

SOME ASPECTS CONCERNING THE CATHOLIC PROPAGANDA IN THE BALKANS. THE AROMANIAN CASE

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ABSTRACT

At the end of the 19th century, there have been some attempts at confessional proselytism in the Balkan targeting the Aromanian communities, partly encouraged by the inspector Apostol Mărgărit, who was in close relations with the abbot Faveyrial, the leader of the Order of Lazarusians from Monastir (Bitola). Minister D. A. Sturdza himself supported such an idea by relying "on the entry of Romanians into the Catholic orbit".²² However, the transition to Catholicism did not increase, but provided the basis for an accusation often used by the patriarchal party which considered that the use of a liturgical language of Latin origin was the favourite channel for the transition to the Roman confession.

Keywords: Aromanians, Catholic Church, Macedonia, Balkans, nationalism.

THE CONTEXT

The first school inspector to report on the situation of all Romanian schools in the Balkan Peninsula was appointed in 1870 in the person of Apostol Mărgărit²³, an Aromanian teacher from Avdela, a graduate of the Greek high school in Ianina as young as 38 years old²⁴.

In 1878, the position of *Inspector General of the Romanian Schools in the Balkans*, based in Bitolia²⁵, was officially established. From the very beginning, it was foreseen that the holder of this position would take over part of the attributes of the Romanian diplomatic representative from Constantinople²⁶, being an intercessor between the Aromanian communities and the government from Bucharest.

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²² Gheorghe Carageani, *Studii Aromâne*, Bucureşti, Fundația Culturală Română, 1999, p. 266.

²³ Mihail Cordescu, *Istoricul școalelor române din Turcia, Sofia și Turtucaia din Bulgaria*, Bucureşti, 1906, p. 28.

²⁴ Victor Papacostea, Mihail Regleanu, *Documentele Redeușteptării Macedoromâne*, Nicolae Șerban Tanașoca, Ștefan Vâlcu (ed.), Bucureşti, Editura Predania, 2012, p. 428.

²⁵ Simion Țovaru, *Problema școlii românești din Balcani*, Bucureşti, 1934, p. 28.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Despite the complaints received during his life, but also posthumously, the activity of the first inspector, Apostol Mărgărit, produced a strong school animation in the Balkans, the large number of primary schools established, the creation of secondary education in the area being his main achievements.

At the time, the discretionary powers of the inspector and the legitimacy he sometimes abused were criticized:

“However, it was not reasonable to create such an inspector position, to abandon the leadership of the Romanian cultural movement on the shoulders of the holder, pouring money annually from the country's budget for school maintenance, without having the possibility of control to know what is done and how it works”²⁷.

At the same time, the entire system of implementation of Romanian education in the Balkans was blamed for not involving the community that was a decisive factor in school affairs. The system of communities operating in Turkey provided that they could manage their own school and church affairs through the ephorates and guardianships led by their own representatives. This was the mechanism used by the Bulgarians to promote their cultural and ecclesiastical cause in the area. Leaving on the field as a total deciding factor only the person of the inspector, the impression was created of private and not community schools, which would have ensured a different consistency of educational efforts in the area²⁸.

If when Apostol Mărgărit started his activity, the representation of the Romanian state in the field was rather weakly consolidated, the end of the 19th century occasioned also the creation of consular networks in the Balkans. Simion Țovaru, considers that at this moment there are a series of frictions between the two authorities that were answering to Bucharest: the inspector and the consul. The same author appreciated that the animosities were also dictated by some political considerations, the inspector's function being the work of the liberals, in this case Ion Brătianu, and the merit of setting up consulates in the Balkans being assumed by the conservative government²⁹.

The establishment of the second consulate in Macedonia in Bitola on June 1st, 1892 by the Conservatives (accomplishment of the former plenipotentiary envoy to Constantinople and Foreign Minister Alexandru Lahovary) led to numerous tensions with Inspector Mărgărit, who resided in the same city. The consul together with several local notables dissatisfied with the excessive authority of the inspector called for the establishment of a new governing body of the schools: the school ephorates³⁰. The idea of ephorates was used by both Greeks and Bulgarians

²⁷ „Nu era însă rezonabil a se crea un atare post de inspector, spre a abandona pe seama titularului conducerea mișcării culturale române, svârbind anual bani din bugetul țării pentru întreținerea școalelor, fără să aibi posibilitatea de control spre a ști ce se face și cum se lucrează!” Eugen Ionescu, *Cauza românească în Turcia Europeană*, București, Tipografia Gutenberg, 1906, p. 27.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²⁹ Simion Țovaru, *op.cit.*, p. 33.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

(after 1870) and consisted of providing an autonomous status to schools and churches that were fully or partially financially supported by the local community. In a memorandum prepared by a number of Aromanian teachers in 1900, it was expected that with the success of the awakening of the national consciousness, the communal and church revenues in the hands of the Grecofiles would be used for cultural institutions, a context in which the Romanian state would not be so financially burdened³¹. The institution of school ephorates was also used by other nationalities having as their main task the administration of school and church property; thus, schools no longer had a particular character, as it was until the advent of iradela. The schools belonged to the teacher or tutor in whose name the opening authorization was issued. If the ephorates were to function, the schools would become public, belonging to the Romanian nation, as the authors of the memoir stated³².

THE ACCUSATIONS

Under these conditions, both the inspectorate and the consulate became hotbeds of intrigue of the parties harmful to the school³³. The emergence of the conflict had several causes that were not foreign to a number of external factors interested in channelling the Aromanian community to other desiderata. One of the professors from Bitolia, Nicolae Maimuca, who later became one of Mărgărit's successors, was acid to him, accusing that the money was spent for the political interests of a foreign state through Mărgărit, which, despite what he claimed, was aimed at weakening the national feeling of the Romanians in the city of Bitolia. The same appellant stated that Inspector Mărgărit had entered into close relations with the Austrian consul in Bitolia, Knapitch, in the years 1880–1881, when the priest Faveyrial practically became his intimate adviser. Faveyrial worked with his superior, Monsignor Bonnetti, the head of the Catholic mission in Thessaloniki. The plan devised by Mărgărit, in Maimuca's opinion, was to convert all Romanians to Catholicism and then to form a strong current that would oppose the policy of the states that had aspirations over Macedonia, practically facilitating the political projects of Austria. The arrival in those years in Bitolia of Vasile Glodariu as director and Corvin as a teacher at the Romanian High School, both Austrian subjects (Transylvanian Romanians) made Knapitch even more confident in his plan of success. Once Monsignor Bonetti became the apostolic nuncio to Constantinople, Catholic proselytism took off, as nuncio, he made several visits to Macedonia and even to the Romanian high school in Bitolia. Abbot Faveyrial even set up a Catholic seminary inside the Romanian boarding school in Bitolia, and the

³¹ ***, *Scurtă privire asupra chestiunii macedo-române*, București, 1900, p. 21.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³³ Simion Țovaru, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

seminarians and a large number of scholarship holders regularly went to the Catholic Church whose choir was made up of Romanian scholarship holders who “worship according to the Catholic rite”³⁴. An 1884 letter from the Apostol Mărgărit showed that he was working in agreement with the French ambassador to Constantinople and the papal mission³⁵. In 1887, the papal nuncio of Constantinople, Monsignor Boneti was triumphantly received in the schools from Monastir at the order of Mărgărit. The result of these secret negotiations undertaken by Apostol Mărgărit was, in the view of his mentioned critic, the disinterest of the Aromanians towards the schools endorsed by him, but also towards the support that the Romanian state continued to give to this inspector³⁶.

The Greek professor Antoine Spiliotopoulos confessed at the beginning of the 20th century evaluating from the Greek perspective the Romanian propaganda that it had hired the abbot Faveyrial who, although supported by Austria-Hungary and other Catholic states, was substantially paid by the Romanian state with about 400,000 gold francs annually in order to create a network of Romanian schools, boarding houses and colleges in the villages of Monastir, Janina and Thessaloniki. The amount advanced by Spiliotopoulos is really fabulous considering that to these funds further funds were added, from the perspective of the Greek academic, from the Macedonian-Romanian Society and others³⁷.

The same Maimuca declared that after 1890 all the students of the boarding school were obliged to go to the Catholic Church and sing the *Te Deum* for the Emperor of Austria. The Austrian government ensured, alongside the king of Romania, that Mărgărit had all the leadership of the Aromanian cause without the direct interference of the Ministry of Public Instruction. Mărgărit himself declared that “he has a peremptory order sanctioned by the king of Romania”³⁸. About the authoritarian way in which the inspector led the school activity, Maimuca confessed that “he has absolute power over the Macedonian-Romanian issue, his relations are Russian decrees”³⁹... Mărgărit being supported by D.A. Sturdza, and once his star sets, Mărgărit will remain isolated and unmasked⁴⁰.

In 1890, Mărgărit’s hostile party began to be more and more coagulated, even addressing a memorandum signed by 55 people to the Bitolia inspector and asking

³⁴ Nicolae Maimuca to George Murnu, 27 January 1891, Bitolia. From the private collection of Professor Nicolae Șerban Tanașoca.

³⁵ Ștefan Mihăileanu, *Les Roumains Macedoniens et les intrigues Etrangères*, București, 1892, p. 18.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

³⁷ Antoine Th. Spiliotopoulos, *La Macedoine et l'hellenisme sa force et ses droits*, Atena, Imprimerie Apostolopoulos, 1904, p. 69.

³⁸ Nicolae Maimuca to George Murnu, 27 January 1891, Bitolia. From the private collection of Professor Nicolae Șerban Tanașoca.

³⁹ “are o putere absolută asupra chestiunii macedo-române raporturile sale sunt ucazuri rusești”, *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Nicolae Maimuca to George Murnu, 24 April 1898, Monastir. From the private collection of Professor Nicolae Șerban Tanașoca.

him on behalf of the community in that city to recognize the ephorate of the Romanian schools showing that Mărgărit was a foreign agent and requesting his non-interference. The memorandum was signed by 55 people⁴¹.

In the same year, another protest was sent to the Ministry of Instruction in Bucharest, requesting:

“[the cessation of the] papist propaganda within the high school in Bitolia, which is done by the “papist” priest [nn. Faveyrial] who uses all means to make students papists in order to insult our religion and our priests; he gives the students dogmatic sermons leading them in groups to the papist chapel with Mărgărit in the lead, even the high school premises being the property of the papist mission, which has a secret communication with the mission house ... ”⁴².

On June 17th, 1891, Abbot Lobry, the superior of the Lazarusians of Constantinople, wrote a letter to Father Faveyrial recalling the help promised to them by Mărgărit. According to Ștefan Mihăileanu, this Catholic agitation was not done with Austrian support, but with French support. He suggested that Mărgărit acted without the actors in Bucharest knowing the real stake of his deeds. The closeness of the Aromanian inspector to the abbot Faveyrial was a really problematic one given that he had repeatedly declared that the Romanians and the Albanians should organize themselves under the protection of the sultan and the pope⁴³.

Even if this scenario of religious union with a church authority other than that of the Patriarch of Constantinople was based on a political calculation that would have favored an exit from under the influence of the Greek clergy and the power of assimilation of the liturgical language, still Eastern spirituality assumed for centuries under the most difficult conditions it was not considered a circumstantial accessory for the Aromanian communities⁴⁴. Here is the opinion of one of the most well-known Aromanian leaders on the Catholic offer:

“Maybe there are among the Macedonian Romanians individuals who believe that being put under the pope’s protection would be beneficial, but none of those who sincerely believe in the good of the Romanians would accept this: the Aromanians would rather give up their national individuality than faith. Apostol Mărgărit knows

⁴¹ Nicolae Maimuca to George Murnu, 13 December 1890, Bitolia. From the private collection of Professor Nicolae Șerban Tanașoca.

⁴² “propagandei papistașe din cadrul liceului din Bitolia ce se face prin preotul „papistaș” [nn. Faveyrial] ce întrebuințează toate mijloacele spre a face papistași pe elevi ca să insulte religiunea și preoții noștri; ține elevilor predici dogmatice ducându-i în corpore la capela papistașă cu Mărgărit în frunte, până și localul liceului fiind proprietatea misiunii papistașe aceasta având comunicație secretă cu locuința misiunii...”. Dimitrie Cosmulei, *Memoriu despre starea școlilor românesce din Macedonia*, București, 1891, p. 47.

⁴³ Ștefan Mihăileanu, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁴⁴ It should be noted that in history there are no mass transitions of Aromanian Orthodox to Islam (except for the town of Nânta in Meglenia), a situation that we do not meet again in other Orthodox nations in the 19th century in the Ottoman Empire.

that the Aromanians were angry with the Romanian culture because it was presented to them under a Catholic light⁴⁵.

Of course, such an accusation, which may not be fully verified, has been cleverly speculated by the Grecophile party, which accused Bucharest of intending to bring Catholicism to Greek territories through schools and churches. On the other hand, the hostility shown by a series of Aromanian notables towards Mărgărit's actions also comes against the background of the progress of the school-educational action, of the increasing number of graduates of the Romanian cultural institutes from Macedonia and Epirus. The best of this new elite come with a new vision of cultural action that invariably conflicts with the views of the old Apostol Mărgărit. The growing expectations and the desire to instil an alert advance on the national question make that in 1894 a Romanian Ephorate was set up in Bitolia to lead the schools and to represent them before the Ottoman authorities. It will be officially recognized by both the Ottoman government and the government in Bucharest⁴⁶. Basically, this recognition was made in the absence of general legislation providing this right, the act itself being an exception that recognized a state of affairs, namely that of the desire of some Aromanian communities to break away from the Greek ephorates and to pursue their own cultural but also ecclesiastical path, the latter much more difficult to obtain.

Regarding the school organization, until 1898 all the schools in the Balkans were subordinated to an inspector-administrator in the person of the principal of the primary school in Vlaho-Clisura, Apostol Mărgărit. At the end of the century, the inspector was accompanied by two school inspectors, one for Macedonia and one for Epirus-Thessaly. In addition to these structures, in Constantinople there was also a person in charge of the church and school affairs of the Romanians in Turkey⁴⁷.

Since 1898, two inspection districts were created, one for Macedonia and one for Epirus and Albania. In 1900, a new inspectorate was established only for Albania, a position taken over by Elie Papahagi. The fiscal year 1905-1906 divided the constituency Albania, holder Andrei Balamaci, into two regions Korița and Berat-Elbasan, holder Anton Becea⁴⁸.

⁴⁵ "Poate că sunt printre românii macedoneni inși care cred că punerea sub protecția papei ar fi benefică, însă nimeni dintre cei care cred cu sinceritate în binele românilor nu ar accepta aceasta: mai degrabă aromânii renunță la individualitatea lor națională decât la credință. Apostol Margarit știe că aromânii s-au supărat pe cultura română pentru că ea le-a fost prezentată sub o lumină catolică.", *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴⁶ Gheorghe Zbucnea, Stelian Brezianu (coord.), *Românii de la sud de Dunăre. Documente*, București, Arhivele Naționale ale României, 1997, p. 173.

⁴⁷ Adina Berciu Drăghicescu, *Școli și biserici românești din Peninsula Balcanică*, București, Ed. Universității din București, 2004, p. 145.

⁴⁸ Simion Măndrescu, „Școli și biserici românești în Albania”, în *Graiul Românesc*, an I, nr. 2, februarie 1927, pp. 49–50.

In order to undermine the authority of the inspector, the consuls were the ones who supported from the shadows the creation of school ephorates, thus launching as early as 1895 the cycle of endless debates in the Aromanian communities⁴⁹. In time, two types of Romanian schools were created in the Balkans: some dependent on the inspectorate and others “ephoral” led by ephorates and supported by the consulate⁵⁰. At the end of 1900, as a result of numerous complaints received by the Ministry of Cults and Instruction, C. C. Arion, having decided to reduce the financial aid sent south of the Danube, decided to let the draft budget for schools be made by the Romanian consul at Bitolia in agreement with the inspectors and principals of the schools. The inspector’s person is not even mentioned at the consultations, Mărgărit being thus removed from a prerogative that he had used intensely until then⁵¹. On September 1st, 1902, Apostol Mărgărit was retired from the position of General Inspector of Romanian Schools and Churches. He died a year later, in 1903⁵².

At a time when everything had to be done, the appreciation of the activity of the Apostol Mărgărit must be done *cum grano salis*.

Even Ionel Brătianu mentioned in the plenary of the parliament about the Aromanian community from Perivole who asked for papal protection, no longer enduring the harassment of the Greek clergy. At the end of the 19th century, we find some attempts at confessional proselytism, partly encouraged by the inspector Apostol Mărgărit, who was in close relations with the abbot Faveyrial, the leader of the Order of Lazarusians from Monastir (Bitola). Minister D. A. Sturdza himself supported such an idea by relying “on the entry of Romanians into the Catholic orbit”⁵³. However, the transition to Catholicism did not increase, but provided the basis for an accusation often used by the patriarchal party which considered that the use of a liturgical language of Latin origin was the favourite channel for the transition to the Roman confession.

FINAL REMARKS

Although the documents we consulted did not show any active involvement of the Apostol Mărgărit in the Catholic propaganda actions targeting the Aromanian communities in the Balkans, this was one of the accusations insistently conveyed by Greek leaders frightened by the loss of influence in the area.

⁴⁹ Simion Țovaru, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁵⁰ Eugen Ionescu, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁵¹ Adina Berciu Drăghicescu, *op. cit.*, p. 170, C.C. Arion către ministrul Afacerilor Străine, Alexandru Marghiloman, 1900.

⁵² Victor Papacostea, Mihail Regleanu, *Documentele Redeușteptării Macedoromâne*, Nicolae Șerban Tanașoca, Ștefan Vâlcu (ed.), Editura Predania, București, 2012, p. 428.

⁵³ “pe intrarea românilor în orbita catolică” – Gheorghe Carageani, *Studii Aromâne*, București, Fundația Culturală Română, 1999, p. 266.

In a context in which the quality of Orthodoxy was often translated as Greek identity, the strategy of Apostol Mărgărit, condemned by some Aromanians of the time, can be interpreted as an attempt to save Aromanian communities from denationalization by the action of the Greek Ecumenical Patriarchate. His close relations with some members of the Catholic clergy in Macedonia can be seen in the wake of this idea.

For the movement of emancipation of the Aromanians from the end of the 19th century, Apostol Mărgărit remains one of the founding fathers, despite his opponents, both from the time in which he lived and later.

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