

FROM POPA BUCUR CRĂCIUN TO POPA BUCUR ȘOLNAL. THE PROCESS OF ETHNIC ASSIMILATION OF A ROMANIAN COMMUNITY IN HARGHITA COUNTY AT THE END OF THE 18TH – BEGINNING OF THE 19TH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

Archival sources from the 18th–19th centuries allow us to reconstruct, at least partially, the process by which a true dynasty of Romanian priests from south-eastern Transylvania changed their family name from a Romanian one to a Hungarian one, most probably in an attempt to “fit in” in the middle of a Hungarian-dominated region.

Keywords: ethnic assimilation, Transylvania, Plăieșii de Jos, Harghita.

INTRODUCTION

The Romanian community of Plăieșii de Jos commune (Harghita county) has been the subject of several previous studies in which the depth of the phenomenon of ethnic assimilation of Romanians within Romania was noted¹⁸³. A previous field research¹⁸⁴ revealed the illustration of this process of ethnic assimilation in the cemetery of the local Orthodox church, this time we will focus on archival sources to try to describe the causes of ethnic assimilation of Romanians.

The Romanian church in Plăieșii de Jos dates back to 1729¹⁸⁵, most probably a wooden construction that was replaced in 1750¹⁸⁶. At this date in Plăieșii de Jos

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¹⁸³ Radu Baltasiu, Ovidiana Bulumac and Gabriel Săpunaru, *Slăbirea comunității românești din Harghita-Covasna [The weakening of the Romanian community in Harghita-Covasna]*, Bucharest, Ethnological Publishing House, 2013, p. 120.

¹⁸⁴ George Damian Mocanu and Narcis Rupe, “The hungarianization of names and inscriptions on the crosses in the cemetery of Plăieșii de Jos – a form of manifestation of ethnic assimilation”, in *Etnosfera*, No. 1/2024, pp. 63–70.

¹⁸⁵ Nicoleta Ploșnea, *Biserici, școli, comunități rurale românești din Covasna și Harghita (1850–1918) [Churches, schools, Romanian rural communities in Covasna and Harghita (1850–1918)]*, Grai Românesc Publishing House, 2012, p. 438.

¹⁸⁶ Ion Ranca, *Românii din scaunele secuiești [Romanians from the Szekler Seats]*, Vol. 2, Târgu Mureș, Pax Historica Publishing House, 1997, p. 196.

there were 433 Greek-Catholic believers registered in the village, but without a priest¹⁸⁷. The new church built by the Romanian community is recorded in 1760, when two priests served 86 families¹⁸⁸. According to archival data, during the 18th – 19th centuries the names of the villages that made up the commune of Plăieșii de Jos, as used by the Romanians in the area, were as follows: Satu Nou (Cașinu Nou), Iacfalău (Iacobeni), Imper (Imper), Satu de Jos (Plăieșii de Jos) and Satu de Sus (Plăieșii de Sus). Doboii is a village inhabited exclusively by Romanians, attested in the 18th century around the Romanian church, but which never received an official administrative status – we have chosen to use the name “church of Doboii” to refer to the church that served the Romanian community in the villages listed above.

THE PARISH REGISTERS

The parish registers of the church of Doboii kept at the National Archives of Harghita County represent a series of extremely interesting and illustrative documents for the process of Magyarization of the Romanian community in this region. Probably the most interesting document in this series is the oldest parish register of the Romanian community – wrongly dated by the National Archives 1793–1852, in reality the register covers the period 1787–1853¹⁸⁹. This parish register contains 89 pages, 87 of which are written, distributed as follows: pages 1 – 61 registration of baptisms for the years 1787–1850, pages 62 – 76 registration of marriages for the years 1789–1853, pages 77 – 78 registration of correspondence, pages 81 – 83 registration of baptisms for the years 1851–1853, page 84 registration of deaths 1787–1788, pages 85 – 89 various notes. The title of the table that makes up the parish register of the church of Doboii is worded as follows: “Protocol of those baptized in the parish of Cașinului, Diocese of Făgărașului, Eparchy of Harom Csikului”. The headings of the table are as follows: “Year”, “Month”, “Day”, “Baptizer”, “Infant”, “Parents”, “Godparents”, “Law” (meaning confession), “Place”.

The entries in this register were made in Romanian language, in chronological order, by the following priests: priest Ion (1787–1789), priest Bucur Crăciun/Șolnai (1789–1834), priest Ștefan Șolnai (1826), priest Ioan Șolnai (1834–1853). Priests Ion, Bucur Crăciun/Șolnai, Ștefan Șolnai used the Cyrillic alphabet for recording baptisms, marriages and deaths, but after 1834 priest Ioan Șolnai switched to writing the records in Romanian with the Latin alphabet using the Hungarian orthographic rules – which contributed to the acceleration of the Hungarianization of the names of Romanians in the region. Priest Ioan Șolnai’s choice to use the Hungarian spelling rules is explained by the fact that the spelling rules of the Romanian language written

¹⁸⁷ Augustin Bunea, “Statistica românilor din Transilvania în anul 1750” [“Statistics of the Romanians in Transylvania in 1750”], in *Transilvania*, No. 9, 1901, p. 248.

¹⁸⁸ Virgil Ciobanu, *Statistica românilor ardeleni din 1760–1762 [Statistics of Transylvanian Romanians from 1760 – 1762]*, in *Yearbook of the Institute of National History*, 3, 1924–1925, p. 681.

¹⁸⁹ D.J.A.N. Harghita, *Colecția Registre Parohiale [Parish Registers Collection]*, Register 302.

in the Latin alphabet were not fixed until the second half of the 19th century. In fact, even Ioan Șolnai would abandon the Hungarian orthographic rules after 1860 in the parish registers of this period. The parish register that we analyze here reflects a very interesting phenomenon, especially during the lifetime of the priest Bucur Crăciun/Șolnai: an external pressure to abandon the Cyrillic alphabet, which we will discuss in the following lines.

It is worth noting that there is a difference in the handwriting of the above-mentioned priests: the priests Ion and Bucur Crăciun/Șolnai used Cyrillic script and it is obvious that writing was an occasional activity for them, while the priest Ștefan Șolnai wrote cursive and calligraphic, a testimony to the fact that he had attended several years of school at one of the Greek-Catholic seminaries in Transylvania, the same being the case for the priest Ioan Șolnai.

THE DYNASTY OF THE ȘOLNAI PRIESTS

The purpose of this article is to trace and, as much as possible, to explain the transformation at the beginning of the 19th century of the family name of a whole dynasty of Romanian priests from Harghita and Covasna counties. A methodological clarification is necessary. The name Șolnai appears in various variants in different documents of the 19th century, depending on the period, who was writing it, what alphabet was used and who was the addressee of the document: a) with the Cyrillic alphabet the name was usually written phonetically in the form “Шолной/ Șolnoi” but also “Шолнай/Șolnai”; b) in documents that came into contact with the Hungarian-speaking administration in Transylvania or in those written in compliance with the spelling rules of the Hungarian language one of the forms “Solnay/Solnaj” is used; c) the bearers of this name prefer, after the transition to the Latin alphabet, in the vast majority of cases the form “Șolnai”, which is also used in official documents and printed publications of the Greek-Catholic Church. In the following we will use the latter variant of the name.

The origin of the name Șolnai is relatively obscure, the word having no obvious or recorded etymology. In an article entitled “Din Săcuime” (From Săcuime) published in the “Gazeta Transilvaniei” of November 14, 1907, the priest Vasiliu Urzică from Varviz states that:

“the priest Ioan Solnaj from Casonul Mare, who originated from the commune of Șona in the Făgăraș region, descendant of the famous Bucur family”¹⁹⁰.

The genealogical information provided by the priest Vasiliu Urzică mixes real data with a great dose of imagination: the priest Ioan Șolnai who was alive in 1907

¹⁹⁰ „preotul Ioan Solnaj dela Casonul Mare, care și-a tras originea din comuna Șona din ținutul Făgărașului, descendent al vestitei familii Bucur”, in ***, *Românii din Treiscaune, Ciuc, Giurgeu și Odorhei, în presa din Transilvania până în anul 1918 [Romanians from Treiscaune, Ciuc, Giurgeu and Odorhei, in the Transylvanian press until 1918]*, St. Gheorghe, Eurocarpatica Publishing House, 2021, p. 144.

was indeed the great-grandson of the priest Bucur from Doboï, but his surname was Crăciun, later changed to Șolnai. The descent from the commune of Șona in the Făgăraș region seems rather intended to explain the Hungarian-sounding name by the similarity Șona/Șolnai. We can understand the attempt of the priest Vasile Urzică to promote a Făgărașean origin of the Șolnai family in the 20th century if we consider the fact that Ioan Șolnai was since 1900 the protopope of the Romanian churches in Trei Scaune – without excluding the possibility that the priest Bucur Crăciun/Șolnai was really originally from the village of Șona.

On the basis of the yearbooks of the Transylvanian Greek-Catholic Church, the records and notes in the parish registers of the church of Doboï, as well as some historical studies, we will try in the following lines to reconstruct the family tree of the Crăciun/Șolnai family, which gave several successive generations of priests and intellectuals of the Romanians from Harghita and Covasna counties in the 19th century.

1. Bucur Crăciun/Șolnai

The founder of a true dynasty of Romanian priests in the region of today's Harghita and Covasna counties, Bucur Crăciun became a priest in the village of Doboï on April 23, 1789¹⁹¹. He was a priest in Casonul Mare until 1834, a long period of 44 years. Until 1826 he used the name Bucur Crăciun – from 1826, most probably under the pressure of his sons, he started to call himself Bucur Șolnoi. According to the entries in the parish register, the priest Bucur Crăciun/Șolnai refused until his death to record the "Greek-Catholic" confession, to the faith of those baptized/ married/buried he preferred to record the confession as "pravoslavnic" (the Slavonic translation of the Orthodox term) or "Greek" – a testimony to and an effect of the confessional tensions and conflicts among the Romanians in 18th century Transylvanian Transylvania. He certainly knew how to distinguish between the various Christian confessions existing in Transylvania: at a wedding on July 10, 1794, he records that "he is of the Greek law, but she is a popist"¹⁹², at a baptism on January 23, 1798, he notes that "the godfather is popist, the godson is of the Greek law"¹⁹³.

We don't know very many details about the life of priest Bucur Crăciun/ Șolnai – he was married to Maria, with whom he had at least 5 sons: Ștefan, Ioan, Gheorghe, Ignatie and Andrei. We also know that he was an organized and dedicated man to his church, at least this is attested by the parish register he kept, which he wrote in a neat and mostly tidy hand, although it is obvious that priest Bucur's hand was more used to hard work than to quill and inkwell. Most likely when he came to Doboï in 1789 he was married and had at least two sons – Ștefan and Ioan – who from 1810–1811 appear in the documents as adults, most probably born a few years before 1793 when George's baptism is recorded. The first record of the birth of a child of the

¹⁹¹ D.J.A.N. Harghita, *Colecția Registre Parohiale [Parish Registers Collection]*, Register 302, Cover II.

¹⁹² *Ibidem*, f. 62v.

¹⁹³ *Ibidem*, f. 6v.

priest Bucur Crăciun/ Şolnai is for his fourth son to whom he dedicated a special note: “Year 1795 was born our child Ignatie December 16”¹⁹⁴, the fifth son of the priest Bucur Crăciun/Şolnai was baptized Andrei on November 29, 1798¹⁹⁵. In the institutional memory of the Greek-Catholic Church, this priest remained with the name Bucur Şolnai, according to the Greek-Catholic yearbook of 1900¹⁹⁶.

2. Ştefan Şolnai

He was probably the eldest son of the priest Bucur Crăciun/Şolnai, unfortunately the documentary information preserved about him does not allow us to approximate at this stage of documentation the date of his birth and death. The yearbooks of the Greek-Catholic Church indicate Ştefan Şolnai as a priest in the village of Turia (Covasna County) between 1811–1819¹⁹⁷, in the village of Poian (Covasna County) between 1816–1827¹⁹⁸, and from 1835 until at least 1842, if not several years after that date in the village of Ernei (Mureş County)¹⁹⁹.

We know that Ştefan Şolnai officiated several baptisms in the church pastored by his father, recorded in the parish register of Doboi: on July 6, 1814, Ştefan Şolnai baptized Maria, daughter of Cojoc Ioan and Virag Colara²⁰⁰, on April 13, 1826, Ştefan Şolnai baptized Eva, daughter of Dima Pinti and Otvaş Maria²⁰¹, and on May 21, 1826, Ştefan Şolnai baptized Ignatie, son of his younger brother, Ignatie Şolnai²⁰². From the notes kept in the parish register of Doboi, it appears that Ştefan Şolnai used both the Cyrillic and the Latin alphabets with equal skill, and it is possible that he was also a connoisseur of Latin – the inner cover of the register is signed in Latin “Stephanus Solnay 1810 7ma die Augustus”. It is most likely that Ştefan Solnay attended a Transylvanian seminary or college, and his calligraphic handwriting makes it clear that he was a man of letters, much more studious than his father.

3. Ioan Şolnai senior

We do not know the exact date of birth of Ioan Şolnai sr., we only know with precision that on September 4, 1810, he and his wife Eva Şimon were the godparents of Maria, daughter of Toader Maro and Borbara Şimon²⁰³ – which means that she was born a few years after Ştefan Şolnai, although the reverse situation cannot be

¹⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, f. 4v.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, f. 7.

¹⁹⁶ ***, *Şematismul veneratului cler al arhiepiscopiei metropolitane greco-catolice române de Alba-Iulia și Făgăraș pre Anul Domnului 1900 [Yearbook of the the Venerable Clergy of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Metropolitan Greek-Catholic Archdiocese of Alba-Iulia and Făgăraș in the Year of Our Lord 1900]*, Blaj, Typography of the Archdiocesan Seminary, 1900, p. 573.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 579.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 578.

¹⁹⁹ ***, *Schematismus venerabilis cleri graeci ritus catholicorum dioceseos Fogarasiensis in Transilvania*, Blaj, Typis Diocesan Seminaries, 1835, p. 59.

²⁰⁰ D.J.A.N. Harghita, *Colecția Registre Parohiale [Parish Registers Collection]*, Register 302, f. 15v.

²⁰¹ *Ibidem*, f. 24v.

²⁰² *Ibidem*, f. 25.

²⁰³ *Ibidem*, f. 13.

excluded, in any case the two sons of the priest Bucur Crăciun/Șolnai were of similar ages. In the parish register of the church of Doboii Ioan Șolnai sr. appears several times as cantor of the church between 1810–1819. On April 13, 1819, Ioan Șolnai sr. officiates at the church of Doboii the baptism of Floarea, daughter of Ion Cojoc from Imper²⁰⁴ – which means that before this date he was ordained. In 1835 the priest Ioan Șolnai sr. was serving in the parish of Turia (Covasna county) where there was a church built in 1730 and there were 352 Greek-Catholic believers²⁰⁵. From the yearbook of the Greek-Catholic church in 1900 we learn that the priest Ioan Șolnai sr. replaced his brother Ștefan Șolnai in the parish of Turia in 1819 until 1864, when he most probably died²⁰⁶.

While he was cantor at the church of Doboii, Ioan Șolnai sr. had a son Ioan, baptized on December 23, 1811, according to the parish register here – most probably he had other children, but to establish this fact exactly, it is necessary to extend the research area. It is also worth mentioning that Ioan Șolnai sr. and his wife Eva Șimon appear in the parish register of the church of Doboii as godparents at 6 baptisms in the period 1810–1819 – a sign of the prestige enjoyed by the family of the priest Bucur Crăciun/Șolnai.

4. George Șolnai

On April 3, 1793, the priest Bucur Crăciun/Șolnai registered the baptism of his son Gheorghe²⁰⁷. It is possible that this Gheorghe born in 1793 was the priest George Șolnai who served at the Greek-Catholic church of Ghelinta between 1841–1870²⁰⁸. About the priest George Șolnai we only know that in 1853 he baptized his nephew Dionisiu in the church of Doboii.

5. Ignatie Șolnai senior

The fourth son of the priest Bucur Crăciun/Șolnai born on December 16, 1795, according to the entry in the parish register²⁰⁹ – a special entry considering that usually the date of baptism was recorded, not the date of birth. Ignatie Șolnai sr. most probably died between 1881–1883 and 1890: between 1881–1883 the new stone church in Doboii was built, and in 1890 a stone cross was placed in the area of the altar of the old wooden church built in 1750, with a largely illegible inscription in Hungarian, but on which the year and the inscription “SOLNAI IGNACZ KANTOR” can be read.

Ignatie Șolnai sr. was cantor of the church in Doboii after the departure of his elder brother Ioan, priest in Turia in 1819, he is mentioned in this position since 1836, during the period when the priest of the church in Doboii was his nephew Ioan Șolnai jr.²¹⁰ Married to Agnes Halanda, Ignatie Șolnai had several children: Andrei,

²⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, f. 19.

²⁰⁵ ***, *Schematismus venerabilis...*, 1835, p. 155.

²⁰⁶ ***, *Șematismul venerabilului cler...*, 1900, p. 579.

²⁰⁷ D.J.A.N. Harghita, *Colecția Registre Parohiale [Parish Registers Collection]*, Register 302, f. 3.

²⁰⁸ ***, *Șematismul venerabilului cler...*, 1900, p. 576.

²⁰⁹ D.J.A.N. Harghita, *Colecția Registre Parohiale [Parish Registers Collection]*, Register 302, f. 4v.

²¹⁰ *Ibidem*, Register 303, f. 4, 9.

baptized on November 27, 1821; Maria, baptized on February 17, 1824; Ignatie, baptized on May 21, 1826 by his uncle Ștefan Șolnai; Agneș, baptized on June 28, 1828; Ignatie, baptized on April 23, 1831²¹¹; Alo(i)su, baptized on April 18, 1836 and Ladislau, baptized on July 3, 1839²¹². Certainly, Ignatie baptized on May 21, 1826, fell victim to the infant mortality of the period, since the next boy born in Ignatie Șolnai's family in 1831 received the same name.

Ignatie Șolnai is mentioned as godfather in the parish registers of the church of Doboi 11 times, proving to have been an influential figure in the Romanian community here – an extension of the current research is to trace the social networks built around the godfather-godson relationship. Another interesting observation concerns the evolution of the names Ignatie chose for his children: from names such as Andrei, Maria, Ignatie to names such as Agnes and Ladislau.

6. Ioan Șolnai junior

He was the son of the priest Ioan Șolnai sr., baptized on December 23, 1811, in Doboi, died in 1873. From 1834 he became the priest of the church of Doboi in place of his grandfather Bucur Crăciun/Șolnai²¹³. Shortly after Ioan Șolnai jr. took over the parish, the yearbook of the Greek-Catholic church noted that there was a wooden church and 700 Greek-Catholics in Doboi²¹⁴. He was married to Maria Crăciun (who constantly appears in the registers in the Hungarian spelling “Karatson”) with whom he had 8 children: Julianna (b. June 22, 1835), Ioan (January 1, 1837), Alexander (b. June 24, 1841), Barbara (b. January 28, 1844 – d. November 2, 1872), Maria (b. February 8, 1846 – d. January 19, 1938), Anna (b. May 17, 1850), Dionisiu (b. May 22, 1853), Carolina (b. May 29, 1858)²¹⁵. An observation worth noting: the vast majority of the children of priest Ioan Șolnai jr. were baptized by the Roman-Catholic priest of Imper, unlike in previous generations when the children of the Greek-Catholic priests of Doboi were baptized by priests of the same confession from other Romanian villages – which signals a closeness of priest Ioan Șolnai jr. to the local Hungarian authorities; in addition to this, there is the appearance of Latin personal names (Iuliana, Dionisiu, Carolina). From 1834 Ioan Șolnai jr. abandons the use of the Cyrillic alphabet in the baptismal register of the parish church in Doboi, replacing it with the Latin alphabet and using the Hungarian orthography for the Romanian names. It is also the priest Ioan Șolnai jr. who begins to record the confession as “Greek-Catholic”. This priest wrote his name as “Joannes/ Joanne”, which together with his neat and calligraphic handwriting indicates that it is highly likely that he attended a long school.

7. Șolnai Andrei

Baptized on November 27, 1821, in the church of Doboi, Andrei Șolnai was the eldest son of the cantor Ignatie Șolnai sr. He studied at the Roman-Catholic

²¹¹ *Ibidem*, Register 302, f. 20, 22v, 25, 27v, 31.

²¹² *Ibidem*, Register 303, f. 4, 9.

²¹³ ***, *Șematismul veneratului cler...*, 1900, p. 573.

²¹⁴ ***, *Schematismus venerabilis...*, 1835, p. 153

²¹⁵ D.J.A.N. Harghita, *Colecția Registre Parohiale [Parish Registers Collection]*, Register 303, f. 3, 6, 11, 14, 17, 22, 27, 36.

secondary school in Șumuleu-Ciuc where he was registered as a pupil in 1834²¹⁶. From 1862 to 1869 he was a priest in the village of Ilieni (Covasna County), and from 1862 to 1881 he was a priest in the village of Turia (Covasna County)²¹⁷.

8. Ioan Șolnai (Tertius)

He was born on January 1, 1837, son of the priest Ioan Șolnai jr., he was the one who reached the highest position in the church hierarchy of all the members of the priestly dynasty of Șolnai – namely, the protopope of the Trei Scaune district since 1900²¹⁸. Ioan Șolnai (tertius) attended four classes at the Roman-Catholic gymnasium in Șumuleu-Ciuc, graduated the theological course in Blaj, where he was ordained in 1859²¹⁹. From this year until 1874 Ioan Șolnai (tertius) was a priest in the village of Poian (Covasna County), from 1874–1890 he was a priest in the village of Joseni (Covasna County), and from 1888 he became vice-protopope of the Trei Scaune district²²⁰.

9. Alexander Șolnai

He was born on June 24, 1841, son of the priest Ioan Șolnai jr., studied at the Roman-Catholic gymnasium in Șumuleu-Ciuc, studied law and became a lawyer²²¹, was followed in his career by his son Cornel Șolnai who practiced law in Budapest during the interwar period.

10. Dionisiu Șolnai

Dionisiu, son of priest Ioan Șolnai jr. was born on May 22, 1853, and, like his older brothers, attended the Roman-Catholic gymnasium in Șumuleu-Ciuc between 1867–1870. He then completed the theological course in Blaj and was ordained in 1874²²². Until 1876 he was a priest in Ghelința (Covasna County), and in 1900 he was recorded in the yearbook of the Greek-Catholic Church as a priest in Sândomic since 1877²²³.

The family founded by priest Bucur Crăciun at the end of the 18th century in the village of Doboii proved to be extremely influential among the Romanian communities in south-eastern Transylvania throughout the 19th century. From the ranks of this family arose 7 priests and 2 cantors who served in the churches of 7 Romanian villages in the region (Doboii, Poian, Turia, Ernei, Ilieni, Joseni, Ghelința), and one of the priests of the third generation of the Șolnai family rose to the rank of protopope of the Trei Scaune district.

²¹⁶ Liviu Boar, *Românii din scaunele Ciuc, Giurgeu și Cașin în secolul al XIX-lea [Romanians from Ciuc, Giurgeu and Cașin in the 19th century]*, Târgu-Mureș, “Petru Maior” University Publishing House, 2004, p. 163.

²¹⁷ ***, *Șematismul veneratului cler...*, 1900, p. 579.

²¹⁸ ***, *Șematismul veneratului cler al arhidiecesei metropolitane greco-catolice române de Alba-Iulia și Făgăraș pre Anul Domnului 1906 [Yearbook of the the Venerable Clergy of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Metropolitan Greek-Catholic Archdiocese of Alba-Iulia and Făgăraș in the Year of Our Lord 1906]*, Blaj, Typography of the Archdiocesan Seminary, 1906, p. 267.

²¹⁹ Liviu Boar, *quoted work*, p. 100.

²²⁰ ***, *Șematismul veneratului cler...*, 1900, p. 337 and p. 576.

²²¹ Liviu Boar, *quoted work*, p. 164 and p. 163.

²²² *Ibidem*, p. 98.

²²³ ***, *Șematismul veneratului cler...*, 1900, p. 338 and p. 576.

FROM CRĂCIUN TO ȘOLNAI

In view of the long-lasting influence of this family on the spiritual life of several Romanian communities in south-eastern Transylvania, the process of changing the family name becomes all the more interesting.

The second cover of the parish register of the church of Doboii contains (among other notes) an extremely interesting phrase:

“In order to let them know that I, the priest Bucur (Crăciun/ overwritten Șolnoi) came to Cason in the year 1789 April 23”²²⁴.

Mirroring this note, on the third cover of the book it says: “Note to be known when I, priest Bucur Crăciun came to be priest in Nog(hi) Cason 1789 April 23”²²⁵.

Both notes are written in Romanian with Cyrillic alphabet and represent a form of certification of the parish register, but also a “taking possession” of the parish by the priest Bucur Crăciun/ Șolnai. The register was started by priest Ion (whose surname unfortunately does not appear) on January 3, 1787. The baptism entries of priest Ion were abruptly interrupted on February 25, 1789, followed by four years without any baptism entries. The entries were resumed by priest Bucur Crăciun on April 3, 1793, when he records the baptism of his son Gheorghe²²⁶.

The lack of records for the years 1789–1793 may indicate that the parish register of the church of Doboii was no longer here and it is possible that it was with the priest Ion, the one who started it – in 1789 the priest Bucur Crăciun/ Șolnai becomes priest here, in 1793 the baptismal records are resumed. The moment of the recovery of this register by priest Bucur Crăciun/ Șolnai in April 1793 seems to have been an important and significant one, which may have provoked the new parish priest to write on the second and third covers the date when he took over the parish.

What is striking about the above-mentioned cover inscriptions is that in the first one the surname “Crăciun” has been crossed out and replaced by “Șolnoi”, while in the second one this change has not been made. During the more than 40 years in which he recorded the baptisms of the members of his community, the priest Bucur Crăciun/ Șolnai preferred to address himself simply as “priest Bucur”. However, there are also a number of deviations from this rule, when the signature appears in other forms: “priest Bucur, paroh of the village”/ “popa Bucur, paroh locului”, “priest Bucur paroh”/ “popa Bucur paroh” and the most important of these deviations from the rule is when he signs himself “priest Bucur Crăciun”/ “popa Bucur Crăciun”. It is worth mentioning here two records that might better illustrate the assumption of this name: at a baptism on October 23, 1794, the mother of the child is recorded as “Eva Caracion”, a Magyarized variant of the surname, and at the

²²⁴ „Pentru ca să știe că am venit eu popa Bucur (Crăciun/Șolnoi) la Cason anul 1789 aprilie 23”, in D.J.A.N. Harghita, *Colecția Registre Parohiale [Parish Registers Collection]*, Register 302, f. 3.

²²⁵ „Însemnare pentru ca să știe de când am venit eu popa Bucur Crăciun preot la Nog(hi) Cason 1789 april 23”, in *Ibidem*.

²²⁶ *Ibidem*.

baptism immediately following on November 11, 1794, the priest signs himself “priest Bucur Crăciun”, as a kind of correction of the previous variant of the same name²²⁷. The frequency with which the priest Bucur Crăciun used this surname in the parish register is as follows: 1794 three times, 1795 twice, 1796 once, 1797 three times – otherwise he preferred the simpler version “priest Bucur”/ “popa Bucur”.

The oldest record of the name “Șolnoi” in the parish register of Doboï dates from 1811, when the priest’s son is listed as godfather at the baptism of a girl under the name Ion Șolnoi²²⁸. Priest Bucur Crăciun became priest Bucur Șolnai in 1826 by the hand of his eldest son Ștefan. The latter served his first baptism at Doboï on July 6, 1814, when he entered his name Ștefan Șolnai in the register and signed himself – a personal mark, he being the only one to use a signature²²⁹. On April 13, 1819, the second son of the priest Bucur served a baptism in the church of Doboï and registered himself in the parish register with the name Ioan Șolnoi²³⁰. On February 16, 1826, Eva’s baptism is registered, here the priest’s name appears “Bucur Șolnai” – written by Ștefan Șolnai, in his obvious handwriting, besides he added his signature²³¹. At the next baptism on February 19, 1826, the inscription in the register was written by the priest Bucur Crăciun/ Șolnai who changed his name to “priest Bucur”/ “popa Bucur” – in fact, no inscription written by him in which he assumed the name “Șolnai” has been preserved, after this date in all the entries in the parish register he used exclusively the form “priest Bucur”/ “popa Bucur”. Only towards the end of his life, in the first half of 1834, his name was entered in the register as “Bokor Pop” with Latin alphabet, by his nephew Ioan Șolnai jr. – who at least at the beginning of his career wrote in Romanian using the spelling rules of the Hungarian language²³².

We can thus trace the evolution of the change of the family name in an extended dynasty of Romanian priests in southeastern Transylvania: the founder of the dynasty occasionally uses the surname Crăciun between 1789 and 1797, after which he prefers to sign himself only by his personal name for a long period; his sons who became priests, however, prefer to use the name “Șolnai” with an unclear origin from 1811 onwards; in 1826 one of these sons enters his father in the parish register as “Bucur Șolnai”, but the priest from Doboï does not take over this name. In the institutional memory of the Greek-Catholic church, the priest Bucur Crăciun remains as Bucur Șolnai and is recorded as such in the 1900 yearbook. All his numerous descendants continued to use the name Șolnai until the middle of the 20th century, and any memory of the original family name Crăciun disappeared.

On the basis of the preserved documents, it is rather difficult to formulate an explanation for the transformation of the surname of a Romanian priest from Crăciun into Șolnoi. In the first place, the Hungarian resonance of the chosen name attracts

²²⁷ *Ibidem*, f. 4.

²²⁸ *Ibidem*, f. 13v.

²²⁹ *Ibidem*, f. 15v.

²³⁰ *Ibidem*, f. 19.

²³¹ *Ibidem*, f. 24v.

²³² *Ibidem*, f. 67.

attention, which points to a possible adaptation strategy in a Hungarian-dominated environment, such as that of the Romanians in south-eastern Transylvania. And this adaptation strategy seems to have been set in motion by the sons of the priest Bucur, especially by Ștefan. The parish register of Doboi illustrates a latent conflict between the priest Bucur and his sons, which we will try to elucidate in the following lines.

CYRILLIC ALPHABET AND ARABIC NUMERALS

First of all, there is a “tension” about the alphabet used. Priest Bucur Crăciun/Șolnai was not very good at calligraphy, his handwriting is clumsy, he did not use cursive letters, but at the same time it was legible and relatively neat. Until 1834 the priest Bucur Crăciun/Șolnai preferred to write using the Cyrillic alphabet – but over the years he “experimented” with the use of Arabic numerals. In the Cyrillic alphabet numbers are rendered using letters, which are assigned a value from 1 to 19, then tens, hundreds and thousands are rendered using letters and groups of letters – the Cyrillic script lacks the digit 0, so the decimal rendering of numbers is different from Arabic numerals. Writing numbers with Arabic numerals proved to be extremely difficult for the priest Bucur Crăciun/Șolnai: he repeatedly tried to switch to Arabic numerals, but never succeeded. He begins to do so from the year 1800 (a symbolic moment, which we suspect he chose specially) and from this time onwards the years are written with Arabic numerals – although the year 1813 is written by priest Bucur Crăciun/Șolnai as “18013”, according to the principle of the Cyrillic alphabet where thousands, hundreds and tens are rendered by special groups of characters in the absence of the digit 0. Often write 15 as “105” following the principle of the Cyrillic system of letter groups, many such mistakes occur in the parish register. Usually, after several attempts to render the day with Arabic numerals, he would revert to writing the numbers in the Cyrillic alphabet. By contrast, his sons Ștefan and Ioan wrote the Arabic numerals without any mistakes – besides a very beautiful calligraphic handwriting in Cyrillic, they also mastered cursive writing in Latin letters, a sign of their superior education compared to their father.

IDENTITY AND CONFESSION

The second level of tension between the priest Bucur Crăciun/Șolnai and his sons can be identified in terms of the denomination designation. In the parish register of Doboi, the priest Ion entered the word “Romanian”/ “Rumân” under the heading “Law” (meaning confession). Priest Bucur Crăciun/Șolnai used over the years several variants for the designation of his confession: “of the Greek law”, “pravoslavnic”, “pravoslavnic of the Greek law” – even though the official designation of his confession was “united” or “Greek Catholic”.

The first record of a baptism in Doboï in which the Greek-Catholic confession appears dates from 1797 and is a handwritten inscription in a hand other than that of the priest Bucur Crăciun/ Şolnai²³³: the year 1797 is written with Arabic numerals; the month “Mar(tie) with Cyrillic letters; the day 10 with Arabic numerals; the name of the priest “popa Bucur” with Cyrillic letters; the name of the father Joan (Latin) Suciù (Cyrillic) of the mother Anna Koszok (Latin letters); godparents Kojok Gyorgy Ola(h) Maria (Latin letters); confession G(reco)-C(atolic) (Latin letters); place Ujfalu (with Latin letters, Hungarian variant, priest Bucur Crăciun/ Şolnai preferred the Romanian variant Satul Nou). After this entry, the priest Bucur Crăciun/ Şolnai returned to his Cyrillic alphabet in which he designated the confession “of Greek law” or “pravoslavnic”. We suspect that this record belonged to a superior of the priest Bucur Crăciun/ Şolnai, he was a person who mastered the Cyrillic alphabet (which he used in cursive) as well as the Latin alphabet, the Romanian names were written in Hungarian spelling, the numbers were correctly rendered with Arabic numerals, and the official Hungarian name of the town was chosen. It is easy to imagine a scenario in which a hierarchical superior of the priest Bucur Crăciun/ Şolnai shows him how to fill in the parish register with the official name of the denomination. From 1806 we have another similar inscription, written by a different hand from that of the priest Bucur Crăciun/ Şolnai, this time entirely in Cyrillic alphabet, but the confession is written “Greek-Catholic”²³⁴. Even stranger is an entry from 1811, when the handwriting in most of the headings looks like that of the priest Bucur Crăciun/ Şolnai in Cyrillic script, but the month is written in Latin alphabet “April”, as is the child’s name “Joan” and the confession “Greek-Catholic”²³⁵.

The next record in which the denomination is designated as Greek-Catholic appears on February 16, 1826, being the one analyzed above, in which Bucur Crăciun becomes Bucur Şolnai, written by his son Ştefan. It is interesting that on April 13, 1826 – a few months after the aforementioned moment – Ştefan Şolnai officiated a baptism which he also recorded in the parish register, and in the confession he passed the “Greek law”. This allows for the hypothesis of a discussion between father and son, as a result of which the son decided not to designate the confession as Greek Catholic in the register. In 1830, at a baptism celebrated by the priest Ioan Şolnai sr. at Doboï, the Greek-Catholic confession is again recorded. At the beginning of 1834, the four weddings officiated by the priest Bucur Crăciun/Şolnai in February were recorded in the register by his nephew Ioan Şolnai jr. and he switched to the “Unitus” confession, the Latin version for “united”²³⁶. Shortly afterwards the priest Bucur Crăciun/Şolnai died – unfortunately we do not know the exact date, only that in July his nephew Ioan Şolnai jr. was parish priest in

²³³ *Ibidem*, f. 5v.

²³⁴ *Ibidem*, f. 11.

²³⁵ *Ibidem*, f. 13.

²³⁶ *Ibidem*, f. 67.

Doboi – without having put in the register any other confession than “Greek law” or “pravoslavnic”. After the death of Bucur Crăciun/ Șolnai, his nephew Ioan Șolnai jr. started a new parish register in which he constantly used the “Greek-Catholic” confession and made the entries in Romanian with Latin alphabet using the orthographic rules of the Hungarian language.

In the light of the above, a generational conflict is evident between Fr: the first, less scholarly, did not give up until his death to define his confession as “Greek law” or “pravoslavnic” – while his sons, with a much more beautiful handwriting, knowledgeable in Latin, but also in the Latin alphabet and Arabic numerals, obviously with much more advanced studies than their father, tried to slip into the parish register of Doboi the official designation of the confession, namely Greek-Catholic. Last but not least, three external interventions in the parish register (from 1797, 1806 and 1811, which suggests a certain rhythm) – most probably made by a hierarchical superior of the priest Bucur Crăciun/Șolnai who also tried to indicate the official denomination of the confession.

CONFESSIONAL CONFLICTS AND THEIR EFFECTS

The manifest and long-term reluctance of the priest Bucur Crăciun/ Șolnai to use the term “Greek-Catholic” for his confession has deep-rooted causes, with origins in the confessional conflicts between the Transylvanian Romanians in the 17th century. In order to shed light on the manifestation of the effects of these confessional conflicts in the parish of the Romanians of Doboi, it is necessary to take a broader look at the history of the Greek-Catholic Church in Transylvania in the 18th century. The Greek-Catholic Church of the Transylvanian Romanians came into being following the Alba Iulia Synod of October 7, 1698, at which Metropolitan Atanasie Anghel and 38 Orthodox protopopes declared their union with the Catholic Church, subject to the preservation of the rites and traditions of the Orthodox Church. The creation of the Greek-Catholic Church of the Transylvanian Romanians was supported by the Imperial Court of Vienna, which pursued a number of confessional and political objectives: the confessional unification of Transylvania and the alteration of the inter-confessional balance of power in the province, the exercise of more effective control over its governance – in practice, the Romanians were an instrument of the Habsburg Empire to impose a new rule in Transylvania²³⁷. From the Romanians’ point of view, the union with the Catholic Church was to pave the way for the social, political and cultural emancipation of the Romanians of Transylvania, who were considered legally “tolerated”²³⁸.

²³⁷ Mathias Bernath, *Habsburgii și începuturile formării națiunii române [The Habsburgs and the Beginnings of the Romanian Nation]*, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia, 1994, pp. 78–79.

²³⁸ Greta-Monica Miron, “Motivetele Unirii religioase [The Reasons of the Religious Union]”, in Johann Marte, *Unirea Românilor Transilvăneni cu biserica Romei [The Union of the Transylvanian Romanians with the Church of Rome]*, Vol. I, Bucharest, Encyclopedic Publishing House, 2010, pp. 214–225.

The failure to fulfill the promises of the Leopoldine Diploma of 1701, which guaranteed the political and religious rights of Romanians in Transylvania under the conditions of union with the Catholic Church, led to the emergence of several movements contesting the union. In the context of the debates on the realization and imposition of the union with the Catholic Church among the Orthodox faithful at the beginning of the 18th century, a series of events took place, which were to be repeated in many other places. At the synod of September 4, 1700, convened by Metropolitan Athanasius in Alba-Iulia, the Orthodox protopope Vasile Grid from Braşov signed the act of union – but as soon as the Romanians of Braşov found out, they threatened to replace him with an Orthodox protopope, which made Vasile Grid promise to remain Orthodox²³⁹. Throughout the 18th century, this scenario was repeated in many Romanian villages in Transylvania: priests usually joined the union with the Catholic Church in order to benefit from the same status as Catholic priests and especially from tax exemption, without informing the believers of this change. In many cases, as soon as the believers learned of the change of confessional subordination, they asked the priest to return to the Orthodox confession under threat of banishment and replacement²⁴⁰. Particularly active were the movements against the union of Romanians with the Catholic Church provoked in the middle of the 18th century by the monks Visarion Sarai²⁴¹ and Sofronie of Cioara²⁴².

The Orthodox Romanians' definition of their own confession was recorded in the 18th century in several documents – Romanians defined their confession in forms such as “Romanian law”, “old law”, “old faith”, while Greek Catholic hierarchs tried to impose the term „united” for their own believers²⁴³. In this context we can see more clearly the choice of the priest Ion de la Doboi between 1787–1789 to use the formula “Romanian law” to designate the confession of the Romanians here – at a

²³⁹ Keith Hitchins, “Cele trei puncte în care decizia de Unire a fost respinsă de la bun început și informațiile noastre asupra altor disensiuni referitoare la deciziile Unirii din anii 1697–1701, care au existat deja de pe vremea lui Atanasie” [“The three points on which the decision of Union was rejected from the outset and our information on other dissensions concerning the decisions of the Union of 1697–1701, which already existed from the time of Athanasius”], in *Ibidem*, pp. 307–319.

²⁴⁰ Mihai Săsăușan, “Curtea din Viena și chestiunea Unirii bisericești a românilor din Transilvania la mijlocul secolului al XVIII-lea” [“The Court of Vienna and the question of the ecclesiastical union of Romanians in Transylvania in the mid-18th century”], in Johann Marte, *Unirea Românilor Transilvăneni cu biserica Romei [The Union of the Transylvanian Romanians with the Church of Rome]*, Vol. II, Bucharest, Encyclopedic Publishing House, 2010, pp. 564–623.

²⁴¹ Paul Bruszanowski, “Egumenul Visarion de la Sâmbăta și disputa teologică cu greco-catolicii (1746)” [“Visarion from Sâmbăta and the theological dispute with the Greek-Catholics (1746)”], in *Ibidem*, pp. 348–367.

²⁴² Florin Dobrei, “Un opozant al Unirii religioase a românilor din Ardeal cu Biserica Romei: călugărul Sofronie de la Cioara” [“An opponent of the religious union of Romanians in Transylvania with the Church of Rome: Sofronie from Cioara”], in *Ibidem*, pp. 402–435.

²⁴³ Daniel Dumitran, „Forme ale definirii identitare în Transilvania veacului al XVIII-lea. Introducere la critica imaginii istoriografice a românilor neuniți” [“Forms of Defining Identity in XVIIIth Century Transylvania. Introduction to Critique of Historiographic Image of the Non-Uniate Romanians”], in *Apulum*, 2013, pp. 149–203.

time when the inhabitants of Doboii appear as Greek-Catholics from 1750. The choice of the priest Bucur Crăciun/ Șolnai to use the expressions “Greek law” or “pravoslavnic” for the confession, until late in 1834, could signal either the existence of a local resistance of the faithful to the union with the Catholic Church, or a personal decision to find a way to avoid the terms “united” or “Greek-Catholic”. In the absence of other documents, we cannot speculate further, we can only say that the change from “pravoslavnic” to “Greek Catholic” like the change from Crăciun to Șolnai was not something accepted by the priest Bucur from Doboii.

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