

TEO, ISSN 2247-4382  
100 (3), pp. 84-104, 2024

# **The Church History of the Episcopal See of Giula between Metropolitan Bishop Sofronie I (1641-1651) and the Archpastorship of His Holiness Father Bishop Sofronie II (1999-2007)**

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## **Abstract**

The 25th anniversary of the ordination of our Father Bishop, His Holiness Sofronie of Oradea, as a bishop, gives us the opportunity and the honor to reconnect the thread interrupted from the candle of the earthen lamp of the bishop's cell in the citadel of Jula, making a foray into the Church history of this area from the time of the archpastorship from the middle of the 17th century of Metropolitan Bishop Sofronie I of the citadels of Lipova and Giula, until that of election, ordination and enthronement in 1999 from Giula, of His Holiness Sofronie Drincec.

## **Keywords**

bishop, metropolitan bishop, religious life, orthodoxy, church communities, Hungary

## **I. Introduction**

The religious life of the Orthodox Romanians was inextricably linked, from the very beginning, to the history and the place where they lived, enduring all those trials that the church and its sons, throughout the ages, had to deal with. All the events of the political life of the Romanians from Transylvania and those from the intra-and cross-border land of the Criș rivers had consequences also on their church life.

After Hungary's defeat at Mohacs (1526), Serbian Orthodoxy within it was subordinated to the metropolitan bishop based in Jenopolje. The "Hungarian" metropolitan bishop of that time, Iosif (Joseph), is mentioned among the participants in the bishop's synod in Ohrida, from the year 1532<sup>1</sup>. After the Banat also fell to the Turks in 1552, the *Hungarian Metropolitan Church* was divided into two parts: the Transylvanian part, based in Jenopolje (Ineu), and the part given to the Turks, based in Lipova. Later, the headquarter of the Metropolitan Church of Transylvania was moved to Sebeș (1580)<sup>2</sup>.

## **II. The first mentions of the hierarchs of Lipova, Ineu and Giula**

The first mention of a hierarch in Lipova was taken from an oral tradition which mentioned that in 1551-1552 the Turks killed a bishop in this city, but without mentioning his name. The first bishop who was known by name was Daniil, who in 1563 wanted to buy a house in Lipova. An ecclesiastical vestment in the form of a shawl inscribed with his name, containing the title of metropolitan bishop and the year 1563, was discovered at the Cruședol monastery and is kept today in the Patriarchal Museum in Belgrade. After the Lipova citadel was occupied by the Turks (1566), the hierarch from Lipova retired to the monastery "St. Hierarch Nicolae" from

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<sup>1</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, "Stranice istorije: odnosi rumunske i srpske crkve", in: *Studii și cercetări. Simpozionul Banatul – trecut istoric și cultural (1996–2010)*, Novi Sad, 2012, p. 272.

<sup>2</sup> Drago NJEHOVAN, Miodrag MILIN, "Mitropolia de la Karlowitz și relațiile sârbo-române din cuprinsul Monarhiei habzburgice", in: *Analele Banatului, S.N., ARHEOLOGIE – ISTORIE*, XXIII, Timișoara, 2015, p. 423.

Ineu, a town where bishop Matei (Matthew) is mentioned, former chrim priest, grandson of the administrative head of Ineu, Gheorghe Brancovici, who embraced the monastic life and was ordained as a bishop in 1570 in Moldova, where his grandfather had been a seneschal at the court of Alexandu Lăpușeanu (1552-1561)<sup>3</sup>.

His son, Solomon, who became a monk under the name of Sava, succeeds him on the episcopal throne of Ienopole. In April 1607, bishop Sava recaptured the citadel of Lipova from the Turks on behalf of the prince of Transylvania Ștefan Bocskay (1606-1606). His successor, Sigismund Rakoczy (1607-1608), gave the hierarch, in June 1607, the Bruznic, Rădmănești, Sâmbăteni and Melitkochia estates, and in November of the same year, all the mills that were located on the river Mureș, near the town of Radna, as a reward for the recapture of the Lipova citadel<sup>4</sup>. After the conquest of the Lipova citadel, bishop Sava, accompanied by 160 Serbian families, moved his residence to the citadel located on the left bank of the Mureș river, calling himself “bishop of Lipova and Ienopole”<sup>5</sup>. He is the one who colonizes the town of Hodoș, which he then gives to the Hodoș-Bodrog monastery, which he also renovates. After 1616, when Lipova and the Hodoș-Bodrog monastery came back under the control of the Turks, Metropolitan Bishop Sava retreats to the citadel of Ineu, where for more than a decade he exercised his pastorship over the Orthodox believers from these lands, but also over those from the north bank of the river Crișul Alb (the White Cris), from the south of Bihor, and he died during the year 1628<sup>6</sup>.

Metropolitan Bishop Sava was succeeded on the episcopal throne by Longhin Brancovici, a nephew of his, with the baptismal name of Lazarus,

<sup>3</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, “Viața bisericească a românilor din părțile Aradului”, in: *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, II, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1981, pp. 182-183; Nicolae DOBRESCU, *Fragmente privitoare la istoria Bisericii române*, Editura Institutul tipografic “Lucefărul”, Budapesta, 1905, pp. 29-30; Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii românești din Transilvania, Banat, Crișana și Maramureș până în 1918*, Editura Episcopia Devei și Hunedoarei, Deva, 2018, p. 178.

<sup>4</sup> Ioan LUPAȘ, *Istoria bisericească a românilor ardeleni*, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1995, pp.123-124.

<sup>5</sup>\*\*\*, *SZERB SZEKESGYHAZ A TABANBAN. Az eltunt Racvaros emlekezete*, Történeti Múzeum, Matica Srpska Keptara, Szerb Egyhazi Múzeum, Budapesti, 2019, p. 44.

<sup>6</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, “Viața bisericească a românilor din părțile Aradului”, p. 183.

who became a monk in 1628 at the Beocin monastery (north of Belgrade), being ordained a Bishop by Patriarch Chiril Lucaris of Constantinople. He was called the “metropolitan bishop of Lipova and Ienopole”, having his residence in the monastery dedicated to “St. Hierarch Nicolae” from Ineu, located on the bank of the river Crișul Alb. He makes two trips to Russia (the first in 1624, the second after his enthronement in 1629) to collect aid for the churches under his jurisdiction<sup>7</sup>. Hierarch Longhin also makes a trip to Rome where he offers his availability to serve the Orthodox Vlachs who, fleeing from the Ottomans, settled on the territory of today’s Croatia, north of Zagreb, they have been ministered and guided since 1609 by Bishop Simeon Vratanja<sup>8</sup> and who in 1632 retired from the episcopal throne on the account of his advanced age of 80 years. His request was not fulfilled. For this reason and because of the Calvinist proselytizing actions, Bishop Longhin retires to the Comana monastery in Wallachia, where he painted icons. Here, in September 1656, he took part in the ordination of his nephew Sava Brancovici as the metropolitan bishop of Transylvania. After this date he passed away to the Lord, being buried at the Comana monastery, with the inscription on the tombstone “by the mercy of God Longhin with the race of the Corenici-Brancovici archbishop of Ineu”<sup>9</sup>.

In the middle of the 17th century, in full action of Calvinist proselytism and Ottoman oppression, the operation of a bishopric in Ienopole after the retirement of Metropolitan Bishop Longhin is a debatable issue, since we have no data about another hierarch in Ineu. Besides, the chronicler Gheorghe Brancovici mentions that after the departure of Bishop Longhin to Comana, Ineu “received then only one leading priest, whose title is archpriest” named Simeon, the future Metropolitan Bishop Sava Brancovici of Transylvania (1656-1680)<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Gheorghe LIȚIU, “Istoria Eparhiei Aradului”, in: *Episcopia Aradului. Istorie. Viață culturală. Monumente de artă*, Editura Episcopiei Ortodoxe Române a Aradului, Arad, 1989, p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> \*\*\*, *SZERB SZEKESEGYHAZ A TABANBAN...*, p. 44.

<sup>9</sup> Andrei PIPPIDI, *Tradiția politică bizantină în țările române în secolele XVI-XVIII*, Editura Corint, București, 2001, p. 302.

<sup>10</sup> Silviu DRAGOMIR, “Fragmente din Conica sârbească a lui Gheorghe Brancovici”, in: *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie Națională*, Editura Cartea românească din Cluj, Sibiu, 1942, pp. 9-10.

### III. The ecclesiastical life of the hierarchical throne in the citadel of Jula during the time of Metropolitan Sofronie I

During the periods of restrictions for the Transylvanian Romanians and their Orthodox Church, when Calvinist proselytism intensified and when the twinned and co-interested actions of Calvinist princely and episcopal absolutism tried to weaken the authority and jurisdiction of the Orthodox metropolitan bishop from the citadel of Transylvania, where was the throne of the hierarchs, by alienating and fragmenting territories subject to his authority, the clergy and believers from the Crișana region benefited from the spiritual support of the bishops who resided sometimes in Lipova, sometimes in the monastery dedicated to “St. Hierarch Nicolae” from Ineu, or, in unfavorable circumstances, even at the Hodoș-Bodrog monastery.

In the second half of the 17th century, the Orthodox Romanians from the eastern side of the river Tisa were under the rule of Bishop Sofronie I “metropolitan bishop of the Lipova and Gyula citadels”<sup>11</sup>, who resided at the Hodoș-Bodrog monastery<sup>12</sup>.

This Metropolitan Church of “Lipova-Gyula citadels” can be found in the diocesan organization from the beginning of the 17th century when, following the Turkish conquests, new ecclesiastical administrative entities created as a result of territorial changes, were reported. The foundation of the new metropolitan churches in the area of Banat and Crișana is obviously related to the governmental changes in the region. So, according to the registers of the church` chancellery in Istanbul from the middle of the 17th century in which records were kept of the Serbian Orthodox metropolitan churches in Hungary, in addition to metropolitan bishops Sevastian from Buda, Andrija from Jenő, Maksim from Mohács, Neofit from Szeged, Hilarion from Sziget-Pecs, Isaija from Temesvár-Becskekerek-Csanád, Varlaam from Versec, Stepan from Pozsega, the name of the first metropolitan bishop named SOFRONIE from Lipova-Gyula is also remembered<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Mirccea PĂCURARIU, “Viața bisericească a românilor din părțile Aradului”, p. 183; \*\*\*, *SZERB SZEKESEGYHAZ A TABANBAN...*, p. 46.

<sup>12</sup> Feriz BERKI: *Az Ortodox Kereszténység, Lapok a magyar ortodoxia történetéből. “Egyházi Krónika”, Keleti Ortodox folyóirat, XV. évfolyam, 2. szám*, Budapest, 1966, p. 192.

<sup>13</sup> \*\*\*, *SZERB SZEKESEGYHAZ A TABANBAN...*, p. 46.

The office of “high priest”<sup>14</sup> (patriarch, metropolitan bishop, bishop) is interpreted in the Ottoman bureaucracy as a kind of “mukat”, meaning the equivalent of a “fiscal rental unit”<sup>15</sup>. If an “aspirant” promised more, he could replace the seat holder, anytime. This explains the frequent alternation of Orthodox bishops, their disappearance or reappearance at the head of bishoprics and metropolitan churches, according to their records in the church registers of Constantinople. The Orthodox churches located in the territories conquered by the Turks were included in the contributory system of the Ottoman economy. The Orthodox hierarchs appointed by the Ottoman Sublime Porte had the status of Ottoman officials and fiscal tenants of the bishop’s seats and were by no means considered, as one might think, as vassal rulers of the conquered territories<sup>16</sup>.

Orthodox Metropolitan Bishops owed two types of taxes to the Ottoman treasury. The first tax (berat) was offered for the act of investiture at the time of their enthronement and had to be accompanied by a gift (peshches), and the second was an annual lump sum tax (kesimet) which was determined according to the territorial extent of the metropolitan church area and the number of believers under their pastorship<sup>17</sup>.

Since very little data is known about the church life of the Orthodox Romanians and Serbs in Ottoman Hungary (1544-1699), the Deftera (register) of the Turkish chancellery in Istanbul of the Orthodox Serbian metropolitan churches from the middle of the 17th century is of particular importance, because it brings out to light the way of organization of the Ottoman rulers, the names of some Orthodox hierarchs, the taxes owed to the Turkish treasury and the ecclesiastical territorial structure of the metropolitan churches<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> \*\*\*, *SZERB SZEKESGYHAZ A TABANBAN...*, p. 45.

<sup>15</sup> \*\*\*, *SZERB SZEKESGYHAZ A TABANBAN...*, p. 38.

<sup>16</sup> Paraskevas KONORTAS, “Relations financières entre le patriarcat orthodoxe de Constantinople et la Sublime Porte (1453-fin du X VI siècle)”, in: *Le patriarcat oecuménique de Constantinople aux XIV-XVI siècles: rupture et continuité. Actes du colloque international, 5-6-7, Dossiers Byzantins, Rome, décembre 2005*, p. 299; Tom PAPADEMETRIOU, *Render Unto the Sultan. Power, Authority, and the Greek Orthodox Church in the Early Ottoman Centuries*, Oxford, 2015, p. 318; Halil INALCIK, *The Satus of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch under the Ottomans*, Turcica, 21-23, 1991, pp. 407-430.

<sup>17</sup> \*\*\*, *SZERB SZEKESGYHAZ A TABANBAN...*, p. 45.

<sup>18</sup> \*\*\*, *SZERB SZEKESGYHAZ A TABANBAN...*, p. 45.

According to the data gathered by the Deftera, in the middle of the 17th century there were nine metropolitan churches in Ottoman Hungary, but their number, from one time interval to another, could fluctuate between eight and fifteen-sixteen metropolitan churches, by merging or splitting some, depending on the interest of the Ottoman Sublime Porte. Analyzing the data of the Turkish Deftera, we can conclude that the administrative structure of the Orthodox metropolitan churches was a non-ecclesiastical one, i.e. it was not based on pastoral-canonical church principles, but strictly followed the logic of the Ottoman financial system based on the flexibility and economic potential of the tax collection centers in the occupied territories<sup>19</sup>.

In 1641, when Metropolitan Bishop SOFRONIE I occupied the bishop's throne of the Lipova and Giula citadels, there were twelve Orthodox metropolitan churches within the borders of Turkish Hungary, according to the Deftera of the Ottoman Chancellery. Of these, eight had a single residence, while the other four were unified, having two or three centers. Among these four unified ecclesiastical administrative units was also the Metropolitan Church of "the citadels of Lipova and Giula". Comparing the taxes charged to these metropolitan churches by the Ottoman Sublime Porte, we find, according to the data recorded in the registry of the chancellery in Istanbul, that metropolitan bishop SOFRONIE I, following the metropolitan bishop of the citadels of Temesvár-Becserek-Csanád who owned three unified centers, had to pay the highest tax to the Ottoman treasury, consisting of 14 ducats. The annual tax was imposed by the Ottoman Sublime Porte and was determined according to the importance of the centers, the resident population and the territorial extent of the metropolitan church. It used to be the case that the annual tax was divided into two: one charged from the metropolitan church in the amount of 1,800 akcse and another paid by each center, so that 10 ducats had to be paid by citadel of Giula, and 4 ducats by the citadel of Lipova.

In these times of Ottoman rule in which maintaining the bishop's throne was a real challenge due to the taxes to the Turkish treasury and in the conditions in which most hierarchs served as archpastors, in the

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<sup>19</sup> \*\*\*, *SZERB SZEKESGYHAZ A TABANBAN...*, p. 47.



happiest case, with few exceptions, only for a few years, sometimes even intermittently, metropolitan bishop SOFRONIE I of Lipova and Giula, like many other bishops, took the path of foreignness in Russia, for help.

Thus, on October 29, 1651, he was in Putiolia together with the monk Axentie, the deacon Mihail, his brother Toma Ivanov and the servant Micolaica. On November 24 he arrives in Moscow, and on December 26 he is received by the Tsar of Russia, Alexie Mihailovici, from whom he asks for alms. The Tsar orders that aid has to be given to him in money, scents, vestments and church books. On February 23, 1652, Sofronie received “a Gospel for the pristol, an Apostle, Psalter, Octoih, Triod, 12 Mines, the Lives of the Reverend Sergius of Rodoney, as well as vestments”<sup>20</sup>. It is not known how long bishop SOFRONIE I ministered as a bishop after his returning from Russia, whereas some historians say that he would not have returned, but would have remained a metropolitan bishop in Russia<sup>21</sup>.

#### **IV. Intermittent investitures of the hierarchs in the land of Crișana between the 17th and 19th centuries**

It is known that in the middle of the 17th century Romanians also lived in the citadel of Gyula<sup>22</sup>. It is possible that of the three existing churches in the town at that time, one of them might have been Romanian. After the withdrawal of the Turks from these parts, recolonization with Hungarians and Romanians began in the depopulated territory at the beginning of the 18th century, and later were brought Slovaks and Germans.

Under these conditions, in 1664, the presence of a “Serbian bishop” is recorded in this area<sup>23</sup>, a delegate of the ecumenical patriarch, identified by

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<sup>20</sup> Ștefan METEȘ, *Istoria Bisericii și a vieții religioase a românilor din Ardeal și Ungaria*, I, Tip. Diecezane, Arad, 1918, p. 187; Stelean-Ioan BOIA, “Biserica Ortodoxă din Lipova”, in: *Studii de Știință și Cultură* 2 (5), 2006; Mircea PĂCURARIU, “Viața bisericească a românilor din părțile Aradului”, p. 184.

<sup>21</sup> I. D. SUCIU, *Monografia Mitropoliei Banatului*, Editura Mitropoliei Banatului, Timișoara, 1977, p. 94.

<sup>22</sup> Ferenc SCHERER, *Gyula város története*, I, Budapest, 1938, pp. 246-261.

<sup>23</sup> Pavel CHERESCU, “Viața bisericească a românilor ortodocși din Bihor. Repere istorice”, in: *Orizonturi Teologice*, 3-4, Oradea, 2005, p. 52.



historians as Ștefan, who did his pastorship in the parts of Arad, in Ineu-Lipova<sup>24</sup>.

With the reorganization of the dioceses in the Habsburg Empire, in 1695, the Serbian patriarch Arsenius III founded a new bishopric based in Oradea and ordained Efrem Veniamin as bishop, but following the strong pressure exerted by the Roman Catholic Church through the Cardinal Kolonici de Ezstergom, Efrem Veniamin went to the union and became vicar for Romanians in Hungary<sup>25</sup> who did the same as him. As a result of his actions, the patriarch dismissed him as hierarch, and the Orthodox Bishopric of Oradea remained vacant<sup>26</sup>.

Then, for two centuries, with only a few extremely brief intermissions<sup>27</sup>, the priests and believers in this region were under the canonical jurisdiction of the bishops of Arad, who prevented the actions of the state and church authorities - especially patronized by the Catholic bishop of Oradea, to attract the Orthodox Romanians from these parts to the Union with the Church of Rome.

Although in 1701 the Viennese Royal Court abolished the old Orthodox Metropolitan Church based in Alba Iulia, after the death of Emperor Leopold I (1705) and Cardinal Kolonich de Esztergom (1707), the pressure in favor of the union decreased, the majority of the protopresbyters still being against it. In the meantime, the Serbs consolidated their status of their own hierarchy, their privileges were confirmed, so they could represent a viable hope of support for the Orthodox Romanians as well<sup>28</sup>.

The roots of Serbian Orthodoxy in this geographical area date back to ancient times, being highlighted from the time of Saint Sava, who in 1220 acquired the interference on the Orthodox in Hungary at the expense of the

<sup>24</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii românești din Transilvania, Banat, Crișana și Maramureș până în 1918*, Editura Imprimeria Ardealului, Cluj-Napoca, 1992, p. 176.

<sup>25</sup> Ștefan LUPȘA, "Fost-a Efrem Banianin episcop al Orăzii ?", in: *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, 5-6, 1935, pp. 260-262; Șt. LUPȘA, "Efrem Banianin episcop titular al Orăzii, 1695-1698", in: *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, 11-12, 1936, pp. 756-757.

<sup>26</sup> Marius EPPPEL, *Drumul către episcopie*, Editura Presa Universitară Clujană, Cluj-Napoca, 2011, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Gheorghe CIUHANDU, *Propaganda catolică-maghiară de la Macău în coasta Diecezei ortodoxe a Aradului (1815-1864)*, Arad, 1926, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> Drago NJEHOVAN and Miodrag MILIN, *Mitropolia de la Karlowitz și relațiile sârbo-române din cuprinsul Monarhiei habzburgice*, p. 424.

Serbian Church, building Serbian monasteries in the Nera valley and in the Danube gorge. Later historical developments will strengthen the bonds of Orthodox Serbs and Romanians, both in medieval Hungary and in the Romanian voivodeships, where Serbs and Romanians lived together<sup>29</sup>.

An important change occurred in the life of the church communities in these parts after 1790, when the patriarch Arsenie Cernoievici settled a number of Serbs here, who organized a Serbian Bishopric in Arad instead of the Bishopric of Lipova. The communities around the town of Giula also belonged to this bishopric, so also the communities within the current Orthodox Diocese of Hungary.

Only after the efforts of several decades and repeated states of revolt of the Orthodox Romanians, as well as of the Serbian and Romanian priests and monks, the Habsburg authorities accepted, in 1761, the reactivation of the old hierarchical throne at Alba Iulia, but only with the rank of a Bishopric, based in Sibiu. The first two bishops were Dionisije Novaković (1761-1767) and Sofronije Kirilović (1770-1774). During the time of Bishop Gedeon Nikitić (1784-1788), the Bishopric of Sibiu (Romanian Orthodox Bishopric of Transylvania) was subordinated to the Metropolitan Church of Karlowitz<sup>30</sup>, a state that would last until 1864, when the independent Romanian Orthodox Metropolitan Church of Sibiu was established under the archpastorship of Andrei Şaguna<sup>31</sup>.

## **V. New attempts at church organization of the Romanian Orthodox church communities in Hungary**

After the re-establishment of the Metropolitan Church of Transylvania, of the 17 communities existing at that time, which today are 21 and are part of the Romanian Orthodox Bishopric in Hungary, nine belonged to the Bishopric of Arad, and eight to the Deanery of Oradea. Among the

<sup>29</sup> D. NJEGOVAN and M. MILIN, *Mitropolia de la Karlowitz...*, p. 420.

<sup>30</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, Sibiu, 1972, pp. 259-260.

<sup>31</sup> Лупуловић ВАСА, *Живот и рад епископа Софронија Кириловића*, Темишварски зборник, 3, Нови Сад, 2002, pp. 135-141; I. D. SUCIU, *Revoluția de la 1848-1849 în Banat*, București, 1968, pp. 104-137.

communities belonging to the Bishopric of Arad, Bătania and the Hungarian Cenad were included in the Archdiocese of Arad, Bichișul, Bichișciaba (filia Ciorvaș), Chitighaz, Otlaca-Pusta, (became a matron parish in 1913), the German Giula and the Hungarian Giula in the Archdiocese of Chisinau, and among the parishes under the Vicariate of Oradea, Apateul, Darvașul, Jaca, Peterdul, Săcalul and Vechedul belonged to the Deanery of Oradea, Micerechiul and Crâstorul belonged to the one from Tinca<sup>32</sup>.

This situation was maintained until 1920, when the border between Hungary and Romania was demarcated. Then a completely new and very difficult reality was created for the Romanian Orthodox church communities remaining on the territory of Hungary, and also a lot of problems that were waiting to be solved for the good running of the communities' affairs in very difficult circumstances<sup>33</sup>.

Following the demarcation of the border between Hungary and Romania in 1920, nineteen Romanian Orthodox church communities remained on the territory of Hungary without any hierarchically superior organization that had the competence to lead the destinies of these parishes in such an unfavorable period. The situation was also aggravated by the fact that, after the end of the First World War, most of the priests left their parishes. For all Romanian Orthodox communities, only 4 priests remained: Ghenadie Gh. Bogoievici in Budapest, Petru Biberia in Giula II, Vasile Beles in Chitighaz and Simion Cornea in Bătania.

Since these church communities have no connection with their legitimate bishops, the Romanian Orthodox Consistory from Oradea - probably for preventive reasons - by the address no. 1636/1920, entrusted the protosinghel Ghenadie Gh. Bogoievici, the parish priest of Budapest, to be the spiritual leader of these parishes<sup>34</sup>. This entrust was later reinforced by the Bishopric of Arad. At the same time, the Hungarian government created a royal commissariat, headed by Iosif Siegescu, a Greek-Catholic prelate, to lead and represent the interests of Romanians in Hungary. The

<sup>32</sup> \* \* \*, *Calendar pe anul de la Hristos 1912*, Arad, pp. 53-55.

<sup>33</sup> Teodor MISAROȘ, *Din istoria comunităților bisericești ortodoxe române din Ungaria, Giula*, 2002, p. 234.

<sup>34</sup> \* \* \*, Arhiva Vicariatului din Giula, *Adresa preotului Simion Cornea nr. org. 12/ 1928*, trimisă membrilor comisiei de organizare a Bisericii Ortodoxe Române din Ungaria.

activity and collaboration of these two leaders in favor of the Romanians, however, left much to be desired, so that very soon movements of dissatisfaction were noticed on the part of the priests, led by the priest Simion Cornea from Bătania, as it appears from his letter, in which, among other things, he writes the following:

“...Anticipating how they will develop and what we will reach with the state of the church and the Romanian nation today - out of the church organization - already in 1923 I started writing letters both to the Most Devoutly Father ProtosinCEL, as well to Mr. commissioner, but little attention was given to my complaints...”<sup>35</sup>.

In this situation, the special letter of Metropolitan Bishop Nicolae Bălan of Transylvania, sent in 1923 to the Serbian bishop of Buda, Gheorghe ZubcoviCi, was welcomed, in which he asked him to take under his parental care - in the dogmatic and spiritual aspects - the Orthodox parishes in Hungary, but the bishop was not willing to interfere in the affairs of the Romanian Orthodox here<sup>36</sup>.

A period of almost three decades followed, in which countless attempts were made to create a church authority here. The desire was that this authority ought to be able to establish good order and, above all, to be a shield against the negative politics that was unleashed, with the arrival of Horthy Miklós (1920-1944), against the Orthodox Romanians in Hungary.

The only hope of escape was the establishment of a church organization that would encompass all the Romanian Orthodox church communities in Hungary.

The first attempt to establish a church organization for the Romanian Orthodox church communities in Hungary took place at the *Assembly in Bichişciaba*. This meeting was held on October 11, 1927<sup>37</sup>. Four priests

<sup>35</sup> \* \* \*, Arhiva Vicariatului din Giula, *Adresa Primpreturei Bătania nr. 169/1930*, trimisă preotului Simion Cornea, Consistoriul Ortodox Român din Oradea, Actul nr. 1636/1920.

<sup>36</sup> \* \* \*, Arhiva Vicariatului din Giula, *Scrisoarea pr. Simion Cornea din Bătania nr. 137/1927*, trimisă Dr. Gheorghe Alexici, membru în comisia de organizare.

<sup>37</sup> Feriz BERKI, *Az Ortodox Kereszténység*, (Budapest, 1975), *Lapok a magyarortodoxia*

and 32 lay representatives of church communities participated. They drew up a plan for the establishment of a Deanery, as an executive body - based in the city of Giula, and as a deliberative and control body, a Consistory based in the city of Bichisciaba. At the same time, they adopted decisions that they submitted to the government for resolution, through the priest Simion Cornea from Bătania. After several months of waiting in vain, he expressed his disappointment in a letter dated March 29, 1928, with the following words:

“...The Commission drafted and submitted the request in this sense to the government... until today no answer came for us. Now we feel even more strongly how sick our church is without those organs. Now we can no longer wait for tens and hundreds of years as before, - as church history tells us, but if the organization is postponed for a long time, the patient becomes dying, who has very little left until death. The Honorable Commission elected in Ciaba, in addition to its organizational duties, would do well to find out how to extend its activity not only for organization, - sitting with folded hands -, watching how some communities are ruined both materially and in the spiritual ones...”<sup>38</sup>

After two years of waiting in vain, the priests, whose number in the meantime rose to 10, decided to convene a new meeting of the College of Romanian Orthodox Priests from Hungary, also in the city of Bichişciaba, on July 29, 1929.

This time, by the address no. 169/1930, the requests of the College received a response from the Ministry of Cults, but a negative one. Those stipulated in another address were invoked, i.e. the one with no. 1636/1920, by which the hierarchically superior authority, the Romanian Orthodox Consistory of Oradea, entrusted the protosinghel Ghenadie Bogoievici

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történetéből. “Egyházi Krónika”, Keleti Ortodox folyóirat, XV. évfolyam, 5 szám, 1966, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> \* \* \*, Arhiva Vicariatului din Giula, *Adresa preotului Simion Cornea nr. org. 12/ 1928*, trimisă membrilor comisiei de organizare a Bisericii Ortodoxe Române din Ungaria.

with a mission - until further notice – namely, to manage the church affairs of the Romanian Orthodox in Hungary<sup>39</sup>.

Those communicated by the ministry were only a pretext for the non-fulfillment of what was requested, because, at that time, the Horthy government had already raised the issue of establishing a Hungarian Orthodox Bishopric, to which all Orthodox believers of any nationality from Hungary must be subjected<sup>40</sup>.

The knowledge of this situation determined the Romanian priests in Hungary to, for preventive reasons, resume the problem of the organization of the church in this country. For these reasons, a new protopresbyterian Assembly was convened in Chitighaz, on February 29, 1932. Here, the “establishment of the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese of Hungary” was declared under the leadership of priest Simion Cornea<sup>41</sup>.

The death, in 1932, of the priests Simion Cornea and Ghenadie Gh. Bogoievici, brought a new perspective in the church life of the Romanian Orthodox in Hungary. Protosinghel Bogoievici who, following the entrustment received in 1920 from the Consistory of Oradea, reinforced by the Bishopric of Arad, considered himself the ecclesiastical leader of the Romanian Orthodox in Hungary, but refrained from all reorganization attempts. After his transition to the eternal, a favorable climate was created for the unification of all forces in order to solve the problem of organization, which imposed itself as a categorical imperative.

For this purpose, on June 24, 1934, in the city of Giula, the Protopresbyteral Synod of the Orthodox Romanians from Hungary, transformed into the “National Congress of the Romanian Orthodox believers from Hungary”, met and in which the protopresbyter of the Orthodox Romanians from this country was elected, stating that

“...the Romanian Orthodox believers in Hungary cannot be satisfied with just one protopresbyter, but so that the Romanian

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<sup>39</sup> \* \* \*, Arhiva Vicariatului din Giula, *Procesul-verbal al ședinței Colegiului preotesc din 29 iunie 1929*.

<sup>40</sup> \* \* \*, Arhiva Vicariatului din Giula, *Adresa Primpreturei din Bătănia nr. 69/1930, Consistoriul Ortodox Român din Oradea, Actul nr. 1636/1920*.

<sup>41</sup> \* \* \*, Arhiva Vicariatului din Giula, *Procesul-verbal al ședinței Adunării protoprezbiteriale din 29 februarie 1932*.

Orthodox Church in Hungary can present itself with all its dignity in an imposing manner, so that it can defend and win all its guaranteed rights through the laws of the state, in order to be able to campaign successfully for its rights..., it is absolutely necessary to organize ourselves in an independent diocese... headed by a diocesan synod and consistory. In order to organize ourselves into a diocese, all the Romanian Orthodox parishes in Hungary must first be organized in at least 4 protopresbyteral tracts, Giula, Chitighaz, Micherechi and Budapest”<sup>42</sup>.

Although the deaneries came into office, the synod could not meet for the constitution of the Diocesan Consistory, because the government ruled by Horthy planned new measures against the Romanian Orthodox communities by establishing the Hungarian Orthodox Church on April 12, 1942. Immense pressures and constraints were exerted on the Romanian Orthodox in Hungary to join this newly established institution, as can be seen from the descriptions of those times, presented by Dr. Berki Feriz, the administrator of the Hungarian Orthodox Church, in 1976:

“...It is a regrettable fact that this adhering everywhere was preceded by some pressures, which were applied partly to the priests, partly to the secular leaders of the church communities. The leaders of the action, in addition to this, exceeded the target when they also forced those parishes in which the overwhelming majority of believers, possibly the entire church community, without a doubt, were of Romanian nationality, language and sentiments, to declare themselves to be of Hungarian character. Thus, it is not surprising if, already in 1943, a process of returning to the Romanian Orthodox Church began, with the result that all the parishes of Romanian origin, which a few years ago - under various pressures - declared to be Hungarian, until 1946, to become Romanian again...”<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> \* \* \*, Arhiva Vicariatului din Giula, *Procesul-verbal al ședinței Congresului Național Bisericesc din 24 iunie 1934*.

<sup>43</sup> Feriz BERKI, *Lapok a magyarortodoxia történetéből*, p. 4.



The first exit attempt was made two months after the establishment of the new organization. Several priests found a way to contact Bishop Andrei Magieru of Arad, informing him of what happened, asking him to intervene with the reason to ask Bishop Nicolae Colan of Cluj, to receive the Romanian Orthodox parishes in Hungary under his paternal auspices.

On the advice of Bishop Andrei, a delegation of three priests led by the former episcopal vicar of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese in Hungary, Dr. Petru Mândruțau, presented themselves to Bishop Nicolae Colan, requesting him to receive these communities under his jurisdiction. Bishop Nicolae approved the request, making it known to all interested parishes on June 12, 1941, in which, among other things, we read the following:

“We inform you that the His Holiness Bishop of Arad, Dr. Andrei Magieru, by the address no. 2676/1941, considering the fact that he did not have the proper communication with you the pious ones and the parishes you lead, he noted me to take care of his remaining parishes in Hungary in his diocese. When I bring this fact to your attention, we invite you that, in the future, in any canonical case to turn to Us to decide in the sphere of jurisdiction that I have taken over”<sup>44</sup>.

It was supposed to be a revival for the Romanian Orthodox parishes interested in Bishop Colan’s good intentions, but it was short-lived due to the vigilance of the government in Budapest, which immediately “directed” - by the county prefecture of Cluj - Bishop Colan to withdraw immediately, his availability. This is how it happened that, only two weeks later, Bishop Nicolae had to send, on June 26, 1941, a new circular to the parishes in question, with the following text:

“Referring to our address no. 2047 of June 12 this year, by which I brought to your attention the desire of His Holiness Dr. Andrei Magieru to entrust you to our canonical pastorate,

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<sup>44</sup> Feriz BERKI, *Az Ortodox Kereszténység*, p. 148.

We inform you that His Excellency Mr. Minister of Religion of Hungary did not consent to this entrustment and thus we revoke our provision no. 2047/1941 and you will remain further in the old canonical order”<sup>45</sup>.

In such trying circumstances nothing could be done. This era filled with so much bitterness ended with the end of the Second World War.

## **VI. Higher ecclesiastical body for the Orthodox Romanians in Hungary**

In order to achieve this goal, contact was resumed with the bishop of Arad, Dr. Andrei Magieru, a great supporter of the cause of Romanian Orthodoxy in Hungary.

On the basis of the organization plan and according to the directives brought to the meeting of the Initiative Commission on January 15, 1946, approved in advance by Bishop Andrei, the deputies for the National-Church Congress of the Romanian Orthodox in Hungary were elected, the body that had the competence to decide on the establishment of the Consistory Diocesan.

Fulfilling all the indicated, in the initiative Commission’s report, Bishop Andrei ordered the following:

“In order to put an end to the non-canonical situation in which the Romanian Orthodox parishes in Hungary are, starting from 1920,... it is necessary to organize those parishes in a Romanian Orthodox Eparchy for Romanians in Hungary, based in Giula. As a result, both His Holiness Metropolitan Bishop Nicolae (Nicholas) of Sibiu, as well as We, His Holiness Nicolae of Oradea, consent to the establishment of that Eparchy. The National Church Congress will meet on March 27, 1946, in the city of Giula, to organize the parishes into a Diocese... and ... the

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<sup>45</sup> \* \* \*, Episcopia Ortodoxă din Cluj, *Actul nr. 2047 din 12 iunie 1941*, înregistrat la Of. Parohia Ortodoxă din Giula I, sub nr. 137/1941.

Romanian Orthodox Diocesan Consistory from Hungary will be elected by secret vote... Following our approval, the Diocesan Consistory will begin to function, preparing the works for the Diocesan Synod, which will have to be convened precisely this year. Through the establishment of the Diocesan Consistory based in Giula and the organization of all Romanian Orthodox parishes in Hungary into a Diocese with the Diocesan Synod, all ecclesiastical, scholastic and philanthropic matters will be resolved by these forums. Only the canonical and spiritual connection of the priests of this Diocese will continue with the Bishops of Arad and Oradea until the installation of a Romanian Orthodox bishop, legally recognized by the Orthodox Church of Romania...<sup>46</sup>.

So, the struggles that lasted two and a half decades ended, and following the great political changes, the activity of the Consistory could be carried out in a favorable atmosphere. Thus, an era full of difficult trials came to an end, which resulted in the fact that each Orthodox Church in Hungary was able to arrange its canonicity freely, each having its own supreme authority, ensuring its undisturbed operation, and for the faithful their full religious freedom<sup>47</sup>.

The Romanian Orthodox Deanery in Hungary functions as an autonomous unit, recognized and canonically dependent on the Romanian Patriarchate, but having its own administrative organization. 19 church communities belong to it, with two branches and 21 positions for priests. The parishes are divided into three dioceses, with headquarters in Giula (Bichiș, Bichisciaba, Budapesta, Ciorvaș, Giula I, and Giula II), Micherechi (Apateu with branch Kormospusztá, Cristor, Darvas, Jaca, Micherechi, Peterd, Săcal and Vecherd) and Chitighaz (Aletea with branch Lökösháza, Batania, Cenadul-Hungarian, Chitighaz and Otlaca-Pustă).

The executive body of the deanery is the Diocesan Consistory, headed by a president, who bears the title of episcopal dean.

<sup>46</sup> BERKI, *Lapok a magyarortodoxia történetéből*, p. 6.

<sup>47</sup> MISAROS, *Din istoria comunităților bisericești ortodoxe române din Ungaria*, p. 258.

The first episcopal dean was Dr. Petru Mândruțau, whose name is inextricably linked to the establishment of this organization. After 30 years of activity, he retired from this position and was replaced by priest Teodor Misaroș, who was installed as episcopal dean on November 21, 1976, in the Cathedral of the Deanery of Giula by His Eminence Metropolitan Bishop Dr. Nicolae Corneanu of Banat, in the presence of representatives of the state authorities and other religions.

### **VII. Sofronie Drincec - the first elected hierarch for the Orthodox Romanians in Hungary**

Although the Orthodox Bishopric was established by the National Church Congress of Romanians in Hungary on March 26, 1946, nevertheless, for political reasons, the first hierarch for the Orthodox Romanians in Hungary was elected only in 1999, in the person of His Holiness Father SOFRONIE Drincec, the current Bishop of Oradea.

Before being elected to the episcopal rank, His Holiness Father SOFRONIE served from January 1998 as first secretary in the Cabinet of the worthy memorial Father Patriarch Teoctist, until February 1999.

At the proposal of Patriarch Teoctist, in the working meeting of the Metropolitan Synod of the Metropolitan Church of Muntenia and Dobrogea on August 28, 1998, he was given the rank of Protosinghel, being ordained by His Beatitude Patriarch Teoctist on October 27, 1998.

On December 15, 1998, in the working session of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, he is designated as the main candidate for the elections to fill the vacant post of Bishop of the Romanian Orthodox Eparchy in Hungary.

On the feast of the Three Holy Hierarchs in 1999, in Giula, in the Episcopal Residence, under the presidency of His Eminence Father Timotei of Arad, deputy of the Romanian Orthodox Bishopric in Hungary and the delegate of the Holy Synod for the election of the Bishop, the Electoral College of the Episcopate elects the Protosinghel Sofronie to occupy the position of Bishop of this diocese.

The Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, in the working session of February 4, 1999, unanimously validates the election and grants him the rank of bishop. On February 7, 1999, His Holiness Patriarch Teoctist ordained him to held the rank of Archimandrite.

Thus, on February 21, 1999, for the first time in history, the Giula Cathedral hosted the ordination and enthronement ceremonies of the first Bishop of the Romanian Orthodox Bishopric in Hungary, His Holiness Father SOFRONIE, by His Eminence Patriarch Teoctist, His Holiness Metropolitan Bishop Nicolae of Banat, Peter of Bessarabia, Seraphim of Germany, Central and Northern Europe, Joseph of Western and Southern Europe and 12 other Hierarchs of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

After 8 years of sacrificial and exemplary archpastorship among the Romanian believers in Hungary, His Holiness Father SOFRONIE was elected, on February 13, 2007, by the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, to the seat of Bishop of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Oradea, being enthroned at February 25, 2007, on Sunday of Orthodoxy, in the old “Assumption of the Virgin” Cathedral, the Moon Church in Oradea<sup>48</sup>.

## VIII. Conclusions

We find that the religious life of the Orthodox Romanians was inextricably linked, from the very beginning, to the history and the place where they lived, enduring all those trials that the church and its sons, throughout the ages, had to deal with. We also notice in this “arch over time” that between SOFRONIE I (1641-1651) siege over the Metropolitan Church of “Lipova and Giula citadels” and the archpastorship of His Holiness Father SOFRONIE II (1999-2007) of the Romanian Orthodox Bishopric in Hungary with headquarters in Giula, at a distance of more than three hundred and fifty years, when the Church and Orthodoxy are the binder, history, even if it has known totally different times and conditions, does not separate, but brings closer. This reality of the proximity of the times, to

<sup>48</sup> Ioan BUȘAGĂ, “Hram și aniversare pentru credincioșii români din Gyula”, in: *Lumina*, 30 ianuarie 2013, p. 3.

our souls, people and not least faith, takes shape par excellence in this year of the chosen celebration on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the ordination as a bishop, of our Bishop, His Holiness Father SOFRONIE of Oradea, and therefore, implicitly through the providential existence of these two great hierarchs of our ancestral church bearing the same name, SOFRONIE.