

**PRIESTLY DYNASTIES: RECRUITMENT POOLS
FOR THE GREEK-CATHOLIC CLERICAL ELITE.
CASE STUDY:
THE DIOCESES OF ORADEA AND GHERLA (1853-1918)***

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Abstract. *For the period under study, what became evident in the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church was the continuing trend of priestly dynasties, in which the sons carried further the mission of their fathers and grandfathers. The difference was that by the second or third generation, the sons of priests were prepared to operate at a higher level, assuming leadership roles in the ecclesiastical administration. Our paper aims to present a case study referring to the social origins of the higher clergy in the Greek-Catholic Dioceses of Oradea and Gherla. In this sense, the prosopographical analysis of the published and unpublished documents suggests the existence of genuine “priestly dynasties” in the area of the two dioceses, whence a good part of the local cultural and ecclesiastical elite emerged. We should note, in this regard, that 7 of the 28 canons who served in the Episcopal Cathedral Chapter of Oradea from 1853 to 1918 were of priestly descent, while in the Diocese of the Gherla the percentage was higher: 12 of the 20 capitular canons came from the ranks of the clergy.*

Significantly, many of the capitular canons who served in the two Greek-Catholic dioceses and were of unquestionable clerical descent became leading representatives of the Transylvanian cultural elite. Among these should be mentioned just a few names, such as Ioan Alexi, Iosif Papp-Szilágyi, Augustin Lauran, Ioan Papiu, Macedon Pop, Mihail Șerban, etc. This was possible thanks to the intellectual training they had received, the work they had accomplished and their degree of involvement in the process of societal enlightenment, in their capacity as teachers, as members of Astra, or as authors of scientific works and textbooks.

Keywords: priestly dynasties, clerical elite, the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church, recruitment, modern Romanian society of Transylvania.

The main aspect to be analysed in this study is the extent to which canons were recruited from priestly dynasties in the Greek-Catholic Dioceses of Oradea and Gherla, during the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The second aspect we intend to clarify is whether this tier of the clerical elite – namely, canons of priestly descent – was a representative component of the

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cultural or even of the political elite in the modern Romanian society of Transylvania.

First of all, let us define the syntagm *priestly dynasties*. In our opinion, a “priestly dynasty” represented a line of professional filiation within one and the same family, comprising 2-3 (consecutive) generations. More specifically, it referred to the case in which a priest’s father or paternal grandfather had also been a priest. We should emphasize the fact that during the modern period, there were at least two types of hereditary priestly succession: direct succession, from father to son, and horizontal or collateral succession, from uncle to nephew (by brother or sister).¹ The second type of succession can easily be illustrated with the case of several bishops who did not have direct descendants and, therefore, focused their attention on and granted their support to their collateral descendants (their nephews). In this sense, a telling example from the Enlightenment period was that of Bishop Samuil Vulcan, from the Diocese of Oradea, who encouraged and supported his brother’s son, Nicolae Vulcan (1805-1884), to pursue his studies in Blaj, Sibiu and Oradea Mare, offering him the opportunity to complete his intellectual and theological training at the University of Vienna. After graduating from this university, Nicolae Vulcan was invited to work in the episcopal chancery. Two years later, he was appointed as priest in the parish of Holod, being promoted archpriest shortly thereafter. All these aspects, the most important of which was his access to proper training and education, represented significant steps towards his recruitment and promotion up the ecclesiastical ladder, all the way to the position of canon.²

A well-known, albeit little researched phenomenon in historiography, the hereditary transmission of ecclesiastical positions or, in general, of professions was a custom perpetuated from the medieval to the modern period. The fact that real “dynasties of priests” were formed among both the Greek-Catholic and the Orthodox Romanians, is obvious and can be relatively easily demonstrated. In his study entitled *Elitele românești din Transilvania veacului al XVIII-lea* [*The Romanian Elites of the 18th Century*], the historian Remus Câmpeanu shows that the promotion mechanism at work in Transylvania during the Enlightenment Age was unquestionably predicated on nepotism.³ There are compelling arguments that this strategy was

¹ Nicolae Edroiu, “Genealogiile preoțești și protopopești din Transilvania (Considerații privind studiul carierelor intelectuale românești din sec. XVIII-XIX), in vol. Sorin Mitu et alii (Eds.), *Biserică, Societate, Identitate. In onorăm Nicolae Bocșan*, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2007, p. 77.

² *Ibidem*, p. 79. See also Mirela Popa-Andrei (Ed.) et alii, *Canonici, profesori și vicari foranei din Biserica Română Unită (1853-1918). Dicționar*, Cluj-Napoca, Mega, 2013 (hereinafter *Dicționar*), p. 407-408.

³ Remus Câmpeanu, *Elitele românești din Transilvania veacului al XVIII-lea*, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2008, 2nd edition, p. 286-305.

taken over and applied by the high prelates of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church in their recruitment of ecclesiastical staff, at least in the first part of the 19th century.

Conclusive evidence, in this regard, comes from the decisions of the Greek-Catholic diocesan synod that took place in Blaj in September 1821. Among them was a resolution stipulating that preference should continue to be given to direct (sons, nephews) and indirect descendants (sons-in-law) in appointments to vacant parish positions.⁴ Even though in the second half of the 19th century, the Romanian Greek-Catholic bishops in Transylvania underscored, in accordance with the requirements of the time, the need for forming professionally well-trained and instructed clergymen, to the detriment of hereditary priesthood, numerous “priestly dynasties” continued to exist. Indeed, from the 1850s on, the number of priests coming from different social backgrounds increased, thanks to the development of a modern theological education system, in which, at least officially, all well-prepared candidates, with a valid file, benefited from equal opportunities of acceptance in a school of theology. Notwithstanding all this, the number of priestly family descendants remained rather high. An explanation for this could be the somewhat privileged situation of the youth who came from priestly families. From the start, they benefited from a superior education and also had certain economic and material advantages over their fellow students, whose roots lay with the peasantry or petty local notables.

For the period under study, what became evident in the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church was the continuing trend of priestly dynasties, in which the sons carried further the mission of their fathers and grandfathers. The difference was that by the second or third generation, the sons of priests were prepared to operate at a higher level, assuming leadership roles in the ecclesiastical administration. Towards the end of the 19th century, the number of canons⁵ of priestly descent increased in all the Greek-Catholic dioceses in Transylvania, attesting the fact that hereditary priesthood functioned efficiently and that the strategy of socio-professional assertion through the second or the third generation was extremely practical. Of the 105 canons who were active, in the period 1853-1918, in the Metropolitan Chapter of Blaj and in the three Episcopal Chapters of Oradea, Lugoj, Gherla, 34 were of priestly origin, amounting to a percentage of 33.33%, i.e. one third of the total. The highest percentage of canons of priestly descent, 60%, could be encountered in the Diocese of Gherla (i.e. 12 of 20 canons came from priestly families). The lowest

⁴ I. Micu Moldovan, *Acte sinodale ale Bisericii de Alba Iulia și Făgăraș*, vol. II, Blaj, 1869, p. 111.

⁵ Canons were members of the Cathedral Chapters. A chapter was a self-standing body that assisted the bishop in governing and administering the diocese. Canons were referents on the ecclesiastical, administrative and educational matters of the diocese. Throughout the time span considered here, the chapters of the Dioceses of Oradea Mare and Gherla comprised 6 canons each, while the Metropolitan Chapter of Blaj included 10 canons after 1855.

percentage was found in the Diocese of Lugoj, 17 % (i.e. 4 of 23 canons). In Blaj and Oradea the percentage was average – 38% (13 of 34 canons), respectively 25% (7 of 28 canons).

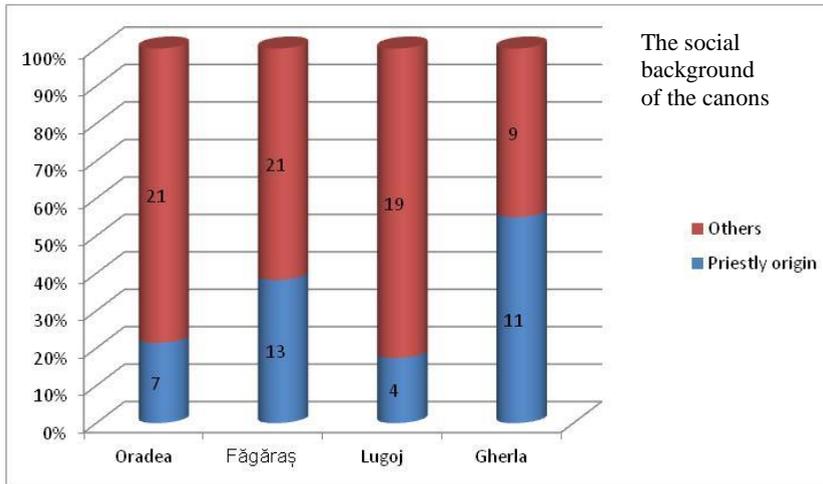


Figure 1: The social background of the canons

In the two dioceses (Oradea and Gherla) on which the case study focuses, we can notice the existence of a 30 percent difference: while in Oradea 7 of the 28 canons were of priestly origin, in Gherla 12 of the 20 canons came from priestly families. However, it should be noted that there was a similarity between these two dioceses, which it is worth mentioning. The largest number of canons of noble birth was registered in Oradea and Gherla. They came mostly from the north-western regions of Transylvania, from amongst the Romanian nobility, whose ancestors had been ennobled for military service rendered to their Transylvanian princes during the Middle Ages. Even though most of these families of petty nobles – or priestly families – did not differ at all, in terms of their wealth and daily living, from the families of well-off farmers, their great merit was that by virtue of their social status, they could provide their children with a different educational background, ensuring their access to primary education and facilitating their attendance of higher schools or their obtaining studentships.

Of the 28 chapter canons in Oradea, 3 came from priestly families⁶ and 12 were of noble descent⁷ (4 were of dual noble-priestly descent: Al. Dobra, Iosif Papp-Szilagy, Ioan Szabó and Ioan Cucu). The remaining canons (13) came from poor families; they could be the sons of village notables, such as cantors or notaries, but most of them (8) were the sons of peasants.

In Gherla 12 of the 20 canons were of priestly descent, most often along the paternal line and only rarely on the maternal side.⁸ This was the case of Canons: Macedon Pop, Ștefan Bilțiu, Ioan Pop Szodoró, Ioan Gulovich, Alexandru Bene, Alexandru Erdős, Dumitru Coroianu, Eusebiu Cartice, Ioan Papiu, Ioan Welle, Vasile Pop and Gregoriu Pop. At the same time, there were four cases in which the canons had a dual, noble-priestly ancestry: Ștefan Bilțiu, Alexandru Erdos, Eusebiu Cartice and Ioan Welle.⁹

In what follows, we shall briefly present the cases of canons who were of priestly descent in the two Greek-Catholic dioceses mentioned above: Oradea and Gherla.

Oradea. In the chronological order of their promotion to canonical stalls, the canons of priestly descent in Oradea were the following (in the period 1853-1918): Alexandru Dobra, Ioan Szabó, Iosif Papp-Szilágyi, Ioan Cucu, Samuil Ciceronescu, Augustin Luran and Coriolan Ardelean.

Among the canons included in our presentation is Alexandru Dobra, a canon in the Chapter of Oradea, who was appointed then as bishop of the newly founded Diocese of Lugoj (1853). His father, Simeon, the descendant of a noble family, was also a priest in the village Șopteriu (Cluj County). In fact, one could say that Alexandru Dobra's entire family consisted of Greek-Catholic clerics, if we consider the fact that his uncle Ioachim was a theologian in Lemberg and then Vice-Rector in Blaj, while two of his brothers, Petru and Avram, with theological studies in

⁶ A definite number would be difficult to advance, because we have not managed to identify the social origin of Canon Bulcu. Still, it is highly likely that he too came from a priestly family. We may safely state that the following canons had a priestly family background: Al. Dobra, Teodor Aron, Ioan Szabó, Ioan Cucu, Augustin Luran, Samuel Ciceronescu, Coriolan Ardelean.

⁷ These canons included the following: Nicolae Borbola, Al. Dobra, Iosif Papp-Szilágyi, Teodor Aron, Ioan Vancea, Nistor Vasiliu, Ioan Szabó, Ioan Cucu, Teodor Kőváry, Nicolae Vulcan și Artemiu Șarcadi. It is also possible that Paul Vela (Ventrarul) had noble origins.

⁸ At this point of our analysis, it should be noted that the information and data regarding the Diocese of Gherla are taken from Ana Victoria Sima, *O episcopie și un ierarh. Înfăptuirea și organizarea episcopiei greco-catolice de Gherla în vremea episcopului Ioan Alexi*, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2003, passim, as well as from *Dicționar...*, with the mention that the biographical entries for the canons in Gherla were compiled by Ana Victoria Sima.

⁹ See the introductory study: *Preliminarii pentru o anchetă socio-antropologică asupra elitei ecleziastice române greco-catolice 1853-1918*, in *Dicționar*, p. 32.

Bratislava and, respectively, Blaj, were also exemplary priests.¹⁰ Ioan Szabó was the son of Demetriu, a priest in Istrău (Sătmar County), the descendant of an impoverished noble family from Cristelec.¹¹ He attended several schools in Transylvania and studied theology in Pest for two years. Then he left for Vienna, where after three and a half years he obtained a PhD in Theology, at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Vienna (10 August 1822), with a thesis entitled *De ortu et progressu schismatis Ecclesiae orientalis*.¹²

Iosif Papp-Szilágyi was born on 13 April 1813, in the village of Tarcea, which was, at that time, situated on the territory of Bihor County, but is in Sălaj County today. His father, Simion Papp-Szilágyi, was a priest in that village. His mother was Maria Bánk. Simion Szilágyi was one of the highly respected priests in the diocese, which is why he was appointed to one of the most coveted parishes, Olosig-Oradea, receiving the title of honorary canon as well. The father of the future Bishop of Oradea, Simion Szilágyi proved his noble origin and supported it with authentic documents before the authorities of Bihor County in 1836. According to his arguments and the attesting documents he invoked, the Szilágyi family came from the Pop family in the village Băsești (also known as Illyésfalva) in Middle Solnoc County. He was thus related not only to the Pop de Băsești family (see Gheorghe Pop de Băsești), but to another branch, whose members had settled in Bihor and whose most recent important descendant was Iosif Papp-Szilágyi, a canon and then provost of the Chapter of Oradea from 1790 to 1825. Thus, the social background of Iosif Papp-Szilágyi, who was to become canon and, then, bishop of the Diocese of Oradea Mare was not just priestly, but also nobiliary. His ancestors had been ennobled by Prince Michael I Apafi in 1678.

Iosif Papp-Szilágyi attended primary, secondary and high school in Oradea, completing his intellectual and theological training in Vienna, where he carried out doctoral studies in Theology and Law. He graduated with a thesis on Canon Law, defended in 1837 and entitled *De potestate impedimenta Matrimonium dirimentia statuendi elucubrata*.¹³ Upon his return home in 1837, his ecclesiastical career embarked on an ascendant path from the very outset of his activity. In the first three years he held various ecclesiastical offices, from consistorial notary and episcopal secretary to director of the diocesan chancery. In 1845 he was appointed canon. In

¹⁰ Nicolae Bocșan, Camelia Vulea, *La începuturile episcopiei Lugojului. Studii și documente*, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2003, p. 11-18.

¹¹ Viorel Câmpean, *Oameni și locuri din Sătmar*, vol. II, Satu Mare, Editura Citadela, 2010, p. 38; Ion Cârja, Daniel Sularea (edited, introductory study and notes by), *Episcopul Ioan Szabó și Sfântul Scaun. Corespondență (1874-1910)*, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2007, p. 5-7.

¹² *Dicționar*, p. 161-163.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 291-294.

October 1851 he became Rector of the Domestic Seminary in Oradea, while in 1863 he was elected as Bishop of the Greek-Catholic Diocese of Oradea-Mare.

In 1862 he published *Enchiridion Juris Ecclesiae Orientalis Catholicae*, on the Canon Law of the Oriental Catholic Churches, a work that was extremely well received in the Catholic milieu of that time. For a long time, this work remained the only textbook of Canon Law in the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church. Moreover, it became included in the international canonical literature, which demonstrates once again the value and appreciation it enjoyed.

Ioan Szabó, a canon in the Chapter of Oradea and, subsequently, Bishop of the Diocese of Gherla (1879-1911), was born at Istrău (Esztró), Sătmar County, on 16 August 1836, in the family of the local priest, Demetriu Szabó of Cristelec, who was the descendant of an impoverished noble family from Cristelec. His mother was Sofia Pop, the daughter of the priest from (Ioan Popp de Vajnag). He attended primary and secondary school in Oradea, being classified as an eminent student, as shown in a report relating to the young scholars accommodated in the Domestic Seminary in the school year 1851/52. The report was drawn by the rector of the Seminary, Iosif Papp-Szilágyi, on 5 February 1852. Having been noticed by his bishop, Vasile Erdélyi, he was sent to study in Rome. Ioan Szabó inaugurated thus the series of Romanian students from Oradea who completed their theological education in the pontifical institutions during the 19th century. Here he attended the absolute philosophical and theological course at the Urban College of the Propaganda Fide Congregation, where he obtained the degree of Doctor in Theology in July 1859. After that he returned to Oradea.¹⁴

Canon Ioan Cucu was born in an old Romanian family, Cucu of Cupșeni (Kapsafalva), related to the Cupcea family from the historical region of Maramureș. The Cucu family had been granted letters patent attesting their ennoblement by King Matthias Corvinus in 1465 and by Prince Stephen Báthory in 1575. These letters patent were confirmed by Emperor Leopold in 1700 and then by Maria Theresa in 1776. His father, who had the same name, Ioan Cucu, had been a priest in many parishes across the Diocese of Oradea, including Culciu Mare, Borlești, Stâna and Soconzel.¹⁵ He studied in Tmava and in 1834 he married Iuliana Papp-Szilágy, the sister of the Greek-Catholic Bishop of Oradea, Iosif Papp-Szilágy.¹⁶

Samuil Ciceronescu was born in a family of priestly descent, in Ceheiu (Csehi), Bihor County, in 1860, his father, Petru, being a priest in that village at that time. Samuel had an older brother, Ioan Ciceronescu, who studied theology at the “St.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 382-384.

¹⁵ „Familia, foaie enciclopedică și beletristică cu ilustrațiuni” (Oradea), XXIV, 1888, no. 32, p. 372; Ioan cavaler de Pușcariu, *Date istorice privitoare la familiile nobile române*, Sibiu, 1892, part I, p. 32; part II, p. 201.

¹⁶ *Dicționar*, p. 149-151.

Athanasius” Greek College in Rome. Ioan Ciceronescu earned a double doctorate in Theology and Philosophy in Rome. On his mother’s side, he was related to another local priestly dynasty, as he was the nephew of Ioan Szabó, who was to become Bishop of Gherla. Ioan Szabó’s sister, Terezia Szabó, was his mother. He attended secondary school in Oradea Mare and then enrolled in the Roman Catholic Theological Seminary in Satu-Mare.¹⁷

Augustin Lauran was born at Petea (Sătmar) on 5 December 1844, in the family of the local Greek-Catholic priest Dumitru Lauran and of Veronica Vlass. Both parents came from well-established Romanian families. His father was from Tămaia, a village near Baia-Mare, which was then in Sătmar County, while his mother came from a family in Bihor. Dumitru Lauran’s grandfather and father had shepherded the parishes of Tămaia, Chariton and Miron for a long time. He completed his secondary education in Oradea. Upon graduation, he was selected for a studentship in Rome, where he read philosophy and theology, as a student of the “St. Athanasius” Greek College, from 1859 to 1867. He graduated with a doctorate in both sciences (Philosophy and Theology). He was a refined scholar, a man of rare ecclesiastical learning, who had the mission to steer the destinies of the Seminary and the Preparandia during a particularly difficult time for the Romanians in Hungary and Transylvania, that is, during the years when the policy pursued by the dualist Austro-Hungarian State sought to restrict the rights of the non-Magyar nationalities. The most illustrative field in which Dr. Augustin Lauran asserted himself was that of theological-pedagogical literature, as attested by his many ecclesiastical works, in which he emphasized, whenever the opportunity arose, the fundamentals of Catholic faith, as well as the adherence of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church (and his own allegiance) to them.¹⁸

Coriolan Ardelean was born in the village Csengerujfalu (then in Sătmar County, today on the territory of Hungary) on 24 October 1860, in the family of the local Greek-Catholic parish priest George Ardeleanu and of Maria Toth. George Ardelean was one of the Romanian intellectuals from Sătmar County who, in 1865, signed a petition addressed to the Lord Lieutenant, regarding the need for ensuring the proportional representation of the Romanians in the county’s administrative bodies. Coriolan attended primary school in Carei and high school in Satu Mare. He

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 133-135.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 210-215. His works included: *Creștinul greco-catolic deprins în legea sa*, Oradea, 1878, a textbook of religious education for the students of the *Preparandia*; *Creșterea poporală, manual pedagogic didactic, pentru luminătorii poporului*, Oradea, 1879, a textbook intended for the students’ pedagogical instruction; *A szent Unio. Apologetus czikk sorozat Magyar Szent korona alatt élő görög szertartásu cath. Románok védelmére (Sfânta Unire întru apărarea românilor greco-catolici de sub sfânta coroană a Ungariei)*, Oradea, 1885, etc.

completed his intellectual training by carrying out university studies in Budapest, where he graduated in Theology and Philology. He was one of the foremost personalities who were committed to the national emancipation movement in Sătmar and Bihor Counties.¹⁹

Gherla. In presenting the canons of priestly descent who were members of the Chapter of the Diocese of Gherla from 1853 to 1918, we have used the same criterion of the chronological order in which they were promoted to canonical stalls, just like in the case of the canons from Oradea.

Ioan Pop Szodoró was born in 1792, in the family of the priest George Pop from the village of Sudurău (Szodoró, in Hungarian), which belonged then to the Greek-Catholic Diocese of Oradea Mare. His mother, Floarea Șincai, was the sister of the well-known Enlightenment scholar Gheorghe Șincai. He was to assume the toponym *Szodoró* (also assigned to him, later on, by his teachers at the Theological Seminary in Blaj) in order to individualize himself in relation to his colleagues who also had this frequently encountered Transylvanian name, Pop. He was ordained as a celibate priest. He was a member of the first Chapter of the newly established Diocese of Gherla, being the oldest canon thereof.²⁰

Macedon Pop was born on 24 June 1809, in the family of the Greek-Catholic priest from Sângeorz; he was one of the six children of Iacob and Maria Pop. He attended the Roman-Catholic gymnasium in Bistrița, and in 1830 he enrolled in the Theological Seminary in Blaj, which he graduated from four years later. He chose the path of celibacy. He was a teacher, a priest and a catechist at the pedagogical school in Năsăud, Vicar Forane of Rodna, as well as provost of the Chapter of Gherla (1857-1873). Both as a vicar and as a chapter provost, he carried out a rich and complex activity, leaving behind a valuable written work.²¹

Ioan Gulovich was born on 2 August 1812, in the family of the Ruthenian Greek-Catholic priest from the village Szerents, the Zemplen region, in the Diocese of Munkacs. He finished his theological studies at the Episcopal Seminary in Ungvár in 1835. He was ordained as a celibate priest. His experience, accumulated over a period of nearly two decades, as a priest in Satu-Mare, his flawless moral conduct and his knowledge of Latin, Hungarian and Ruthenian, determined the first Bishop of Gherla, Ioan Alexi, to introduce him on the list of canons in the Gherla Chapter.²²

Ștefan Bîlțiu was born on 6 January 1814, in the family of Dumitru Bîlțiu, the parish priest from the village of Chiuzbaia (located in the proximity of Baia Mare and Baia Sprie). Along the paternal line, he came from an old Romanian noble

¹⁹ *Dicționar*, p. 84-85.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 335-336.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 321-324. His works included *Activitatea vicarilor foranei episcopiești greco-catolici din districtul Năsăudului, de la înființarea vicariatului până la vicariul Anchedimu Pop inclusive*, published posthumously in Budapest, in 1875.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 183-185.

family, first attested in 1595, in the letter patent issued by Sigismund Batory to a man called Bilț of Vișeu. Canon Ștefan Bilțiu was to become the uncle, after one of his sisters, of the Greek-Catholic archpriests of Baia Mare, Avram and Alexandru Breban, father and son. The latter, Alexandru Breban, also became a canon in the Chapter of the Greek-Catholic Diocese of Maramureș. In 1835, Ștefan Bilțiu married Melania Dragoș, the daughter of the Greek-Catholic priest from Ferneziu. Two boys were born out of their thirteen-year long marriage: Ștefan and Gavril. Both had theological studies and embarked on priestly careers.²³

Demetriu Coroianu was born on 24 October 1814 in an old family of Greek-Catholic priests from Așchileul Mare, Dăbâca County. His father, Antoniu Coroianu was among the first graduates in theological studies at the University of Vienna, while his mother, Ecaterina Muntean came from the family of a prominent Greek-Catholic priest in Noțig, Middle Solnoc County. Demetriu Coroianu married Iuliana Pop, the niece of the Archpriest of Craidorolț, Grigore Pop. Four children were born from his marriage to Iuliana Pop, two boys and two girls, of whom the most accomplished were Iuliu Coroianu, the author of the Memorandum, and Clara (married Maniu), an active militant in the cultural and national emancipation movement in Sălaj, during the second half of the 19th century.²⁴

Vasile Pop was born on 25 December 1832, in the family of the priest Artimon Mânzat and of Maria Filip, in the village Cremenea, the Archpresbyteriate of Dej. He was the second of the seven children born in the Mânzat family. He completed his theological studies at the University of Pest, where he attended the Central Seminary, and was ordained as a celibate priest in the spring of 1858. He was a very active priest and, then, canon, his pastoral and educational pursuits being seconded by a fervent political and national activity. This is attested by the fact that he ran, unsuccessfully, for the Hungarian Parliament, on the lists of the National Party of the Transylvanian Romanians, as well as by his active involvement in the national meetings and conferences of this political party.²⁵

Alexandru Erdös was born in 1824, in the family of the Greek-Catholic priest Simeon Erdös from the village of Apa, where his father was both parish priest and archpriest. He came from an old Romanian noble family, *de Uglya*, ennobled by King Albert in 1440 for the military services rendered to him. After completing his primary and secondary studies in Satu Mare and his high school education in Ungvár, he graduated from the Theological Seminary in Trnava, opting for the civil status of a celibate priest.²⁶

Alexandru Bene was born on 21 April 1846, in the family of the Greek-Catholic priest Vasile Bene and of his wife Veronica from Șoimeni, in the

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 97-99.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 145-147.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 336-337.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 166-167.

Archpresbyteriate of Cluj. In 1875 he married Matilda Godolean, the daughter of the priest from Mintiul Gherlei, who was related, on her mother's side, to Canon Ioan Fekete Negruțiu from Blaj. He studied theology at the University of Pest, becoming an alumnus of the Roman-Catholic Central Seminary. Subsequently, he played an important role in the reorganization of the curriculum of the Preparandia in Gherla, the duration of studies being extended, under his directorate, to 3-4 years. He also contributed to the organization and management of the chapter's foundations, as well as to laying the episcopal printing house on more efficient foundations.²⁷

Eusebiu Cartice was born on 11 July 1836 in Dumbrăvița, a village in the Archpresbyteriate of Baia Sprie, in the family of the Greek-Catholic priest and Archpriest Andrei Cartice. His mother, Maria Bilțiu, of priestly descent, was the sister of Canon Ștefan Bilțiu from Gherla. He was married very briefly to the daughter of Ioan Fași, the priest and Archpriest of Baia Mare, but was widowed after just one year of marriage. He was the first student in the Diocese of Gherla who was selected by Bishop Ioan Alexi and sent to study theology in Vienna.²⁸

Ioan Papiu was born on 29 August 1835, in the family of the priest Matei Pop and of Maria Pop, in Satul Nou (Szasz Ujfalù), in the Archpresbyteriate of Buza, being the first born of the priest's 12 children. He acquired the name Papiu during his studies, in order to set himself apart from other homonymous students. He completed his theological studies in Blaj and, then, at the recommendation of Bishop Alexi, in the capital of the Empire, in Vienna, where he attended the Faculty of Theology, as a student of the St. Barbara Seminary, he was actively involved in organizing the theological students in the imperial capital. Upon his return home, he was ordained and married Maria Dragomir, the daughter of the priest in Băbeni, being widowed just three years into the marriage, without having had any children. For a while he worked in the episcopal chancellery. Then, for a few years, he was a teacher and director of the Gymnasium in Năsăud, being admitted to the Chapter in 1891. He was extremely active both in the ecclesiastical / educational field and in the realm of pedagogical-literary scholarship.²⁹

Ioan Wele was born on 17 December 1842, in the family of the Greek-Catholic priest from Șigău, near Dej. On his paternal side, he was descended from a noble family, first attested in the middle of the 16th century. He studied theology at the Seminary in Gherla, where, shortly after graduation, he was appointed Vice-Rector, being entrusted mostly with economic-financial duties. He chose the path of celibacy. He was a canon from 1910 to 1916. He was also active on a national/ecclesiastical level. Emblematic, in that regard, was his involvement in the protest initiatives against the establishment of the Diocese of Hajdudorog, in 1912.³⁰

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 92-94.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 126-127.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 288-291.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 409-410.

Gregoriu Pop was born on 28 April 1859 in the family of the priest Ștefan Pop and of Terezia, in the Greek-Catholic parish Babța. He attended primary and secondary school in Oradea and high school in Satu Mare, where he took his baccalaureate in 1878. He attended the Theological Seminary in Gherla, which he graduated in 1882, ranking among the outstanding students of his generation. After completing his theological studies, he married Emilia Ossian, the daughter of the archpriest in Sălsig. In 1910, he was promoted to the Diocesan Chapter of Gherla, as prebendary canon. Like other canons, Gregoriu Pop climbed, one by one, the rungs of the hierarchical ladder, reaching the rank of archdeacon (24 May 1924).

Matrimonial alliances

It should be noted that besides priestly descent, another element that played an important role in the recruitment and promotion of the clergy within the canonical hierarchy resided in matrimonial alliances and the resulting kinships. This phenomenon most certainly also affected the ecclesiastical elites in Oradea, but in the case of this analysis it was more visible in the Diocese of Gherla, where, unlike in the Diocese of Oradea³¹, many of the canons were married. Thus, while in Oradea only 2 of the 7 canons presented in this study were married (the other 5 were celibate priests), the majority of the 12 canons in the Gherla Chapter were married to priests' daughters or nieces. We should also mention the fact that the mothers of 2 of the 7 canons in the Oradea Chapter discussed in this study (who were the descendants, along paternal lines, of priestly families) were daughters of priests, too. Such was the case of Ioan Szabó's mother, Sofia Pop, and of Samuel Ciceronescu's mother, Terezia, nee Szabó (the sister of Bishop Ioan Szabó). Another case of a matrimonial alliance with an impact was that of Canon Ioan Cucu, married to Iuliana Papp-Szilágyi, the sister of the Bishop of Oradea Mare.

In the Diocese of Gherla, a suggestive example was that of Canon Eusebiu Cartice, who was promoted to the Chapter of Gherla in 1888. On his mother's side, he was related to Canon Ștefan Bilțiu (he was Bilțiu's nephew by his sister). We do not know to what extent this mattered for his promotion to the rank of canon, but it is certain that his kinship to Canon Ștefan Bilțiu boosted his professional development and then facilitated his admission into the Episcopal Chapter. For instance, having been brought to the theological Seminary in Gherla, just one year after the appointment of his uncle Ștefan Bilțiu in the Chapter of Gherla, Eusebiu Cartice was the first candidate who was sent by Bishop Ioan Alexi to study theology in Vienna. Upon returning from university in 1862, he was immediately employed

³¹ Priority celibate priests to occupy an ecclesiastical dignity was a reality more evident in the Diocese of Oradea due latinizing phenomenon more pronounced here than in other parts of the ecclesiastical province of Transylvania.

as a teacher at the Seminary in Gherla, where he remained until 1888, when he was elevated to the rank of canon capitular.³²

Another interesting case is that of Canon Alexandru Bene, whose mother-in-law was the niece of Ioan Fekete Negruțiu, the canon from Blaj (his sister's daughter). It is true that at the time of Alexandru Bene's admission into the Chapter of Gherla, his uncle Ioan Fekete Negruțiu was no longer alive. He had passed away 5 years before, but the upward path of Bene the cleric had started in 1875, when he was appointed by the Bishop of Gherla, Mihail Pavel, as a priest in Mintiul Gherlei (taking the place of his father-in-law, who had died in the meantime), as Archpriest of Sânmarghita, and, in 1879, as a member of Episcopal Consistorial See. Thus, upon the death of his uncle, Alexandru Bene's position in the diocesan administrative apparatus was already well consolidated, which eased his admittance to the Chapter in the early 1890s.³³

Aspects of the canons' activity

The canons mentioned in this case study were, alongside their fellow clergymen, highly involved in numerous administrative-ecclesiastical activities and in promoting national culture, most of all through the Astra Society, whose members most of them were. Moreover, some of them were renowned authors of textbooks (Augustin Luran in Oradea and Ioan Papiu in Gherla, for instance) or of scientific works, while others distinguished themselves through their activity in the field of politics, at either the central or the local level.

It should be emphasized that most of the canons in Oradea held important teaching positions, too. They worked either as teachers at the Gymnasium in Beiuș and at the Diocesan Preparandia in Oradea or as vice-rectors and rectors of the Domestic Diocesan Seminary (Ioan Szabó, Iosif Papp-Szilágyi, Samuil Ciceronescu, Augustin Luran), training generations upon generations of the local elites. The same situation was encountered in the Diocese of Gherla. Here, especially during the first decades after the establishment of the Chapter (1858), most of the canons were also teachers at the Diocesan Theological Seminary. Of the 12 canons discussed in this study, those who stood out through their activity in the educational field included: Ștefan Bilțiu, Ioan Pop Szodorò, Alexandru Bene, Eusebiu Cartice, Vasile Pop, etc. The canons from the Chapter of Gherla were also involved in the process of institutional organization, which began in 1853, when this new Greek-Catholic diocese was founded.

Many of the canons examined here dedicated themselves to writing theological works, textbooks or press articles. Among the canons of priestly descent from

³² See the introductory study: *Preliminarii pentru o anchetă socio-antropologică asupra elitei ecleziastice române greco-catolice 1853-1918*, in *Dicționar*, p. 33.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 92-94.

Oradea who left behind written works, the most important was Iosif Papp-Szilágyi, who produced a valuable theological oeuvre, written while he was a canon of the Cathedral Chapter in Oradea Mare. His fundamental work, *Enchiridion Juris Ecclesiae Orientalis Catholicae*, was published in 1862 and was re-edited by Canon Augustin Lauran in 1880. In his turn, Dr. Augustin Lauran published ecclesiological works, in which he emphasized, as often as possible, the fundamentals of Catholic faith, as well as the adherence of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church (and his own allegiance) to them. *A szent Unio, a Magyar Szent korona alatt álló görög cath. Románok védelmére (Sfânta Unire întru apărarea românilor greco-catolici de sub sfânta coroană a Ungariei)*, Oradea, 1885, he edited textbooks (*Creștinul greco-catolic deprins în legea sa*, Oradea, 1878, a religious education textbook for the students of the preparandia; *Creșterea poporală, manual pedagogic didactic, pentru luminătorii poporului*, Oradea, 1879, a textbook intended for the students' pedagogical instruction). He also published numerous articles in Romanian and Hungarian newspapers, participating in theological and political-ecclesiastical disputes, and subsequently collecting these texts into seven brochures.³⁴ Other canons who distinguished themselves in the field of journalism were Coriolan Ardelean, who contributed to the review *Unirea* in Blaj, and Ioan Papiu, a canon from Gherla, who published numerous articles on theological and pedagogical topics in *Magazin pedagogic* and *Preotul român*.

As regards the canons from the Cathedral Chapter of Gherla, those who produced remarkable written works included Macedon Pop and Ioan Papiu. In the national ecclesiastical historiography, Macedon Pop is known for his work entitled *Activitatea vicarilor foranei episcopiești greco-catolici din districtul Năsăudului, de la înființarea vicariatului până la vicariul Anchedimu Pop inclusiv*, published posthumously in Budapest, in 1875, by Maxim Pop. This is a genuine monograph of the vicariate forane as an institution, which comprises the biographies of the vicars of Năsăud from the establishment of the institution to 1858. In addition to this, Macedon Pop translated Deharbe's *Large Catechism*, which was used as a textbook in the high schools and pedagogical schools in Transylvania for a long period of time.³⁵ Ioan Papiu distinguished himself as a prolific writer in the area of theological and pedagogical-literary scholarship. This is attested by his numerous religious, philosophical and pedagogical works, compiled in the form of sermons,³⁶ poems,

³⁴ *Dicționar*, p. 210-215.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 323-324.

³⁶ *Cuventări bisericesci: acomodate pentru ori ce tempu*, Gherla, Tipografia diecesana, Cu literele și editura lui Ioan Stein, vol. I, 1874; vol. II, 1876; vol. III, 1885; vol. IV, 1888. *Cuventări funebrale seau la casuri de morte*, Gherla, Tipografia diecesana, 1875. *Cuventări funebrale și iertatuni pentru diferite casuri de morte*, Gherla, Tipografia Aurora, P. A. Todoranu, vol. I, II, 1888.

philosophical tracts,³⁷ grammars and primers,³⁸ meant to contribute to the professional training and moral edification of the clergy, the teachers and the believers. Even though the majority of the canons from Gherla did not produce written works, as teachers at the Theological Seminary,³⁹ they nonetheless carried out a genuine and profound unwritten activity, shepherding their communities and shaping their parishioners' characters. Some of these canons were founders of churches and schools: Alexandru Erdös, Alexandru Bene, Vasile Pop and Gregoriu Pop.

Some of the canons in the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church also participated in the national-political emancipation struggle, fervently supporting Astra's objectives and activities and becoming involved in the major political events of the time. Many of the canons mentioned in this study were active members of Astra: Cucu Ioan, Samuil Ciceronescu, Coriolan Ardeleanu (Oradea), Macedon Pop, Demetriu Coroianu, Gregoriu Pop, Vasile Pop, Alexandru Bene (Gherla). Some, like Canon Gregoriu Pop, led, for a long time, the local branches of Astra.

Another field in which some of the canons were very active was political and national militantism. Ștefan Bilțiu was among those who displayed, without reservations, his national militantism. He was one of the authors of the memorandum submitted to the emperor in Baia Mare, in 1852. During the period of Austrian neo-absolutism, his house in Mocira was the headquarters of a secret association, entitled *The Elders' Society*, which consisted of local personalities who supported the national and political emancipation project of the Romanians in Transylvania. His constant support of the Romanian national cause led to his inclusion in numerous Transylvanian delegations that travelled to Vienna, Cluj and Sibiu, seeking to determine the authorities to fulfil the Romanians' political-national desiderata. He was also among the 48 Romanian deputies in the Transylvanian Diet, convened in Sibiu in 1863-1864.⁴⁰ Another member of the Sibiu Diet was the provost of the Chapter in Gherla, Macedon Pop, himself an active participant in the Romanian national-political emancipation movement in Transylvania. Macedon Pop attended

³⁷ *Cartea Sfântului Ioan Gură de Aur despre Preoție*, Gherla, 1869; *Viața după moarte*, Gherla, 1870; *Preotul ca ministru al Sacramentului Penitenții*, Gherla, 1895 – published under the pseudonym Arghirobarb; *Cugete și considerațiuni din experiența vieții*, Gherla, 1898 – published under the pseudonym Arghirobarb.

³⁸ *Legendariu sau carte de cetit pentru scholele populare românești de confesiunea greco-catolică din diecesea Gherlei*, edițiunea străformată II, Gherla, Tiparul Diecezan, 1895 or *Gramatica limbei române pentru școlile inferioare. Prelucrată după sistemul fonetismului moderat*, ed. II, Part I-III, Gherla, Tipografia diecezană, 1899.

³⁹ See the introductory study: *Preliminarii pentru o anchetă socio-antropologică asupra elitei ecleziastice române greco-catolice 1853-1918*, in *Dicționar*, p. 57.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 98-99.

the Assembly held in Blaj in May 1848, and in the autumn of 1861 he was a member of the Romanian delegation sent to Vienna, requesting the emperor to include the Romanian nation in the governance of the Transylvanian principality, in the context of the “political thaw” that took place in the monarchy in the early 1860s. On this occasion, he joined the delegates from Năsăud, who were in Vienna, attempting to retrieve the border guards’ funds and to secure rights for the descendants of the former border guards.⁴¹

A particular aspect concerns the involvement of the canons, in their capacity as members of the higher clergy, in the financial-banking sector.⁴² Thus, a considerable number of clergymen (above all, of canons)⁴³ were included in the management of the Romanian credit system in Transylvania. The clergy could assume leadership roles in the Romanian banks and they could also be found among the shareholders. An illustrative example is that of Canon Samuil Ciceronescu, who was a member of *Bihoreana* Bank’s board of directors for a long period.⁴⁴ To give another example, Coriolan Ardelean was among the founding members of *Arina* Bank in Sanislău and of *Drăganul* Bank in Beiuș.⁴⁵

It should be noted that many of the canons, including those examined in this study, bequeathed their wealth (money, movable and immovable assets) for the establishment of cultural-educational foundations, which were to support the outstanding students in the two dioceses. In this sense, the following canons of Oradea of priestly descent, who were subsequently appointed to episcopal sees, deserve mentioning: Iosif Papp-Szilágyi, who left a foundation of 20,000 Gulden for the payment of the teachers from the Gymnasium in Beiuș,⁴⁶ and Ioan Szabó, who bought a vineyard for the Domestic Seminary in Oradea and left a foundation of

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 323.

⁴² Marin Balog, *The Clergy’s Involvement in the Romanian Credit System from Transylvania during the Late Nineteenth and the Early Twentieth Centuries. Case Study: the Greek-Catholic Clergy, in Recruitment and Promotion among the Romanian Greek-Catholic Ecclesiastical Elite in Transylvania (1853-1918). A collection of Studies*, Cluj-Napoca, Mega, 2014, p. 163-180.

⁴³ In 1913, there were 571 clerics, of all ranks, in the entire Romanian banking system in Transylvania. They represented 14.38 percent of the total number of clerics, estimated, at that time, to be 3970. 16 of these 571 clerics were canons and 8 were vicars forane. Apud Vasile Dobrescu, *Funcții și funcționalități în sistemul de credit românesc din Transilvania până la Primul război mondial*, Târgu Mureș, Editura Universității “Petru Maior”, 2006, Annex A.

⁴⁴ *Dicționar*, p. 135.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 85.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 293.

1,000 Gulden.⁴⁷ Another canon from Oradea, Samuil Ciceronescu, left a foundation of 50,000 lei for the maintenance of the poorer churches.⁴⁸

In the Diocese of Gherla, some of the 12 canons presented here gathered, throughout their lives, major financial and economic resources, derived from inheritances or from their priestly and canonical emoluments,⁴⁹ which were often invested in movable and immovable property, as well as in bank assets. Examples may include Canons Macedon Pop, who left a fortune estimated at 5,000 Gulden, Alexandru Erdoş – 6000/7000 Gulden, Ioan Welle – 200000 Crowns, etc. However, there were also situations where the canons from Gherla left no inheritance for such purposes: see the cases of Ioan Gulovich, Eusebiu Cartice, etc. It should be noted that most of those who left substantial inheritances bequeathed them to the diocese as eparchial foundations.⁵⁰

Not only did many of the canons evoked in this study hold important ecclesiastical offices, but they were also renowned teachers and authors of textbooks of tremendous importance in the Romanian school system of the 19th and 20th centuries. They also wrote works of major importance in various fields, such as ecclesiastical or general history, theology, pedagogy, linguistics, philosophy, geography, or compiled dictionaries, etc., as they were not limited strictly to the status of men of the church. Some of them distinguished themselves in the national and cultural emancipation struggle of the Romanian nation in Transylvania. All of them had several things in common: they were canons who benefited from solid professional and intellectual training and they were the descendants of priestly families. They represented a segment of the cultural – and, for a while, even the political – vanguard of Romanian society, standing in for the lay intellectuals, to whose formation they contributed decisively, above all in their capacity as professors. Thus, as stated and shown in the pages above, our research legitimizes the idea that priestly dynasties represented a social-historical reality in the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church from 1853 to 1918. Priestly dynasties existed, indeed. They are not a myth, for their historical reality is attested by rigorous documents, ranging from academic records to study certificates, diplomas, etc. During the period we have analysed, they continued to represent an important source for candidates for the priesthood and a recruitment pool for the ecclesiastical elite. It should be noted that during this period, by the second or the third generation, the sons of priests were ready to engage on a higher level, assuming leadership roles in the ecclesiastical administration, from teachers in theological seminaries to archpriests, vicars forane, canons and bishops. Of course, this research presents a case study, analysing the

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 384.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

⁴⁹ The annual salaries of the canons from the Chapter of Gherla ranged between 1,800 Gulden, which went to the capitular provost, and 1,000 Gulden, which was the prebendary canon's salary.

⁵⁰ *Dicţionar*, p. 56.

priestly origin of the canons in two of the Greek-Catholic chapters in Transylvania, bringing to the attention of scholars a possible working method. We hope that it will foster a broader investigation that might be conducted from a sociological-historical and demographic standpoint, including through a paradigmatic analysis of the priestly dynasties that existed and functioned among both of the Romanian denominations in Transylvania.