

ROMANIAN ACADEMY  
„GEORGE BARIȚIU” HISTORY INSTITUTE  
CLUJ-NAPOCA

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Romanian ecclesiastical structures in Turda County.  
Archpriestships, parishes, subsidiaries.  
1850 – 1900

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ABSTRACT

Coordinator:

C.S. I. Dr. Dumitru SUCIU

PhD:

Pr. Dan MELENTI

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## Abstract

**KEY WORDS: the history of church; Transylvania; church; ecclesiastic; Turda-Arieș County; orthodox; Greek-Catholic; religious; archpriestships; protopopes; parishes; priest; priestly; clergy; subsidiary.**

It is appropriate that, before beginning the presentation and summarizing the historical approach of this proposed paper, to clarify a number of issues related to choosing and delimitating the research basis, the structure and methodology of the paper work.

Regarding the approached issue, it was suggested by Professor Dr. Dumitru Suci, given both the current requirements of modern historiography of **Transylvania** and our theological formation.

Starting from the premise that **religious** institutions were the organizational skeleton of the whole Romanian community and political life, we have proposed, following the suggestion of our coordinator, to try to approach from this point of view a well circumscribed administrative-territorial unit: **Turda-Arieș County** between 1850-1900.

Even if this administrative entity is legally organized only in 1876, I decided that, in order to operate diachronically coherent, to start with the formal structure of the 1876-1900 period, which I designed regressively, so for the period 1850-1861 my research is related to the settlements from the former Turda county and the former county seat of Arieș, administrative units reorganized between 1861-1876 and later joined under the name of „**Turda-Arieș County**”. We believe that this approach offered the necessary territorial coherence, indispensable to any scientific paper.

Regarding the interval approached, it perfectly covers the second half of the nineteenth century: its lower limit represents the beginning of the neoabsolutist period in the Habsburg Empire and the reorganization that followed the bloody events of 1848 while the upper limit is the passing into the new century, administratively marked by the important census of 1900, which provides, with bald but relevant figures, an overview of the Romanian society in Transylvania. 1850-1900 is a period

of accelerated modernization, while in these five decades was taking place the "denial" of the last forms of feudal relations that persisted in the Empire, as well as dualistic reorganization of 1867 and following it, the entrance of Romanians from the new Hungarian state in defensive, both politically and socially under the pressure of Magyarization policy imposed by Budapest.

The paper was structured as it follows:

<b>Argument</b> .....	<b>p. 3</b>
<b>Chapter I. Turda-Arieş County between 1850-1900. Administrative-territorial organization, institutional structures and demographic realities</b> .....	<b>p. 7</b>
<i>a. Turda County and Arieş Seat until 1848</i> .....	p. 7
a.1. Turda County .....	p. 7
a.2. Arieş Seat .....	p. 11
<i>b. Administrative organization in the area of Turda-Arieş County between 1850-1900</i> .....	p. 13
b.1. Neoabsolutist period (1850-1860) .....	p. 13
b.2. Liberal period (1861-1866) .....	p. 15
b.3. Dualist period (1867-1900) .....	p. 17
b.4. Component localities from Turda-Arieş County (1876-1900) .....	p. 19
<i>c. Demographic considerations regarding Turda Arieş County</i> .....	p. 23
c.1. Transylvania censuses between 1850-1900 .....	p. 23
c.2. Demographical structure of Turda-Arieş County 1850-1900 .....	p. 27
<i>d. Conclusions. The romanians in Turda-Arieş County between laic and ecclesiastic administration</i> .....	p. 30
<b>Chapter II. The Institution of Archpriestship in romanian churches from Transylvania. The activity of romanian archpriestships in Turda-Arieş County (1850-1900)</b> .....	<b>p. 33</b>
<i>a. The origins of archpriestship institution in Christian churches</i> .....	p. 33
a.1. Short history of horepiscop's institution .....	p. 35
a.2. The rights and obligations of horepiscops .....	p. 38
a.3. Gradual disappearance of horepiscop's institution .....	p. 39
a.4. Archpriestship in the Romanian Church from Transylvania until 1850 .....	p. 40
<i>b. The organisation of romanian archpriestships from Transylvania in the secon half of 19th Century</i> .....	p. 41
b.1. Jurisdiction. Election of the protopopes (protopresbiters). Clerical administrative authorities subordinated to the archpriestships .....	p. 41
b.2. The role and responsibilities of the archpriest .....	p. 47
b.3. The Greek-Catholic Archpriestships with parishes in Turda-Arieş County..	p. 56
b.4. The Orthodox Archpriestships with parishes in Turda-Arieş County .....	p. 69
<i>c. The activity of romanian presbiters in Turda-Arieş County (1850-1900) reflected in archives and documentary sources</i> .....	p. 72
<i>d. Media coverage of protobresbiteral institution's activity. Case study: „Romanian Telegraph” and orthodox archpriestships from Turda County in the last two decades of the 19th century</i> .....	p. 94
<b>Chapter III. Romanian parishes and subsidiaries from Turda-Arieş County</b>	

<b>between 1850-1900 (micromonographies): clerical communities, condition and social status .....</b>	<b>p. 101</b>
a. <i>Romanian parishes and subsidiaries from Turda-Arieş County (micromonographies) ...</i>	p. 103
b. <i>Clerical communities and priests: condition and social status .....</i>	p. 279
<b>Chapter IV. Romanian churches from Turda-Arieş County and national movement of romanians in the Austro-Hungarian Empire .....</b>	<b>p. 301</b>
a. <i>Events and involvements previous to the year 1850 .....</i>	p. 301
b. <i>The absolutist period and the liberal period (1850-1866) .....</i>	p. 306
c. <i>Dualist period (1867-1900) .....</i>	p. 313
c.1. <i>The pronouncement of Blaj (May 1868) .....</i>	p. 313
c.2. <i>Orientation towards pasivism and the Conference of Miercurea (March 1869) .....</i>	p. 314
c.3. <i>Echoes of The Independence War (1877-1878) .....</i>	p. 317
c.4. <i>The involvement in the national movement in the prememorandist period (1869-1892) and in the formation of the Romanian National Party from Transylvania and Hungary (1881) .....</i>	p. 319
c.5. <i>The Memorandum and the clergy from Turda-Arieş County (1892-1895)...</i>	p. 328
c.6. <i>The joint action of romanian churches from Turda-Arieş County against maghiarization .....</i>	p. 341
c.7. <i>The portraits of priests from Turda-Arieş County involved in romanian national fights in the 19th century .....</i>	p. 344
<b>Conclusions .....</b>	<b>p. 350</b>
<b>Annexes list .....</b>	<b>p. 355</b>
<b>Annexes .....</b>	<b>p. 356</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>p. 400</b>

What we intend to achieve in this paper is the reconstruction of the manner in which the institutional structures of Romanian **Churches**, both **Orthodox** and united, have supported the modernization of Romanian society, as they also adapted themselves to the new realities, both from centralized measures of the hierarchies of Sibiu and Blaj and also as a result of local requirements and not least, the links between these structures and the national movement, especially since the **Turda-Arieş County** has represented over three decades, between 1865 -1896, one of the most important political centers of Romanians in Transylvania, having the great Ion Raţiu as a leader of national fighters, chairman of Romanian National Party and the strongest supporter of the memorandum action.

Consequently, we chose to organize our argument in four main chapters.

The first, the introduction part, covers an overview of the **Turda-Arieş County**, of administrative tradition before 1848, its evolution between 1850 and 1900 and the demographic realities that have characterized this period.

The second chapter focuses on the development of the **archpriestship** institution (**Orthodox** and united) in that county, following: the origins and the organization prior to 1850, institutional development, the persons and the role of **protopopes**, reflections of this institution in the press of that time and its interaction with the Romanian society.

The third chapter seeks to micromonograph each of the **parishes** and **subsidiaries** that operated in the county, this approach eventually allowing both general considerations on communes and **church** servants of both faiths, and also a number of serial analyses which will support these considerations with accurate data. Based on documents from the archives of the Archdiocese of Sibiu (Transylvania's Mitropoly respectively), of the Archdiocese of Vad, Feleac and Cluj and Archdiocese of Alba Iulia, but also from some **parishes** in the same Archdioceses, manuscript papers, published documents or various books and so on so forth, I tried to form the 142 micromonographies of **the parishes** and **the subsidiaries** of former Turda county between 1850-1900; it was a relatively short time, but dense in terms of events that took place in half of a century in this Transylvanian area.

Although referred to as micromonographies of **parishes** and **subsidiaries** from the mentioned county, in some places we encountered serious difficulties regarding the first official document, even writing a short history of those, due to lack of reliable sources, and accepting mostly oral tradition; furthermore, in most cases, historical data on edifying places of worship are given approximately; the same situation we encountered even in identifying the former **priests** of some **parishes** and **subsidiaries**; and even if in most cases we found the correct name of the **clergy** and their pastoral period, I found little information about their missionary, pastoral work, although it was assumed to be intense, in harsh historical conditions, a true evidence being the faith of most people here, whether is **Greek-Catholic** or **Orthodox**. An encouraging fact is the existence of demographic statistics on each **parish** and **subsidiaries**, as a result of specialists' research in this field.

A final chapter is dedicated to associations between the institutional structures of **church** in Turda-Arieș and the Romanian national movement in **Transylvania**, from local propaganda and indirect support to the involvement in major actions of national struggle: the imposition of passive tactics and memorandist actions.

Our hope is that in this way, we managed to give a picture of the institutional Romanian **church** life on the territory of **Turda-Arieş County**, ranging from the superior hierarchic unit (**archpriestship**) to subunits (**parishes, subsidiaries**), to examine the body of **priests** who worked in these units and follow both the institutional and human interaction between **church** and Romanian society: to what extent, **church** structures and people had influenced or had been influenced by Romanian laic society and what was their role in the major transformations that have characterized the five studied decades, both from a national-politically and a socially point of view.

Regarding the sources, I used a large bibliography, linked both to the county's administrative situation and also to the aspects of ecclesiastical life or those of the national movement. I also used lettered source collections and vintage papers, periodicals and reference works. Obviously, the complete list of such works can be found in the references of this paper.

I would like to insist on the used archival sources.

Some of the material comes from the **Orthodox** Mitropoly Archive in Sibiu, especially the correspondence between **archpriestships** and Mitropoly.

Another part of the material comes from the archives of Alba Iulia, from the United Mitropoly fund.

I also used **archpriestships** funds: the **Greek-Catholic** of Luduş (located in the Archives of Târgu-Mureş) and the **Orthodox** of Turda (located in the Archives of Cluj-Napoca).

Other funds that were used were the administrative ones: Turda County Fund, Arieş Seat Fund, Turda-Arieş County Prefecture Fund and Royal Hungarian Ministry of Interns Fund.

I also had the opportunity to consult some translations of documents from the Hungarian Culture in **Transylvania** Association Fund. I should mention that many of the administrative funds materials we consulted also in translation, because they were originally written in Hungarian.

All of these archive funds, to some of which I arrived by walking in the footsteps of historians, and wanting to review the materials they had used, thinking that I could use the information in a more specific way, have contributed in a major

way in forming my own image of **Turda-Arieș County** in the nineteenth century and hence the way I approached the topic.

The paper's conclusions outline some realities of the age: **Turda-Arieș County** was mainly inhabited by Romanian population, while administrative structures until 1876 were dependent to a greater or lesser extent on pre-modern realities, with feudal roots, and institutions were dominated by the Hungarians. After the administrative reform in 1876, the central government insisted on Magyarization, this being reflected by demographic trends up to WWI.

From the confessional point of view, Romanians were divided between **Orthodox** and **Greek-Catholics**, the latter accounting for dominance, with approximately 55%. However, the number of **Greek-Catholic archpriestships** that activated in this county was six, compared to only three **Orthodox archpriestships**. An important detail is that the population of **Turda-Arieș County** was mostly rural (Turda was the only urban centre), so Romanians here were mostly farmers and few rural intellectuals, and seemed less interested in the activities of the "bourgeoisie". Obviously, important laic figures of county history (Dr. Ioan Rațiu, Dionisie Șterca-Șuluțiu etc.) are associated with the bourgeois class, but they are rather exceptions, from a social perspective.

Analyzing the structure of the nine Romanian **archpriestships**, we concluded that, certainly, pre-eminence in all respects was held by the united ones. Their number, the number of inhabitants, that of covered areas, the social and political visibility and involvement of some united **archpriest**, clearly demonstrates that the Turda shires space was dominated by **Greek-Catholics**. However, analysis of **religious** activity of **protopopes** permits the assertion that, regardless of their confession, the protopopes and protopope's administrators in this area had the same difficulties.

First of all, internal organization in the spirit of centralization of decisions coming from the bishops and after that from the mitropolies, required constant attention of the **protopopes**: predominantly in the **Orthodox church**, since the imposition of the Organic Statute, or the regulation of **priestly** revenues meant intensified efforts of protopopes in convincing the congregation that the **priest's** work must be properly paid according to his education and status.

Regarding denominational schools, although there are few documents, it is clear that at least in the first two decades after the Revolution, neither **Greek-Catholics** nor

**Orthodox** had succeeded to develop a well organized system, primarily because of the material problems of these communities, but also, as we have seen in the documents, due to arbitrary interference of civil authorities. Fortunately, for **Orthodox** schools there are conscriptions published by Prof. Paul Cherescu, so that it can be seen that **orthodox** religious educational establishment is growing between 1858 and 1881, but the Hungarian pressure and lack of money prevented the organization of schools in each location.

Divorces and matrimonial matters raised no particular problems, not even when a **priest** was about to divorce because in this case the **protopope** should simply follow the canon law or comply, for the difficult cases, requiring the intervention of the Archpriestship/Mitropoly.

Another role of the **protopopes** revealed in documents was to ensure constant fidelity of **parishioners** to laic authorities, especially to the Emperor. In this respect, the protopope resorted to priests' support, mobilized by circulars and urged to lead people by example of prayer, by act and by spoken word on the path of obedience.

Furthermore, the **protopope** appears as the manager of the entire tract and **religious** fortunes and is in charge with appointing and replacing **priests**. He is a financial intermediary between **priests** and **church** hierarchies – he collects money for the Mitropoly disc, but he also divides and “high compassion”, he sends all candidates to seminaries in Blaj and Sibiu, and he also handles regulatory affairs in the **parishes** remained vacant.

Not lastly, as shown in Chapter IV of the paper, some **archpriests** from Turda were also members of the Romanian political elite in **Transylvania** and were involved in major political actions of the time: The Diet in Sibiu, NRP conferences, Memorandum submission.

In conclusion, although the analysis of the **protopope**'s institution actions from Turda County tracts revealed no particular problems, other than that of Romanian protopopes' action as it is known in the rest of **Transylvania**, we can affirm that not certain activities customized the action but the intensity of it did, due to national and political traditions in that area, to proximity to Episcopal centers and subsequently to mitropolies (especially Blaj), to confessional mixtures and not least to the economical profile of the area - quite poor and less prosperous communities than elsewhere.

This situation, found among the **protopopes**, certainly passed to the subordinate clergy. Transylvanian **priesthood** assumed the difficult and long mission of apostolate, serving the Romanian people. **The priests** pulled through the difficulties raised against the Romanian national assertion, especially in the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy. In the world of rural and **priestly** Transylvania, **the Church** was the fundamental core of Romanian's resurrection and the **clergy** realized the important role of emancipating, politically and spiritually, the Romanian people.

In these circumstances, **the priest** was a "Totum factum" in the Transylvanian village, discontent solely with its role as shepherd of souls, but also becoming the supreme leader of the congregation, the core reference in culture, in society, in politics and even economics. Derived mostly from the peasantry, this sacerdotal and national elite will draw after it a Romanian society, then just taking its first steps towards progress, shaping it for the requirements implied for achieving national unity. Both the **Church** and the **clergy** in the **Turda-Arieş County** in the second half of the nineteenth century were taking part in the fight for Romanian resurrection and for emancipation, after centuries of serfdom.

Interweaving their own life with the life of people in middle of which they fulfilled their mission of redeeming, the ministers of the holy shrines agreed to be present in all try-outs of Romanian people, supporting them and sharing their aspirations toward a right and free life. Any page we would open in the **history of our Church**, we cannot read anything to testify against the continuous support that the ministers of the altars had given to Romanian people in their struggle for national and statal independence.

There were, as already written by historians, over time, teachers for children, doctors for the sick, judges for enmity, defenders of the rights of the oppressed, and when oppression and injustice defied the power of people's patience and it rebelled, they became fighters and as well as guides in the fight for the holy right of the people.

The most valued thing in the world for a nation is freedom and the most valued thing for the Romanian **Church** was its independence.

Many **priests** have made a conscious activity from defending the Romanian national heritage, actively participating in activities organized by the Romanian political leaders, by the Romanian National Party (popular meetings, electoral

campaigns, etc..) and mobilizing the masses to struggle, actions aimed to achieve the national agenda objectives.

All these facts are captured in micro monographs which form the larger part of Chapter III in the paper. Although we chose a monographic and an alphabetically-structured presentation instead of a synthesis, we are sure that our thesis can be useful to researchers, not only to those professionals recognized for their work but also to the least important, dealing with local history or restricted areas. They will find valuable information about **the church** in each **county** settlements of **Turda-Arieș**, information that would have been lost if we chose a synthesis. The 142 monographs, of different sizes, depending on the amount of information identified, represent a radiography of the **parishes** and the **affiliates** in the **county** branch of **Turda-Arieș**, which can be the basis for future serial analysis.

The same chapter III of the paper also contains a subchapter in which, using mainly archival documents we have attempted to provide a synthetic image of Romanian **churches** in Turda-Arieș. It is a fact that this image is much more reduced quantitatively than the monographs, but it shows how, at **parish** level, are reflected and resolved some of the issues previously achieved in the presentation of the **protopopes**'. This time I insisted on **priestly** figures, on the process of schooling and placing them in **the parish** and the difficulties that often occurred in their lives. A number of quantitative analysis, based on Prof. Sigmirean's work, showed how an important part of **Greek-Catholic priests** returned, after completing their studies, at the same location from which they originated, continuing a family tradition, but the same analysis revealed a balance between the number of **Greek-Catholic** priests from clerical families and those from peasant families, this fact being evidence that this occupation requires grace, in addition to being a family tradition. Finally, we dwelt upon the situation of other **religious** personnel (the vicar choral, the bell ringer, the sacristan and religious teacher) and we analyzed the overall situation of building places of worship in **Turda-Arieș County** between 1700-1910, resulting that in the studied period (1850 -1910) their number had doubled compared to the previous century and the first half of the nineteenth century.

The final chapter of the thesis follows the involvement of clerics in the **Turda-Arieș County** in the Romanian national movement in **Transylvania**. Like everywhere else, here too, the clergy constantly mobilized the masses in important moments: The

Revolution, The Diet in 1863, founding of NRP, The Memorandum, and some representatives of **the clergy** even occupied central positions as deputies in the Diet of Sibiu or members of NRP board. Gradually, however, in agreement with the whole trend of the secularization of the national movement, the priests manifested only locally, supporting laic bourgeois class members, like Ioan Rațiu, who took over the national movement leadership and struggled against the dualist system.

Although our work is in essence more descriptive than analytical, trying to provide more information about Romanian **Church in Turda-Arieș County** - sometimes at the expense of deep and more "elegant" analysis - hopefully it will be useful in time, both for professional historians but also for those who resort to it only for local history topics.