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## ORTHODOX CHURCH AND SERBO-ROMANIAN RELATIONS IN BANAT IN THE 19<sup>th</sup> AND THE FIRST HALF OF 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

### ABSTRACT

*By the notion of "Serbian Banat" we consider Banat in the historical sense assigned to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia) after the peace conferences concluding the First World War. Today, it belongs to the Republic of Serbia (Autonomous Province of Vojvodina). Before 1918, the period of our interest in this study, Banat (i.e., including the current Serbian Banat) had been a part of the Habsburg Monarchy, namely Austria-Hungary, an area that have had different influences, a phenomenon which is still true. The Romanian-Serbian relations in the Banat settlements were one of the most interesting components of the process, both Serbs and Romanians having a common religious affiliation, which had caused the Serbs and Romanians to have the same interests throughout the period in question (from 19th century until 1918), although there had been periods when the two nations had disagreements, culminating in the Revolution of 1848-49. In all these events, prominent Romanian and Serbian personalities of national and cultural importance were involved. Quite interestingly, some of them have left indelible traces in the history of both Serbs and Romanians.*

**KEYWORDS:** Serbo-Romanian relations, Orthodox Church, identity, Banat

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper our aim is to present some aspects of the Serbian-Romanian relations in Banat, especially in the Serbian part of the historical Banat, which belonged to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia) after the peace conferences of 1919-1920 and which is today found in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (in The Republic of Serbia). One must specify that everything concerning the Serbian Banat before 1918, was related to the events in the historical Banat, which had to that year belonged to the Habsburg Monarchy, respectively Austria-Hungary. Banat has been from the ancient times, including the period covered here (the 19th century and early 20th century until 1918), an

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area of ethno-linguistic, cultural and religious interference, a phenomenon that has not disappeared with time, and which today represents a real wealth of this area. In this context, the Romanian-Serbian relations in the Banat villages (with Germans, Hungarians and many other nations living together) were very interesting, but also specific to a certain extent, given that both peoples had the same religious denomination (which was not the case, for example, with Serbs or Romanians and peoples with other denominations that cohabited). This caused the Serbs and Romanians throughout this period to have the same interests, although there were moments when, primarily because of religious issues (the separation of the churches), disagreements took place between the two nations, especially during the Revolution of 1848-49.

## **2. INTELLECTUALS AND CHURCH RELATIONS**

The principal element of cohesion was the common Orthodox Church, the Romanians being a part of the Serbian Metropolitan of Sremski Karlovci [Carlowitz]. The first signs of religious and national emancipation among the Romanians in the Serbian Banat appear in the last decades of the 18th century, under the influence of the reforms of Maria Theresa and Joseph and the activity of the Transylvanian School, which were felt in these most western parts of the historical Banat. What created conditions for the Romanian national movement to take off slowly, but surely, even in this period, was the work of Paul Iorgovici, one of the first Enlightenment figures in Banat, who spent the last years of his life in Vršac (Vârșeț), in the first decade of the 19th century, but also the forming of a layer of intellectuals and the bourgeoisie in the towns and cities in the Romanian Banat.

In this regard, we mention the case of the Romanian national movement in Biserica Albă (in Serbian - Bela Crkva, in German - Weißkirchen), which at first consisted in the demands to use the Romanian language in the religious services in the shared Orthodox church, and later, in the 19th century, after the separation in 1864, in the formation of a separate Romanian Orthodox parish and the setting up of a choral society with great quality and activity. Since 1798, the Orthodox church in this town, according to the decision of the diocesan consistory in Vršac, the religious service was held in the Romanian language every second Sunday and one of the two priests was obliged to be a speaker of Romanian. However, problems began in 1815, when the first incident between the Serbian and Romanian parishioners took place in the church, followed by a complaint to the Banat General Command in Timișoara. In the coming decades, conflicts broke out at certain intervals, the primary cause continuing to be the use of the Romanian language at the religious service, the Serbs claiming that Romanians did not help build the shared church building (between 1774 and 1780). The intervention of the military authorities calmed down the situation, but after a while, tensions arose again. The conflict reached its peak during the revolutionary events of 1848-49.

After the revolution, the Serbian-Romanian church dispute was not definitely concluded, not until the separation of the churches in 1864-1865, which continued during the years 1866 to 1869 when the separation of the two churches in the town of Weißkirchen was finalized. The church and school, shared until then, remained the property of the Serbian parishioners while the Romanians received as compensation the sum of 11 432 forints. This represented the end of the dispute which had begun in 1815, after which the Romanians built a new church, in 1871, and in 1879 established the Romanian Vocal

Choir, modeled after the German one (1859) and the Serbian one (1867). In the 19th century there was a numerous and powerful Romanian bourgeoisie at Weißkirchen, with a developed national consciousness, which showed a combativeness rarely found in other parts of the Serbian Banat, Weißkirchen being the century's major centre of the Romanian national movement in this part of Banat. As already having been stated, despite these facts, mixed marriages were very numerous, resulting in the assimilation of Romanians within only a few decades, despite having achieved objectives on the confessional and national-cultural level. One thing must be understood and that is that the Serbian-Romanian church dispute did not mean that relations between Serbs and Romanians were negative, on the contrary, living together and having the same religion made the mutual influences particularly strong, especially that of the Serbs toward the Romanians, which continued even after the separation of the churches.

We need to mention the fact that during the period between 1910 and 1914, the Mayor of Weißkirchen was a Romanian lawyer Ioan M. Roșiu and that the position as the music teacher of the Romanian choir was assigned to a Serb named Aleksandar Ristić (1864-1926), which is a proof of good inter-ethnic relations that predominated in this town. It is necessary to mention the fact that many citizens of Romanian origin from Weißkirchen gave their contribution to the Serbian national movement not only in this town, but on a much larger scale.

We name, in this case, Dimitrie Radulovici (1814-1865), originally from a poor Romanian family of skimmers from Weißkirchen, which became one of the first doctors of Romanian origin in the Habsburg Monarchy, identifying himself as a member of the Serbian people. He worked first as a doctor in Pančevo, where he particularly set himself apart during the Revolution of 1848 with his endeavor to help people with cholera, and later as a personal physician of the Serbian Patriarch Josif Rajačić.

The struggle for the separation of the churches, after the Revolution of 1848, was conducted in other places with mixed population, but its intensity was not as strong as the one in Weißkirchen. The separation of the Romanians from the Serbs also took place in parishes from Alibunar, Banatsko Novo Selo, Mramorak, Dolovo, Deliblato, Kovin, and at the end of the 19th century in Omoljica, Dobrica and Pančevo, and elsewhere later. It is interesting that in Vršac, where the highest-standing intellectuals and leaders of the Romanian national movement carried their activities and where even in 1865 the headquarters of a Romanian Orthodox Protosynodal congregation was founded, the separation of the Romanians from the Serbian parishes did not happen until 1909, helped by the active role of the Archpriest Traian Oprea.

Many citizens of Banat, living in such mixed environments, were influenced by the languages and cultures of both nations, the Serbian element being stronger, because of the religious supremacy of the Serbs, but also because, in this part of Banat, the Serbs had a numerical superiority over the Romanians. The Romanian population was often assimilated in some places with mixed population (in Dobrica, Sefkerin, Gaj, Jasenovo, Kajtasovo, Parta etc.) but, in rare cases, the Romanization of Serbs was also present (in Markovac, Barice etc.). Therefore, the dual identity that had already taken root among the citizens of these towns was one of the causes of failure of the endeavor for the establishment of the Romanian Orthodox parishes, the consequence being their complete assimilation.

In this context, one can mention numerous people belonging to the intellectual elite of Banat, who had a dual identity, Serbian and Romanian. There was, for example, a known case of the family members Ivačković (Ivașcu) from Deliblata, who contributed to the religious and cultural history of Banat and even wider. The family comes from Goruia (now in Caraș-Severin, Romania), but they went to Deliblata, where Andrei Ivacicovici [Ivačković] served as an Orthodox priest and because he was married to a Serbian woman it is easy to understand why their boy should have a dual identity, two of them playing an important role in the religious and cultural history of the Romanians and the Serbs in the Habsburg Monarchy. Namely, beside the two brothers - Tanasie and Matei - we mention Sofronie and Petru (Procopie), distinguished people in the history of the Serbs and Romanians in Banat. Sofronie (1793-1861), the oldest brother, was the parish priest of Vršac (1815-1822) and the Archpriest of Vărădia, based in Oravița (1829-1847), for many years teaching at the Romanian departments of the Clerical Serbian-Romanian Institute in Vršac (1822-1829). On April 1, 1847, he was appointed as the Protosacerdot of Palanka, based in Weißkirchen. Among the original literary works, in 1830 his Ode to the Orthodox Bishop Maksim Manuilović was published in Buda, in the Serbian language. In 1851, under the patronage of Patriarch Josif Rajačić, his translation of The Voyage of Anaccharsis was published in seven volumes. The manuscripts of many Serbian translations of Seneca's epistles and other writings have remained. His brother Procopie (1808-1881) taught at the Clerical Institute from Sremski Karlovci for some time and, afterwards, he was appointed as the Archimandrite of the monastery Krušedol on Fruška Gora. As a leading figure in the religious-cultural life of the Romanians and Serbs in the Habsburg Monarchy, he, in turn, obtained the position of the Bishop of Arad (1853), then the Metropolitan of the Romanians from the Monarchy, based in Sibiu (replacing Andrei Șaguna after his death in 1873) and, finally, the Patriarch of the Serbs in the Habsburg Monarchy, based in Sremski Karlovci (1874-1878). He actively participated in the fight for independence of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the Habsburg Monarchy. The last years of his life he spent at Weißkirchen. The two brothers are considered by the Romanians and the Serbs to be distinguished people of their national history, both sides having serious arguments in this regard. The Almanac "Orao" in 1875, wrote, among other things, about the appointment of Procopie as the Romanian Metropolitan based in Sibiu, the following: "Procopie, the Serbian Orthodox Bishop, found it difficult to go to another flock. His heart drew him to his Serbian people, whom he always loved and admired as a faithful and honest son".

As an Episcopal center common for the Orthodox Romanians and Serbs, Vršac was in the 19th century a place where Serbian-Romanian interference surfaced in a specific way, many intellectuals honorably representing the interests and aspirations of both peoples. We would just need to mention the fact that Maksim Manuilović, the Bishop of Vršac (1829-1833) was a Romanian, originating from the Arad area; he firmly defended the interests of the Church and the Serbian hierarchy within it, but without sacrificing the interests of the Romanians from his Eparchy. In his family, as asserted by Andrei Șaguna, "good Romanian traditions were cultivated, perhaps more so in secret and with a deeper sentiment." Andrei Șaguna and Nicolae Tincu Velia affirm in their texts published in contemporary media that, at the time of Maksim Manuilović's priesthood, the Romanian language was reintroduced in religious services in Vršac, the singing of hymns in the Diocesan Cathedral was performed in both languages, Serbian and Romanian. However,

this was the case for a brief period, since, in the subsequent years, the churches in Vršac stopped using the Romanian language. Șaguna himself gave his contribution to the prosperity of the Church and the Serbian culture, as a teacher at the School of Theology in SremskiKarlovci, at the Serbian-language departments of the School of Theology in Vršac (1842-1845), the abbot and Archimandrite of monasteries Hopovo and Kovilj etc. Later, after he was appointed as the Bishop of Transylvania (1848), as the Romanian fight for the separation from the Metropolis of SremskiKarlovci started, he was considered by a part of the Serbian hierarchy to be a dangerous opponent of the Serbian Orthodox Church, often being criticized by the Serbian press as well .

There are many among the Orthodox clergy in Vršac and its surroundings for whom it can be claimed that they belonged to both peoples. A Vršac parish priest Lazar Stefanović (1809-1884), son of a priest, of Romanian origin, taught at the School of Theology in Vršac, the department in the Serbian language, after the separation of the churches remaining faithful to the Serbian Orthodox Church.

There were also cases when Serbs after the church division went to the Romanian Orthodox Church. Among them was municipal notary Čavoški Nicholas (Nicolae Ciavoschi) from Banatsko Novo Selo. Even though Čavoški had Serbian origin, he considered himself Romanian and he was one of the leaders of the Romanian national movement in this Banat town. Banatsko Novo Selo represented a mixed Serbian-Romanian ethnic environment in which the Romanian Orthodox parish was established in 1872 and it was part of the inhabitants, who are mostly came from mixed families, was in a dilemma to which the parish church to join. It is known that in the Banatsko Novo Selo lived more families with that surname, which to this day remained within the Serbian Orthodox Church so the case of the municipal notary was unique. Print in the Romanian language published in the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy magnified Čavoški Nicholas as "a true son of the Romanian church and the nation," which has made a significant contribution to the success of the isolation of the Romanians in Serbian Orthodox parish in Banatsko Novo Selo, 1872. To pay off the debts of the Serbian Romanians parish, it was very difficult to find the necessary sums of money to make that fulfilled, Čavoški took over this responsibility and hard work. He managed within five months to found the necessary sum of money, a total of 5,700 forints, 300 forints borrowed from his own money. He died in 1877 at 28 years of age. .

Another distinguished person who worked in Vršac was Dr. Vladimir Margan, known for his commitment to the public life, through many of his contributions to the history and culture of Banat, being the author of numerous monographic studies and translations, and a good connoisseur of history, culture and the language and civilization of the Serbs and Romanians. Coming from a mixed family from Serbian Pojejena (b. 1871), he studied theology at Sremski Karlovci, Cernăuți and Bern and law at Budapest and Cluj, and since 1894 he held various positions in municipal, county and district institutions. Although declaring himself as a Serbian, Dr. Margan knew Romanian to perfection, translating into Serbian in the interwar period (1935) the works of the great historian Nicolae Iorga *Istoria românilor și a civilizației lor* (The History of Romanians and their civilization), he became the first teacher of the Romanian language at the Romanian department of the Vršac Comprehensive School [Gymnasium] (1934). In the same period,

as a confidant of the Belgrade authorities, he intervened in the government on behalf of the Romanians from the Yugoslav Banat, on the eve of the parliamentary elections of 1935 .

Another personality important for both Serbs and Romanians was the great painter Constantin Daniel (1799-1873) from Nagybecskerek (today Zrenjanin). Born in Lugoj, Constantin Daniel started painting in the studio of a Serbian maestro Arsa Teodorović from Timișoara, after which, in the thirties of the 19th century, he moved to Nagybecskerek (Zrenjanin). The Serbian biographers see him as a great national artist , since he was, indeed, a part of the Serbian culture and national tradition. Meanwhile, his Romanian origin was supported by the authors in Romania, including I. Miloia but also by the Romanian researchers in Vojvodina, namely Radu Flora, who noted that "his Romanian origin might be a probability, but it should nonetheless be documented and proven," underlining once again his full integration into the Serbian culture and art. Also, more recently, Adrian Negru notes that doubts about his origin were removed by the discovery of the Chronicle of the Serbian church from Deliblata, where it is written: "slavni živopisac Danijel nacionalitetaromanskog iz Logoža" (Daniel a famous painter of the Romanian nationality from Lugoj). However, his origin and identity matters less than the outstanding artistic achievements, present in both the Serbian churches (Pančevo, Jarkovac, Dobrica) and in the ones in the Romanian church (Uzdin), and numerous other artistic works which are not a part of religious painting (especially portraits).

The most positive component of the Romanian-Serbian relations in Banat in the 19th and the early 20th century was the political cooperation, which began to crystallize in the sixties of the 19th century, especially following the signing of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. The ones who headed this new wave in the Romanian-Serbian relations were the bourgeois liberal intelligentsia leaders of the two peoples, such as Svetozar Miletić and Mihailo Polit Desančić on behalf of the Serbs and Vinčențiu Babeș on behalf of the Romanians. In this context, we will only mention the fact that at the parliamentary elections, the two nations participated together, choosing a common representative in the Hungarian Parliament, like in the case of V. Babeș, who won at the parliamentary elections in the electoral area of Weißkirchen, or in the case of Polit, a Serbian liberal, whose four victories in the electoral areas in Pančevo and Uzdin were in large measure due to the Romanian voters from the surrounding villages. Mihailo Polit Desančić (1833-1920) was a politician who had always advocated the Serbian-Romanian cooperation. Despite harsh times, this distinguished personality was always in the focus of the fierce political battles that the nationalities of the Dual Monarchy conducted to achieve their rights. A true friend of the Romanian people, Polit had always been, when necessary, supported by the Romanian voters, but also by their political leaders. Romanian political leader George Mocsonyi (1823-1887) had similar role during the elections for Hungarian assembly in 1865, 1869. i 1872. Mocsonyi was the landowner, the owner of the castle in Vlakovac near Vrsac, one of the prominent personalities of history of Romanians Vrsac region, a big supporter of the Romanian-Serbian cooperation.

Another contributor to the Romanians among the Serbian politicians from Banat was Dr. Emil Gavrilla (1861-1933). He was the son of a border officer Jon Gabriel from the city Jaz, which was at the time located in the Habsburg Monarchy within the Romanian-Banat regiment no. 13, based in Caransebes. He married a Serbian woman and moved to Great Bečkerek, where his son and daughter were born . Emil Gavrilla was a member of the

Serbian Radical Party from Hungary (the moderate fraction) and editor of the newspaper *Zastava*, supporter of the Romanian-Serbian political cooperation and a partisan of the Coalition of Nationalities, a participant at the Congress of Nationalities, held in Budapest in August 1895. Being a friend of the Romanians and a good connoisseur of the Romanian language, Gavrilla participated in the process against the Memorandists as an attorney of Patriciu Barbu, one of the defendants (1894). During the process against the Memorandists, Dr. Gavrilla published an article in *Zastava*, proclaiming his solidarity of the Serbs in Hungary with "their suffering brethren," the Romanians in Transylvania. This inconvenienced the Serbian newspaper, against which a lawsuit was initiated in December 1894 (the first lawsuit against the newspaper took place in January 1894, when the editorial of *Zastava* was defended by a Romanian lawyer and political leader Ștefan Cicio Pop). The Serbian lawyer maintained cordial ties with the family of Ioan Rațiu, but also with many other Romanian intellectuals from Transylvania and Banat.

Of course, one can remember numerous other cases like this, and the conclusion is that in the villages and towns in the Serbian Banat, the relations between the Romanians and the Serbs (except with matters relating to the separation of the churches) were very good, the two nations strongly influencing each other and having a similar position and being in a similar situation, when regarding the period of interest for this paper.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

The Romanian-Serbian relations presented only a part of a much wider phenomenon of multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Banat. Referred to each other because of living in the same area, as well as belonging to the same denomination, and for a long time, the same church organization, Romanians and Serbs represent a model of coexistence of two neighboring nations. Of course, minor conflicts existed, caused primarily by the division of church and, later, the division of Banat between the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Romania, but they are not turned into large-scale conflicts. Belonging to the same confession has increased the number of mixed marriages and, therefore, the existence of many citizens with dual identity, which will represent the first step towards assimilation that took place already in the next generation. It is characteristic of both ordinary citizens and the intellectual elite, which we show in this paper. The division of Banat and the demarcation between the Yugoslav and Romanian state influenced the intensification of this phenomenon, which is a minority slowly blends into the majority, as in the last hundred years or significantly lessened the number of Serbs in Romania and Romanians in Serbian Banat. The issue of double identity was recently transferred to the minority citizens of ethnically homogeneous families, which can be interpreted as intensified presence of the phenomenon of acculturation in a time of rapid rise of mass-communication, characteristic of the last decade of XX and beginning of XXI century. The most important, however, that this process is natural, and therefore it should be seen in a positive light, as something spontaneously as part of general social processes in contemporary European society.

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