

**“BABEȘ-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY OF CLUJ-NAPOCA**

**FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY**

*Population Studies and Minorities Studies Doctoral School*

**Doctoral Thesis**

*Between Tradition and Modernity.  
The Church and Rural World in Land of Lăpuș  
(Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century – First Half of The 20<sup>th</sup> Century)*

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**CLUJ-NAPOCA, 2020**



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**KEY WORDS: Land of Lăpuș, local identity, confessional identity, tradition, modernity, Orthodox Church, Greek Catholic Church, confessional school, monasticism, Lăpuș village.**

*Between tradition and modernity.  
The Church and The Rural World in Land of Lăpuș (late 19<sup>th</sup> century -  
first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century)  
(Doctoral Thesis Summary)*

The *Between Tradition and Modernity. The Church and the Rural World in Land of Lăpuș (Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century – First Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century)* doctoral thesis is the result of a research project that aims to research the northern Transylvanian village, punctually, in the Lăpuș area, from a historical perspective that has long been ignored by official history, of great deeds, phenomena, and personalities, which have guided the existence of communities, nations, or humanity as a whole. More precisely, the research aimed to descend to the lower level of society, to the daily dynamics of the life of individuals, families, communities in a well-defined area of morpho-geographical, cultural-religious, economic, etc. particularities. The approach involved a clearer specification of the methods and sources that were exploited during the research, however leaving the door open for new contributions that may arise during the growing interest of historical research for such type of approach, but also for the area which was the objective of the research, namely, Land of Lăpuș.

The first chapter, *Land of Lăpuș, dilemmas of a local identity, relevant historical landmarks*, aims two aspects from the coordinates of the local history of Lăpuș. As the concept of *Land of Lăpuș* has been used more and more frequently for several decades to designate the realities in the depression area of Lăpuș River and in the nearby villages, both locally and in academic environments, in the subchapter *Evolution of the concept of country*, the necessity appeared to clear out the extent to which the above mentioned area, totalling a number of 38 villages, corresponds from various points of view to the semantic field of the *land* term. Starting from the first documented attestations and reaching the present, outlining even some potential evolutionary routes of this area, it was possible to disseminate the existing distance between the Romanian *country*, in its traditional meaning of Romanian political autonomy at the beginning of the Middle Ages, the land from the ethnographic point of view, or the *land* as a regional development project in the context of a political and geographical redrawing of the European continent. The subchapter managed to inventory

most of the situations in which the Lăpuș area would respond in all three temporal coordinates, past, present and future, to the concept of land, managing to identify arguments for its preservation, its continued use, and – why not? – its promotion in the meaning of designating an ongoing identity construction.

The second subchapter, *A few historical coordinates of Land of Lăpuș before the Great Union*, aimed mainly to reinterpret the various already known possible episodes from the Lăpuș past, but whose highlighting in the sense of historical research, suffered from some shortcomings, such as already outdated visions in terms of historical phenomenology, lack of training and information of the various authors who have been concerned with the history of Lăpuș and even a certain audacity to get out of the beaten tracks by other researchers, a few decades ago or even centuries. It has succeeded in inventorying some significant episodes from the past of Land of Lăpuș in a new light, which focuses on man rather than the event.

The second chapter, *Church, School, Society*, intends to be a prospecting in the depths of the life of rural communities, in less approached aspects, at least in this area of Transylvania, aspects that emerge from the functioning of the triad Church – School – Society, triad which ensured, at least during the modern period, the sanding and survival of the Romanians in the territories inhabited by the Romanian population and under Austrian, and later Austro-Hungarian rule. Developed in six subchapters, the subjects followed to the level of elementary concreteness the consequences of Șaguna's reforms, not only on the functioning of ecclesiastical institutions, but also on the functioning of rural society, accustoming a conservative population with the change, setting afoot traditional reluctant communities all the time to change, contact with the new or stranger. Taken in order, the first subchapter debated in the most applied way possible, the functioning of church justice in those aspects that were allowed by the laws of the Austro-Hungarian state, more specifically the disciplinary investigation of confessional priests and teachers. Confessional democracy seen through the view of the elections triggered for holding various positions in the Romanian confessional autonomies, was the subject of the second subchapter, highlighting the slow and hesitant adaptation of rural communities to one of the fundamental principles of modernity, eligibility, introduced in the Transylvanian rural world, not through the ambitious projects of a reforming state, but through the contacts of an established conservative institution, the Orthodox Church, with the Protestant circles, especially the Lutheran ones. A major drag in the implementation of this modern principle has proved to be the preservation and perpetuation at the local community level of the tradition of inheritance of functions, more specifically the preservation and perpetuation of priests' dynasties. The concern of another

subchapter, the existence of priests' dynasties proved to be a much more concrete and even functional process, if not from the perspective of the advanced ideas of Şaguna's reforms, at least from the perspective of maintaining the balance of cohesion, solidarity and confessional belonging of the peasant communities to one of the two confessions, Orthodox or Greek Catholic. The religiosity of the peasantry, as it was, from extreme mystical experiences to superstition and witchcraft, proved to be a difficult filter to overcome and not to be ignored for any initiative related to imprinting another dynamic for these communities except for what they were willing to accept.

Modernity proposed to the communities in the Lăpuş area, which still met many constitutive elements of the notion of community, the contact with new and new ideas, with new challenges, some of them intertwining with the mission of the Church, the others, on the contrary, coming into contradiction with it. If the Reform affected to a limited extent the Romanian Transylvanian space, at least in the aspects of confessional affiliation, migration, the First World War, but also the ignorance of the local realities, caused the germs of neo-Protestantism, the most eloquent case occurring at Maşca, where the community is enflamed to resist under any form the church administration, a situation that proliferated against the background of the appearance of a parenthesis in the evolution of the local priests' dynasty, Herman. Without a state of their own, to support them, without an aristocracy or bourgeoisie to offer them material support, with a population left behind in poverty, the Romanian church communes were forced to face only with their own means the demands of modernity and traps put by a state that wanted their denationalization. New churches in the wall, fitting the cultic needs of growing communities, schools where an illiterate population is brought to light by education, salaries for priests and teachers, categories that had to be removed and clearly differentiated from the peasants, the indispensable preamble of the emergence of a Romanian rural elite, libraries, cemeteries, were just some of the challenges that these communities had to meet and which required a constant infusion of capital. Cash, contributions in labour and products, reminiscent of the medieval world, could no longer meet the needs of the institutional functioning of a church that also played the role of state for most aspects of community life among Transylvanian Romanians. This is the background on which the villages of Lăpuş have struggled for decades to learn, to be able to learn how money worked, the world around it, so that at the end of sustained efforts and struggles, these communities are the owners and beneficiaries of some spacious and comfortable wall mounted churches, lighted, beautified, endowed cult books, with qualified and well-paid priests, schools where all those who wished to find a book could find it, endowed with well-meaning well paid

qualified teachers, endowed with both libraries and latrines. Last but not least, the centuries-old church missionaryism met on the coordinates of the balance of the two centuries with civility, with the international movement against alcoholism, with the rigorous reactions provoked by the relaxation of morals prior to First World War, etc. Along with ASTRA, the Romanian Church proved to be the great guardian of the spiritual and biological resistance of the Romanian ethnic group to these challenges, also against the background of a situation in which the problem of survival of the Romanian people in Transylvania was acute in the two already mentioned aspects, national identity and biological being.

The third chapter was reserved for an aspect from which the Transylvanian Orthodox communities had been alienated from the repressive policy of an imperial state, namely the monastic life. The appearance of the Orthodox monastery from Rohia proved to be the germs of a phenomenon of a magnitude that the initiators could imagine, but which was far beyond the possibilities of the local environment, proposing at least in the first two decades of operation of this monastery, a continuous contact and a continuous effort to adapt to the new, for both the church structures and the local population. *The resurgence of monastic life. Abbots, processions, cultural models*, is the third chapter of the work, which, like the previous ones, proposed a different approach than those in the light of which the history of Rohia Monastery was presented, in already existing monographic works. The act of founding on which the first subchapter insisted is discovered after 100 years as an enterprise of a vicar located in a difficult position to spot, between despair and extreme audacity, between the Theophanic transcendence and the rigid concreteness of material constraints. Having all the constitutive premises of a failure, the first initiative of this kind in Transylvania after the Union, was invigorated by the figure of an abbot from other dimensions of Orthodoxy, Gherontie Guțu, whose figure the current research revealed in an entire subchapter. The implementation of Eastern monasticism in a predominantly Greek-Catholic environment, by a Bessarabian abbot, was not only a novelty for Land of Lăpuș, but also a continuous source of suspicion, distrust, searches regarding attitudes towards monks coming from the local Orthodox clergy, ordinary believers, public authorities or from the competing confession, the Greek Catholic, clergy and laity alike. After its establishment as a result of a personal approach of the vicar Nicolae Gherman, Rohia Monastery becomes the pivot in the region of a true counter-offensive of the Orthodox cult in northern Transylvania, dominated by the Greek-Catholic cult, a movement that became evident after 1918, the pre-war period, a phenomenon whose historical study is only at the beginning, with reference to the Rohia Monastery being a novelty. As the monastic tradition had been extinguished in the area for a

long time, bringing the monks, initially from the Diocese of Argeş, and then almost exclusively from Bessarabia, required a great effort of adaptation from both the locals and the naturalized monks. The arrival of Gherontie Guţu, with his image and attitude as a Russian pilgrim, deeply shocked the conscience of his contemporaries, from Bishop Nicolae Ivan, his protector, to the last clergyman or believer from Lăpuş. The correspondence between the valiant bishop and the picturesque abbot provided a description in the mirror of the two, which contain elements close to the candour of Dostoevsky's novels.

The two parallel construction sites, the liquidation of the monastery's debt and the construction of a monastic community, in an area without any tradition in this regard, were the two parallel construction sites, which gave the measure of this abbot's personality, but in the same proportion exhausted his biological being, his death leading to the end of the second stage in the evolution of the monastic settlement, a stage that can be characterized without mistake as the second foundation, a phenomenon that occupies the second subchapter of research related to monastic life. Despite the difficulties of the first decade of operation, due to Gherontie Guţu the easily predictable bankruptcy of the Rohia Monastery did not happen. Fighting with the debts and the local collective mentality, Gherontie Guţu managed to impress on the young and rustic monastic settlement what he had proposed from the beginning, although at first sight it may seem emphatic, the status of Romanian Zion. That this is exactly what happened, the fourth subchapter, *Missionaryism and Modelling*, proves that, where we can see how Rohia becomes a centre of irradiation of Orthodox values in northern Transylvania and a starting point for the missionary initiatives in the Greek Catholic, and later in the neo-Protestant environment. The last subchapter, other beginnings, focused on the period between Gherontie Guţu's death and the surrender of the north-western Transylvania in 1940, a significant period in the evolution of the monastery, capturing what can be called the local, Transylvanian response to the challenges of monastic life. What happened in the approximately three years, after Gherontie Guţu's death, was nothing more than the coagulation of a new community, in the light of an organizational vision, completely different from that of Gherontie Guţu, a vision impregnated with western influences in which order, rigor, contractual relationship, were beginning to play an increasingly important role. However, the monks of Bessarabian origin will continue to dominate the community of the monastery until 1940, when we can talk in Rohia about the beginnings of a Transylvanian monasticism. The issue of these three years on the eve of Second World War was disseminated in the last subchapter, *Other Beginnings*.

The last chapter, the fourth, *The Challenge of Modernity*, proposes an approach of Lăpuș society a century ago, from a perspective much closer to ethnography, sociology, psychology. Titled *The Challenge of Modernity*, this chapter can claim to be part of a cultural history of Lăpuș County at the turn between the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, trying to capture both the continuance and the changes in the peasant's relationship to some of the fundamental landmarks of his existence. The first subchapter, *Space, Time and Celebration for the Lăpuș peasant. Perception and representation*, marks the various hypostases in which the peasant, individually, but also the community as a whole, as a unity, interacts with these three major coordinates of existence in a world where the sacred and the profane, religiosity and superstition, the known and the unknown, fear and curiosity, merge, intertwine, sometimes work in tandem. The place, being or moment is loaded or emptied of content, oscillates between known and unknown, records transfers of symbolic or concrete values, at the end of all these oscillations the world image emerges that at the same time struggles in the direction of change, but also stubborn to continue its traditional existence. The manner in which tradition competes with modernity, give colour to the image of a world, the Romanian one, like then, can be posted between a degenerated tradition and a failed modernity. The second subchapter focused on the peasant house, one of the fundamental landmarks of the Romanian peasant's life. The research looked for the house in a concrete way, as it was, with its building procedure, with its level of comfort, with its own functionality, and especially the populated house, the inhabited house, the family home. The temptation to approach the house in a stylized, spiritualized vision, adorned with many symbols and messages, was opposed by the concreteness of the house, as it was, dominated by the need to ensure a minimum living conditions for a peasant family, which consumes anyway existence, always, at the limits of subsistence. More specifically, an attempt was made to capture the Lăpuș house in what was basically the peasant house, an answer that was as simple as possible and useful. The last subchapter was reserved for the analysis of the rural society, of the multiple and diverse ways in which individuals interact at the level of family, ethnicity or community, but also of the way in which the various communities react to each other. During the period subscribed to the research project, the communities of Lăpuș continued to keep massively their archaic character, the elements of the new gradually infiltrating, more and more visible in the interwar period, because then, the Second World War and what followed to lead to a real dislocation of the archaic village and to result in some communities in a position difficult to locate between rural and urban, between traditional and modern.