

Aspects in the religious life of Romanians from the Balkan Peninsula – the end of the 19th century – the beginning of of the 20th century. Archive Documents

Dr. Adina Berciu-Drăghicescu

Library and Information Science Department,
Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest
E-mail: adina_berciu2002@yahoo.com

Dr. Adina Berciu-Drăghicescu is a professor at the Library and Information Science Department of the Faculty of Letters at the University of Bucharest. She teaches courses on Archive Science and Documentation. Her research fields are: Archive Science, Heraldry, Sigillography, Numismatics, The Art of Miniatures.

Abstract

The article presents on the basis of the archive documents aspects related to the religious life of Romanians from the Balkan Peninsula between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. It also presents the position which the Patriarchy in Constantinople had during all this period of time concerning the actions of Romanians. These were not successful but the situation changed after the issue of the imperial resolution of 1905 which ensured the use of the Romanian language and of the A-romanian dialect in church.

Keywords: A-Romanians; Romanians; church; Patriarchy of Constantinople; Balkan Peninsula; orthodoxy

The issues related to the religious life of the Balkan Romanians were related to the actions of the ecumenical Patriarchy in Constantinople, and to the repeated rejection of the Romanian actions by the same, especially at the end of the 19th century and during the first decades of the 20th century.

The Romanians had intended to use Romanian language in church since the second half of the 19th century. But said attempts have continuously been met with the categorical refusal of the Greek clergy and the Patriarchy in Constantinople. Over this entire period, countless

aggressions were directed against the Romanian priests and the Romanian subjects in the Ottoman Empire (the European side).

Spirits calmed down a little bit after the Balkan wars and the First World War.

After 1892 Romanians commenced an ample action for the acknowledgement of their church-related rights, asking the Sultan to grant them the right to their own Episcopal office. The Romanians very difficultly obtained the right to have their own spiritual leader, who was found in the person of the metropolitan bishop of Ohrida and Prespa, Antim. However, the patriarchy failed to acknowledge the same. On the other hand, Antim failed to rise up to the expectations of the responsibility he had undertaken. In 1899 he returned to Ohrida and Prespa.

After the imperial resolution of 1905, which ensured the use of the Romanian language in church, Patriarch Ioachim protested to the grand vizier against the new statute granted to Romanians, and in the meeting of the Holy Synod of October 12, 1905, he proposed that all priests and believers “who dared pray to God in their mother tongue” (1) should be anathematized. The Patriarchy’s stand resulted in the ceasing of the diplomatic and commercial relations with Romania. (2)

After 1908 the issue related to the establishment of a Romanian Episcopal office was resumed, but without any actual result.

The religious issue of the Balkan Romanians was recorded in the documents of the London Conference and of the Peace Congress in Bucharest (1913) but subsequently, the documents according to which Serbia and Bulgaria and Greece agreed to, and acknowledged the rights of the Balkan Romanians to have schools and churches in their mother tongue, were not longer given any attention. In their turn the Balkan states have always looked for pretexts for avoiding the friendly interventions of the Romanian State and preventing the good progress of the Aromanians’ cause.

Until the First World War in the former Macedonia there were 38 churches. After the war, the development of the Romanian churches’ situation was similar to that of the schools located at the South of the Danube.

In Albania, out of the 10 Romanian churches that existed in 1912, only 6 still functioned in 1941.

In Bulgaria, prior to the First World War, where there existed Romanian communities, Romanian priests performed the religious service in the Romanian language. Subsequently, the parishes were joined into the Bulgarian ones. Romanian priests were banished and those who remained were forced to perform the religious service in the Bulgarian language, using Bulgarian religious books.

In the fourth decade of the 20th century, the service was performed in the Romanian language only in Sofia, Giurmaia and Bregova.

In Greece, after the First World War, Romanian church was hierarchically subordinated to the Greek Orthodox Church, and the priests were supposed to be Greek citizens.

After the First World War the policy of obstructing the priests who served at the churches of the Romanian communities in the Romanian language continued.

The places were either destroyed during the war or taken over by the Greek authorities.

Nevertheless, during the interwar period, 11 Romanian churches continued to function in Greece, and the Romanian state continued to pay the indemnities of the church staff.

In 1941, solely 11 out of the 23 Romanian churches that functioned in 1912 were open.

In Yugoslavia, in the church field the same policy as that used in the education field was applied. In 1919 the Serbian authorities allowed for the reopening of the Romanian churches in: Bitolia, Cruşova, Gopeşti and Molovişte. Subsequently, upon motivating the absence of the priests, solely the church of Bitolia (3) was opened.

In November 1938, the ecclesiastical authorities in Bitolia resumed the attack against the Romanian church.

Father Gh. Cosmescu was summoned to deliver the keys of the church. As the former fell ill, the church was closed, and the keys were kept at the Consulate.

The attempts of the Romanian state to at least keep the Romanian church and cemetery in Bitolia failed. In 1939 the Romanian church in Bitolia was deemed Serbian and the first service in Serbian was performed on November 12, 1939. The cemetery was taken over as well, and father Gh. Cosmescu was forbidden to deliver his sermon in the chapel.

In view of regulating the religious life of the Romanians in the Yugoslavian Banat and of the Serbians in the Romanian Banat, a joint commission was established and negotiations were carried out for 12 years and only as late as July 2, 1934 in Belgrade, one signed the Convention relating to the regime of the Romanian and Serbian Orthodox Churches in said area. The Romanian Parliament ratified the Convention in June 1935. Yugoslavia failed to ratify the same. In the Serbian Banat 53 Romanian Orthodox parishes functioned until 1941. (4)

The process of denationalizing of the South-Danube Romanians also continued after the Second World War. In the autumn of 1945 the Romanian

schools and churches in Albania were included, in February 1946 the Romanian schools in Greece, in 1947 the Romanian schools in Bulgaria and in 1948 the Romanian churches in Greece.

As far as the situation of the Romanians in the Valley of Timoc is concerned, both the Romanians in Bulgaria and the Romanians in Yugoslavia, totally lacking the possibility to benefit from education and religious sermons in their mother tongue, were subjected to an accelerated process of assimilation, and it is a miracle that they managed to maintain their ethno-linguistic identity.

The Romanian state, also included in the Communist influence scope, continued to pay, in a first stage, the indemnities of the teaching and church staff in the Balkan Peninsula. The rare diplomatic interventions with the Governments of the four Balkan states were unsuccessful. Consequently, the South-Danube Romanians were abandoned and the Romanian state also resolved, by means of decree no. 159 of July 22, 1948, upon the end of the functioning of the foreign schools in the country.

Despite the very difficult conditions, the South-Danube Romanians have maintained, for the following four decades, to a great extent, their language, their customs and the conscience of their own identity so that, after 1990, in all countries in the area, their own publications, cultural societies were established, and the language began being used in education, the media etc.

We hope that the current edition of documents should remind our contemporaries of the efforts made for almost a century, on the one hand by the Romanian state, on the other hand by the representatives of the South-Danube Romanians, for maintaining their linguistic and cultural identity.

References

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- (3) A.N.I.C., fund of the Ministry for Public Instruction, (fond Ministerul Instrucțiunii Publice), file dosar 326/1921, f. 17.
- (4) *Ibidem*, fond Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri, dosar 391/1941, f. 32.