Originali riferite nelle Congregazioni Generali, 1696, vol. 524, f. 492v.

¹⁶ Cornelia Papacostea-Danielopolu, "Le régime privilégié des marchands bulgares et grecs en Olténie pendant l'occupation autrichienne (1718-1738)", *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes* 4, no 3-4 (1966), 476-490; Telbizov, "Liste des chartes", 71-72; Șerban Papacostea, *Oltenia sub stăpânirea austriacă (1718-1739)*, ed. Gheorghe Lazăr (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 1998), 120-124.

¹⁷ C. Giurescu, *Material pentru istoria Olteniei supt austriaci*, vol. 1 (București: Tipografia „Gutenberg”, 1913), 401, doc. 335.

¹⁸ Ivić, "Ansiedlung der Bulgaren", 426; Kálmán Juhász, "Nicolaus Stanislavich, OFM, Bischof von Csanad († 1750)", *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 52, no 4 (1959), 427-432.

¹⁹ In the 17th century the Ottoman tax abuses forced some Paulician families to cross the Danube into Wallachia where they settled down scattered among the Romanians. In the

Nikopolis diocese settled down in Craiova and Islaz.²⁰ The Paulicians did not mix with the Bulgarian merchants: in Craiova they lived apart and expressed the wish to have their own church.²¹ Each of the three Catholic populations which settled down in Little Wallachia had distinct social and professional status: the Germans were soldiers, craftsmen and office workers, the Bulgarians – merchants, and the Paulicians – peasants.²² Each group had its own clergy. According to the bishop of Nikopolis in 1729 the entire Catholic population of the province numbered over 4,000 souls.²³

In 1737 when a new war with the Ottomans broke out the Catholic population abandoned the province. The Bulgarians and the Paulicians settled down in the neighbouring province of Banat.²⁴ A small Catholic community survived only in Râmnic. In 1746 it numbered no more than 10 families.²⁵ 55 Catholics were registered in the town at the end of the 18th century.²⁶

3. The Catholic community in Bucharest

After crushing the anti-Ottoman rebellion of 1659-1660, the Turks forced the Wallachian authorities to move the capital from Târgoviște to Bucharest. In the new capital only few Catholic inhabitants were to be found. In 1667 the Catholic archbishop of Sofia mentioned there two or three Catholics who had Orthodox Romanian wives; in the same town lived also Catholic merchants and court soldiers, but according to the source, their number was no higher than 15.²⁷ Three years later the

village of Flămânda many Paulician families were to be found, but had neither church, nor priest. See more details in *Dokumenti za*, 297-298; Alexandru Ciocîltan, "Catholicismul în Țara Românească în relatări editate și inedite ale arhiepiscopului de Sofia Petru Bogdan Bakšić (1663, 1668, 1670)", *Revista Istorică* 18, no 1-2 (2007), 71-72, 85; Archivio Storico della Sacra Congregazione "De Propaganda Fide" (Vatican), Scritture Originali riferite nelle Congregazioni Generali, 1725, vol. 646, f. 291r-292r.

²⁰ Fermeđžin, *Acta Bulgariae*, 349, doc. CCXL.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 350-351, doc. CCXLII.

²² Archivio Storico della Sacra Congregazione "De Propaganda Fide" (Vatican), Scritture Originali riferite nelle Congregazioni Generali, 1728, vol. 662, f. 156r-157r.

²³ *Ibid.*, 1731, vol. 670, f. 874rv.

²⁴ Ivić, "Ansiedlung der Bulgaren", 428; Juhász, "Nicolaus Stanislavich", 432-433.

²⁵ Archivio Storico della Sacra Congregazione "De Propaganda Fide" (Vatican), Scritture Originali riferite nelle Congregazioni Generali, 1747, vol. 734, f. 120r-124v.

²⁶ Iacob, "Catholicii din Valahia", 66.

²⁷ *Dokumenti za*, 215, 217-218; Alexandru Ciocîltan, "Viziția arhiepiscopului de Sofia, Petru Bogdan Bakšić în Țara Românească (1667)", in *Vocația istoriei: prinos profesorului Șerban*

archbishop noticed the very diverse ethnic origin of the Catholics living in Bucharest. They were Italians, French, Poles, Ragusans and Bulgarians.²⁸ No demographic information about the Catholics in Bucharest are available for the last decades of the 17th century. We can only presume a small increase of their number. An actual Catholic community formed itself in the last decades of the 17th century. The formation of this community became possible owing to the increasing number of Catholic parishioners and to the permanent spiritual assistance offered by the Franciscans of the Bulgarian and Wallachian province.

Nevertheless the weakness of the Catholic community in Bucharest is obvious: it was not able to reconstruct the Bărăția-Church and as a consequence the divine service had to be celebrated for 60 years (1670-1730) first in the parish house and afterwards in a wooden chapel.²⁹

The Catholic church had no revenue of its own. In order to make possible the celebration of the divine office the Franciscans were compelled to appeal to the revenues of the Bărăția-Church in Târgoviște, a town without Catholic parishioners. Things got better only in the 18th century when some wealthy parishioners took care of the church with gifts and money. Among these the most notorious were physician Bartolomeo Ferrati, his wife Agnes Kálnoky and count Nicolae Rosetti.

Among other important Catholic personalities who served at the princely court we mention the names of Andreas Wolff, Domenico Fontana and Anton-Maria Del Chiaro.³⁰ Their ties to the government of the country enabled them to protect the Catholic community in a time when hostility towards Catholicism was growing, as a reaction to the Union with Rome of a segment of the Transylvanian Romanians and to the annexation of Oltenia by the Habsburgs. Highly relevant in this context was the attitude of the grand boyars who in 1730, when they learned that the Catholic church had just been reconstructed, decided to demolish it. It was Prince Constantin Mavrocordat who managed to avoid this outcome by arguing

Papacostea, ed. Ovidiu Cristea and Gheorghe Lazăr (Brăila: Editura Istros a Muzeului Brăilei, 2008), 185.

²⁸ *Dokumenti za*, 299.

²⁹ *Călători străini despre țările române*, vol. 9, ed. Maria Holban, M. M. Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru and Paul Cernovodeanu (București: Editura Academiei Române, 1997), 436; Ciocîltan, "Catolicismul în Țara Românească", 69-70.

³⁰ Francisc Pall, "Date noi despre istoria Bucureștilor la mijlocul secolului al XVIII-lea", *Materiale de istorie și muzeografie* 4 (1966), 31-33.

that such an irresponsible action would seriously damage the reputation of the country.³¹

The Catholic community in Bucharest had a very heterogeneous composition. In 1746 and 1764 half of the 100 parishioners were Turkish speaking Armenians.³² The number of the Catholics increased also owing to the conversion of some Protestants (Lutherans and Calvinists), which happened especially in the 18th century.³³ In the last decades of the 18th century the Catholic community increased from 215 in 1781 to 300 souls in 1799.³⁴ This evolution was the result of the afflux of Germans and Hungarians from the Habsburg Empire. As a consequence in the second half of the 18th century the most important Catholic community in the country was to be found in Bucharest.

The most important professions of the Catholics in the capital were trade and crafts. Among the Catholics there were also a few noblemen.³⁵

Particularly significant for the special status of Catholicism and for its relationship with the authorities were the diplomatic missions accomplished in the interest of the country by some members of the Catholic clergy.³⁶ Even the fact that the Franciscans were allowed to convert Protestants is another sign of the special status of Catholicism in Wallachia. There was no other non-Orthodox denomination to enjoy such a privilege in the country.

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³¹ *Călători străini*, vol. 9, 436.

³² Pall, "Date noi", 28-29, 34.

³³ *Inscripțiile medievale ale României. Orașul București*, vol. 1, (1395-1800), ed. Alexandru Elian, Constantin Bălan, Haralambie Chircă and Olimpia Diaconescu (București: Editura Academiei R.S.R, 1965), 216, doc. 40.

³⁴ Iacob, "Catolicii din Valahia", 59, 66.

³⁵ Pall, "Date noi", 29.

³⁶ Karol Telbizov, "Quelques données sur la personnalité et l'activité diplomatique de Ilija Matejanič", *Études Balkaniques* 11, no 1 (1975), 99-102.

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