



ECHOES OF THE GOLGOTHA SURVIVED BY THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE BISHOPRIC OF BUZĂU WITHIN THE KINGDOM OF ROMANIA (1916-1918)

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Between December 1916 and November 1918, approximately 66% of the territory of the Kingdom of Romania, including Bucharest, its capital, was under the domination of the Central Powers.

This academic approach certifies the fact that the Orthodox Church in the Kingdom of Romania was not exempted from the major trials experienced, during that period, by the population and the other institutions of the state. It highlights some relevant aspects of the “Golgotha” suffered by some hierarchs, clerics, monks and believers, who lived through this unfortunate chapter in the national history.

Those “crucified” by the terror practiced by the occupying enemy continued to believe in the resurrection of the Romanian nation.

Strong echoes of the temptations, passions and hopes of this capital moment for our existential destiny were also fully felt in the Bishopric of Buzău, chosen as a case study.

Keywords: Golgotha; Romanian Orthodox Church; occupation; Central Powers; Bishopric of Buzău;



INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of the First World War represented a favourable circumstance for the fulfilment of the aspiration of uniting all Romanians in a single national state.

After two years of neutrality, Romania entered the war on the side of the Entente (France, Great Britain, Russia) with the guarantee that it would take possession of Transylvania, Bucovina and Banat, which were under the control of the Habsburg court. On the night of 14/27 August to 15/28 August 1916, the army, which included regiments from Buzău and Râmnic, crossed the artificially constructed border of Transylvania and achieved short-lived successes over the Austro-Hungarian and German enemies, freeing 1/3 of the territory of the ancient Romanian province.

The counter-offensive of the combined troops of the Central Powers, launched in the intra-Carpathian territory and on the front in Dobrogea, caused the Romanian divisions to record defeats and heavy losses and to retreat to Moldova, leaving the opponent in possession of 2/3 of the national territory, Bucharest, the capital the country, included.

Thus, the first phase of the engagement of the Romanian army in the First World War represented a national catastrophe (Dobrincu, 2003, p. 157). The bill paid to the enemy consisted in the cession of over 100,000 km² (Oltenia, Muntenia, Dobrogea and small portions of southern Moldova), with almost 3.5 million inhabitants. At the same time, it contributed to Romania’s significant distance from achieving the goal of the national ideal (Torrey, 2004, p. 186).

The superiority of the armies of the Central Powers in technique, personnel and war experience, the lack of concrete support from the Entente and the unfulfilled promises, the length of the front (almost 1500 km), the errors committed by some commanders, including the leadership of the Great General Staff, and the uninspired measures

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ordered by a series of incompetent officers cost greatly to the Romanian army. The military establishment counted in its account the heroic toll of 100,000 dead, 150,000 wounded and missing, to which were added 250,000 prisoners (Platon, 2003, p. 435). The “full side of the glass” was that the Central Powers did not achieve their planned objective of getting Romania out of the war.

A detail worthy of highlighting is the fact that, in the struggle for the accomplishment of the national ideal, our troops were accompanied by more than 200 military confessors. Being under the coordination of the newly established Religious Service of the Army (1916-1921), led by archpriest Constantin Nazarie, most of them fulfilled their assigned mission with maximum responsibility. They managed to meet the spiritual, educational, cultural and medical needs of the soldiers, and by raising their morale, they had the ability to enhance the combative spirit and give them extra immunity in the face of enemy propaganda. Also, in conditions of retreat, defeat or epidemiological siege, the army priests were endowed with the ability to plant in their souls the confidence in victory and the wholeness of the nation.

In the limit situations of the evolution of the front, the mobilized clerics crossed the demarcation line of church canons and sometimes used weapons to defend the country’s precious land.

One of the characteristics of the Great War was that it affected not only economic and social life, but also the church life (Popescu, 2011). In those years full of strong drama, in all the Orthodox places of worship in the Old Kingdom, fervent prayers were raised for the Romanian soldiers who had gone to the front and their families who remained at home, for those who were suffering, hospitalized in civil hospitals or soldiers, war orphans and widows (Drăghiceanu, 1920, p. 53).

Out of the desire not to leave their churches, liturgical and pastoral-missionary service, many priests preferred to stay with their faithful in the territories occupied by opposing armies and endured the hardships and privations characteristic of belligerent situations. Some of them were persecuted by the authorities of the Central Powers and were sent to the camps established internally or to those in Bulgaria, Austria-Hungary and Germany, where, due to various diseases, they perished alongside the Romanian military prisoners.

On the other hand, an appreciable number of priests from Dobrogea, as well as from the other affected areas of the country, took refuge in Moldova from the fear of the enemy and managed, with the precious support given by Metropolitan Pimen Georgescu (1909-1934), to continue their sacerdotal mission in various parishes and monasteries.

The choice of the exodus as a saving solution, by an important segment of the clerical body, was debated in the meeting of the Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the summer of 1918 and was considered inappropriate for the sacrificial position of the priestly mission (Cotan, 2014, pp. 49, 62)

It is a well-known fact that, in the tradition of our people, the Friday of the Sacred Passion of the Redeemer has been called, since ancient times, “Black Friday”. It is also called so because on this day humanity, gripped by the dominion of the darkness of sin, crucified Jesus Christ, the Son of God and “The Light of the World”, between two robbers (John 8:12). The slaughter took place on the hill outside the walls of Jerusalem known as Golgotha (Heb. “skull”, “head”) or Calvary.

By extension, within this scientific approach, I have associated the suffering endured by the Romanian nation, under the harsh regime of foreign military occupation, with a real “Golgotha” on which our national being was “crucified”. I have condensed that period of agony, which lasted according to a raconteur of the time, Virgiliu Drăghiceanu, 707 days, and “baptized” it suggestively “Black Friday” of the millennial history of our country.

As a whole, the study presents sequentially some of the events of the two years of occupation, which marked, in general, the church life, with strict reference to the Kingdom of Romania.

As a case study, I have focused on the heroic deeds, sufferings and forms of resistance of the clergy from the Bishopric of Buzău. The choice of this diocese was made on the basis of the canonical, geographical and spiritual affiliation of the author of this article. Another reason for this choice was the particularly illustrative examples found here, through the archival documents and edited reference works, which the author was interested in and had access to.



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The material proposed for publication represents an original contribution by consistently enriching the information base related to this subject, by renewing the interpretation of the studied phenomenon, as well as by synthesizing and systematizing the available information, up to the present moment.

The predominantly used scientific research method is the analysis of available documents.

“THE SPIRITUAL MOTHER OF THE ROMANIAN NATION” IN THE YEARS OF CALVARY AND RESURRECTION 1916-1918

During the period of occupation of the Central Powers in Romania, the supreme military authority was entrusted to the Great Military Headquarters, based at the “Athénée Palace” Hotel in Bucharest. Its hegemony was exercised over three Romanian provinces (Oltenia, Muntenia and Dobrogea), totalling 21 counties, 1156 towns and approximately 2304 localities, where the most important agricultural regions and industrial centres of the country were located.

At its command was Field Marshal August von Mackensen, seconded by infantry general Tulff von Tschepe und Weidenbach and having as chief of staff Colonel Richard Hentsch, the real leader and brain of the entire military administration (Stan, 2008, pp. 62 -63). The other states allied to Germany were represented by: General Sandler, then replaced by Colonel Kontz (Austria-Hungary), Osman Nizani Pasha (Turkey) and General Petăr Tantilov (Bulgaria).

The occupied territory was organized into four military zones, divided as follows:

- The territory of the military administration (*Gebiet der Militärverwaltung*) was the largest (it included 14 counties of Oltenia and Muntenia, less Buzău, Brăila and Râmnicu Sărat) and the most important in terms of economic potential;
- The stage area (*Etappengebiet*) included the territories positioned along the Buzau River, from the bend of the Carpathians to the Danube, ensuring, in particular, the supply of the troops on the front;
- The 9th Army Area of Operations (*Operationsgebiet*) had in its area of responsibility the counties of Buzău, Râmnicu Sărat,

Putna and Brăila and was under the direct command of Field Marshal August von Mackensen;

- The military occupation zone of Dobrogea benefited from a separate military administration, located under the condominium owned by Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey (Cotan, 2018, pp. 228-229).

Until the fall of 1918, the channel of communication of the decisions issued by the management of these structures, addressed to the Romanian institutions plus the population remaining in the territory, was the ordinances (Pherekyde, 1918). Having a predominantly economic character, “they have become a real Bible” for receivers (Urse, 2012, p. 163).

As a result of some of the decisions, the main edifices of the cities were transformed into spaces reserved for the occupation administration. Also, school and college classes were suspended, and their buildings were used as barracks, hospitals, offices, prisons, and even horse stables.

Primarily, through the German Economic Staff (*Wirtschaftstab*) and its local auxiliary bodies (Platon, 2003, p. 450), the conquering authorities instituted a rigorous and systematic programme of exploitation of the country’s wealth and resources, focused on increasing oil production, the intensification of coal and salt extraction and the use of all arable land. Regardless of its will, Romania became the “granary of the Central Powers”. The financial sector also benefited from a capital interest, one of the targeted objectives being the issuance of new banknotes – the so-called “*occupation lei*” –, which were not backed by gold and amplified the state of inflation.

The ordered measures of spoliation, of which I have listed only a few, greatly exposed the population to poverty, malnutrition and a series of epidemics (smallpox, influenza, relapsing fever, scarlet fever, typhus, rash).

In parallel, the inhabitants of the Romanian provinces, under the control of the Central Powers, were subjected to permanent control by means of the military, rural or political police apparatus. The citizens who did not approve of the occupation administration and who displayed a hostile attitude, especially peasants and intellectuals, among whom



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Donici's pastorate coincided with the most difficult moments of the existence of the Romanian nation. In the context in which, a few days before entering the capital, the German armies brutally bombed the city, the venerable bishop miraculously survived the enemy shells, which hit the cathedral and destroyed the right wing of the metropolitan palace.

there were also priests, were fined, arrested and imprisoned in the 7 main and 33 secondary camps, organized for this purpose. Some of them even got in touch with specialized units in Bulgaria, Germany and Austria-Hungary (Drăghiceanu, 1920, p. 27).

The economic and social difficulties deeply affected church life too. Against the background of the accelerated military offensive of the Central Powers, on 20 November/3 December 1916, the king and the government withdrew to Iasi. At the request of the Romanian political leaders, Metropolitan Primate Conon Arămescu Donici (1912-1918) remained in occupied Bucharest (starting on 23 November/6 December 1916), as a symbol of national resistance (Șerbănescu, 1959, pp. 822-824).

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Hoping for the disclosure of some compromising documents, related to the first hierarch of the country, the occupation authorities arrested his secretary, the priest Hrisant Popescu (Vasilescu, 2018, p. 53). Also, on the grounds that he supported the project of Romania entering the war for the achievement of our national ideal, he was stigmatized in the pages of the newspaper of the German Command in Brăila *"Donau Armee Zeitung"* (*"Danube Army Sheet"*), no. 127 of 25 July 1917. The accusatory article was entitled *A metropolitan warrior* (*"Biserica Ortodoxă Română"*, 1924, pp. 168-169).

Certainly, the greatest disappointment and indignation provoked to the hierarch, Conon, who was almost ninety years old, was the signing of the manifesto by which, in the summer of 1917, he urged the Romanian soldiers to non-combat on the Moldavian front (Alimăneștianu, 1929, pp. 101-103).

The document titled *The Calling of the Metropolitan Primate* was drafted by the clerics Grigorie Pișculescu (Gala Galaction) and Iuliu Scriban (Nistor, 2003, p. 298) and put the Orthodox clergy in a negative light (Boia, 2010, p. 86). On a personal level, it brought him the label of collaborationist, anti-Romanian and even traitor, and forced him to resign at the end of the following year.

An entirely admirable aspect was the fact that the Romanian Armed Forces and the population of the free territory remained immune to the call to make a pact with the enemy. Metropolitan Pimen of Moldova and other Orthodox hierarchs and priests, including military confessors, urged the soldiers to fight on for the unity of the nation. For example, the army priest Neculai V. Hodoroabă noted in his diary that he read it *"with disgust"* (Hodoroabă, 1926, p. 262.).

Beyond the often-critical rhetoric, developed over time on this subject, we subscribe to the point of view of the military historian Aurel Pentelescu according to which the gesture of the Primate Metropolitan Conon Arămescu Donici to deny the defeatist act falls into the category of unforgivable errors committed by the high hierarchy and *"still remains to the judgment of history"* (Pentelescu, Preda, 2014, pp. 211-231) and, above all, of God.

On another note, the Roman Catholic Archbishop Raymund Netzhhammer (1905-1924) assures us that Field Marshal Mackensen, Commander von Heinrich and Governor Tulff von Tschepe und Waidenbach expressed their interest in the region, from the first days of their arrival, of the history of the Romanian Orthodox Church, its practices and clergy, about which they knew very little (Netzhhammer, 2005, pp. 696-697, 701).

The coexistence relationship between the authorities of the Central Powers and the ecclesiastical ones was very often based on convenience. Particularly tense was the episode consumed on 24 December 1916/6 January 1917, when the German side decided through a military ordinance that the Gregorian calendar¹ and Central European time would come into force in the occupied territory (Marghiloman, 1927, p. 356). As a result of this imperative act, through which a subtle moral blow was given to both the population and the Orthodox Church (Vasilescu, 1978, p. 1118), Metropolitan Conon convened an assembly at the Metropolis, on 2/15 January 1917. The meeting was attended by all the bishops in Bucharest, the members of the Superior Consistory and all the important clerics or those who had taken refuge in the capital of Romania. Following the discussions, a protest was drawn up expressing the point of view of the Romanian

¹ The provision was published in *"Gazeta Bucureștilor"*, no. 210 of 17/31 December 1916.



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A sensitive moment, which caused a lot of bitterness and revolt among the hierarchy, the clergy and the population, was the campaign to confiscate, for economic interests, the majority of church and monastery bells, as well as their accessories. The rationale for such an abominable action was to melt and use them as raw materials for the production of Germany's weapons and munitions of war.

Orthodox Church and through which the measures to be taken were brought to the attention of the population (Vasilescu, 2018, p. 46).

As a result of the numerous petitions, but mainly due to the fear of the uprising of the masses, the initiators of the reforming project allowed to hold according to the old Julian calendar only the Christmas of 1916 and the Epiphany of 1917, following that the other holidays, during the church year, would be celebrated according to the new calendar (Netzhammer, 2005, p. 697). Overcoming those prohibitions and commitments, the Orthodox Romanians celebrated Easter in 1917 according to the tradition existing until then (Drăghiceanu, 1920, pp. 79-80).

In this context, we also emphasize that attempts of this kind, especially with regard to keeping a paschal (date of Easter) common with the Western world, have taken place before in history and appear on the agenda even today. They have often been viewed with suspicion and reserve by a representative sample of the church hierarchy and the laity, as a Roman Catholic *Trojan horse* introduced into the citadel of Orthodoxy, producer of great disturbances and stylistic schisms (Bichir, 2023). Despite all these reactions, the revised version of the calendar was adopted by the Romanian civil society on 1/14 April 1919, and by the church in October 1924². An exception to the rule was made in the case of the feasts connected with the Paschal cycle³, which have remained to this day in the old style, as a sign of the unity of faith of the Orthodox world.

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With the intention of countering that humiliating plan, Metropolitan Conon tried to buy back those goods by organizing

² Following the *Pan-Orthodox Conference in Constantinople* in 1923.

³ The Lord's Entry into Jerusalem, the Healing Spring, the Lord's Ascension, the Descent of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Trinity.

a national collection. His initiative met with a categorical refusal from the *"injured"*, on the grounds that metal was more valuable than money (Cotan, 2014, p. 38).

In order to better understand the situation and introduce ourselves to the atmosphere of those times of austerity, we reproduce, for edification, a scene with valences of ancient tragedy, which took place on the occasion of the requisition of the bells from the *"Saint New Spiridon"* Church in Bucharest: *"From the 20th of the month (April 1917, a.n.), an <Abnahme-Kommando der Glocken>, composed of an officer and armed soldiers, climbs into the belltowers and begins the operation of removing or breaking the bells. The long, shrill, terrifying sounds, produced by the impact, find their pitiful echo in the hearts of the population of the entire Capital. More and more quiet, the bells die in a muffled sob, falling down to pieces..., the great bell of Brâncoveanu brought from the Dealu Monastery to the church of Saint Spiridon is smashed with Hungarian fury by two Hungarians ... But wonder! Both profaners remain crushed under the fragments of the bell upon which they laid their sacrilegious hands... From the fragments left in the bell are seen the filaments of gold and silver; they are the remains of gold and silver rings, brooches, earrings that the Romanian piety had thrown away during their casting. That is why it is said that their acoustics are unsurpassed until today"* (Drăghiceanu, 1920, p. 94).

One gratifying aspect, however, was the fact that the protests of the clergy and the faithful eventually led the occupation authorities to desist from confiscating bells of historical or symbolic value.

Keeping the same note, we also remember that some places of worship were also uncovered by the copper sheet covers, which were transferred across the border. As a result of public vigilance and protest demonstrations, the roofs of the Royal Church in Argeș, the Cathedral in Târgoviște, but especially that of the Metropolitan Cathedral in Bucharest were saved (Cotan, 2014, p. 42).

Another incident, which held the front page of the newspapers at the time, was that of 17 February 1918, when, by order of General Petar Tantilov, at 2 o'clock in the morning a commando consisting of about 20 Bulgarian soldiers managed to steal for shortly the relics of Saint New Demetrius, from the Metropolitan Cathedral in Bucharest, claiming him as their national saint. As a result of the inflamed state



ROMANIAN
MILITARY
THINKING

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According to Bacalbaşa, “of all the vexations endured by the occupier, two were the ones that impressed the Bucharest population the most: the lifting of church bells and the theft of Saint Dumitru. All other pressures went almost unnoticed, while the two acts of defiance brought to the religious feeling raised the population”.

of mind of the inhabitants of the capital and the memorandum addressed by Metropolitan Conon directly to Field Marshal Mackensen, the operation was finally stopped. The whistle-blowers were caught by German soldiers, led by Lieutenant Rhefeld, near the village of Daia in Giurgiu.

To the astonishment of the Germans, the success of recovering the reliquary with the holy and much-loved relics brought an enormous ray of joy to the faces of the people of Bucharest, mobilized to meet them at the Belu barricade. It also came under the specific incidence of divine miracles, given that the criminals did not manage to leave the country in a timely manner, and the car carrying the priceless gifts achieved the “performance” of breaking down 3 times (Vasilescu, 2018, pp. 50-52).

Staying connected on this issue, we also note that in order to be saved from the Bulgarian troops, on 20 November 1916, the relics of Saint Filofteia as well as those of Saints Nifon, Serghie, Vah and Tatiana, which belonged to the Diocese of Argeş, were housed, for almost a year, in the “All Saints” Church, in the premises of the Antim Monastery (Cotan, 2018, p. 215).

A keen observer of the two events, closely followed by public opinion and to which I have referred in the previous lines, Constantin Bacalbaşa opined that they marked the collective mind more than all the other challenges that left their mark on the physiognomy of the occupation: “Of all the vexations endured by the occupier, two were the ones that impressed the Bucharest population the most: the lifting of church bells and the theft of Saint Dumitru. All other pressures went almost unnoticed, while the two acts of defiance brought to the religious feeling raised the population” (Bacalbaşa, 1921, pp. 169-170).

Although they had their own church in Bucharest, on 21 February 1917, the leadership of the Bulgarian army decided “ostentatiously” to make two Tedeums for the royal family from Sofia, in our metropolitan cathedral. With the initial approval of Metropolitan Conon, and in the second phase with his total opposition, for canonical reasons⁴, the projected activity could no longer be prevented (Cotan, 2018, p. 272).

⁴ The Orthodox Church of Bulgaria was catalogued as a heretic at that time, following its condemnation for “phyletism” by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1872. Also called “ethnophyletism”, this concept considers that there is a primacy of the nation over humanity as a whole and that would operate even over divine ordinances.



Among the measures taken by the Central Powers against the Orthodox Church, we highlight the closing of some churches or their transformation into warehouses or stables for the horses of their own troops, sporadically setting up garbage platforms and even latrines in their premises. The rooms of the monks and nuns were not “neglected” either, being “metamorphosed” into camps, hospitals and other utilities. All those practices caused a series of protests by the clergy and fuelled the state of agitation and discontent of the population.

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Another aspect, which we believe should not be overlooked, was the order given by the Command of the Mobile Squad in Râmnicu Vâlcea that, after every Holy Liturgy, on Sundays and holidays, the list of those condemned to death should be read, followed by its display on the church door (Cotan, 2018, p. 261).

Changing the geographical area of the research a little, we also point out that in the Jiu Gorge the German soldiers camped for a while at the Lainici Monastery. After they used the church as a stable, the painting of the place of worship was scratched and blackened by the smoke from the burning of the furniture and the archive of the monastic establishment. Moreover, some of the survivors were deported to Germany.

They showed similar behaviour at the Cozia Monastery, which they devastated. They did not even ignore the tombstone of the place of eternal belonging to voivode Mircea the Elder, which was seriously damaged (Ib., pp. 260, 262).

We also highlight that a multitude of churches were stripped of their religious objects, especially those made of silver (Gherasim Piteşteanu, 1983, p. 763), but also of brass, bronze, copper and pewter, to be transformed into cannons or projectiles.

The extreme weather conditions at the beginning of 1917 and the indolence of the occupation authorities required the establishment of a commission appointed by Alexandru Marghiloman, whose mission was to requisition firewood from the homes of the refugees in Moldova and distribute it to the poor population. Among its prominent members were bishops Meletie Dobrescu, Evghenie Humulescu and Teofil Mihăilescu (Cotan, 2018, p. 239).

During the counter-offensive of the Central Powers, at the end of 1916, the bishop of Râmnicu, Sofronie Vulpescu (1913-1918), retired



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to Bucharest. A vehement critic of the occupation, by order of the German Command, he was arrested on Descent of the Holy Spirit Sunday in 1917 and imprisoned at the Military Circle in the capital. Later, he was forced to reside at the Cheia Monastery, in Prahova County, then at the Hermitage of Ialomicioarei Cave, in the Bucegi Mountains, where he was forced to live in more than precarious living conditions. Due to his deteriorating health, he wrote to Mackensen, informing him of his predicament. In his answer, the latter allowed him to settle at the Căldărusani Monastery and then with his relatives in the capital.

Reasoning that he was too *“physically weak”*, after what he endured during detention, on 8 June 1918, he officially retired from his seat, his resignation being accepted by King Ferdinand and Simion Mehedinți, the Minister of Worship and Instruction (Cotan, 2018, pp. 129, 150, 151, 154).

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During the three months of their administration, our southern Danube neighbours showed a constant xenophobia towards the Romanian population and the autochthonous Orthodox clergy. In order to further temper such excesses, following an agreement, Dobrogea was placed under the direction of a German governor, who had under his command a Bulgarian general with the rank of prefect (Ib., pp. 175-176).

Among the local priests subjected to Calvary, we particularly mention Atanasie Popescu from the Agighiol commune in Tulcea, father of 8 children, 2 of whom were mobilized on the front. While he was in the church at the service of the Baptism of the Lord, he was arrested, together with 41 parishioners, on 6 January 1917, and charged with espionage. After an odyssey of 10 and a half months, in which he grazed the cattle of the Bulgarians through the Balkans and endured an acute famine as well as the darkest miseries and persecutions, on the occasion of the feast of Saint Demetrius the Great Martyr (26 October), he was pardoned from Sofia. Returning home, in the village of Domnița Maria, he found the household completely

destroyed, and the parish place of worship devastated and desecrated. The Mother of God in the royal icon of the church pediment was shot in the chest, and the eyes of the Baby Jesus in her arms were taken out with bayonets. At the sight of such sacrilege, the priest felt sick and fainted (Popescu, 1940, pp. 331-333).

Without having such aspirations, the community of the Rooster Monastery entered the circuit of deportations to Slava Rusă, then Bulgaria, through the monks Damian Nenciu, Agatanghel Chiriac, Varasiil Luca and 6 other monks, who died in the camp. Also, on 10 May 1917 the priest Vasile Aftenie, from the town of I. Gh. Duca, was killed by the Bulgarians, because he officiated the divine service in the Romanian language (Ib., p. 340).

A host of other servants of the Holy Shrines in the occupied territories suffered as a result of the most furious attacks of their transitory masters. Within this article we limit ourselves to nominating only a few of them. For example, in the Dedulești commune of Argeș, the Germans fixed a squad in the house of the priest Gheorghe Dobrinescu. The repeated violence to which he was subjected caused his paralysis and finally his death (Ib., p. 25). Beaten by Hungarian soldiers, on 8 November 1917, the priest Gheorghe Popescu, from Puchenii-Moșneni, Prahova County, also passed away (Ib., p. 218).

An extremely impressive case, which aroused our interest, is that of Father Constantin Păunescu, from Mihăești - Olt, who, at the age of only 28, was shot by the occupation troops. The motive for this odious assassination, which took place on 21 February 1917, was the following: a housekeeper working in his house discovered a grenade, which she took and secretly hid in the kitchen of the servant of God. Out of curiosity and carelessness, on 15 February, at 3 p.m., she handled it irresponsibly causing an explosion, which claimed her life and damaged part of the building. The noise produced by the explosion alerted not only the neighbours, but also the German police station. Although he was innocent, the young priest was arrested and sentenced by the court to capital punishment on the charge of insubordination to the imperial order regarding the regime of arms and ammunition and of plotting against the German armies.

As a divine sign of his innocence, the horses that were carrying him to the place of execution stopped at a bend in the road and did not want to go any further. Only after a generous consumption of nerves



The community of the Rooster Monastery entered the circuit of deportations to Slava Rusă, then Bulgaria, through the monks Damian Nenciu, Agatanghel Chiriac, Varasiil Luca and 6 other monks, who died in the camp. Also, on 10 May 1917 the priest Vasile Aftenie, from the town of I. Gh. Duca, was killed by the Bulgarians, because he officiated the divine service in the Romanian language.



After almost 53 months of apocalyptic fighting, with a victorious Entente and a Central Powers camp exhausted and losing on all fronts, the First World War ended on 29 October /11 November 1918, by the armistice signed by Germany in wagon 2419 from Compiègne. Preceding and similar political acts were initialled by the Entente, in the same year, in Thessaloniki with Bulgaria, in Mudros with Turkey, in Padua with Austria-Hungary and in Belgrade with Hungary.

and swearing and a long work of persuasion, submitted by those mandated to carry out the sentence, the speechless and, many times more sensitive than humans, animals agreed to move.

In the testamentary dispositions, drawn up on 18 February 1917 and addressed to his priestess, the martyred priest wrote: *“Dear father, mother, brothers, sisters, beloved wife and my beloved children. If I am going to die, you know that I am innocent, as I absolutely did not know that in the house where I was staying there was left from the German soldiers, to the misfortune of my family, a German grenade which was brought by some harm, and caused my misfortune. I was sick with sadness and ill-treated in prison.*

Take care of the children, Zino – let them learn to become well-known people all over the country, help them and spend everything with them. Deposit all the money for the children and stay with dad. Do not be wasteful and too smiling. You have some church money with you, give it to the Epitropia (Trusteeship) and get a certificate.

Prepare me a pompous funeral and pretend to the priests a rare angelic service, you know how I like it. You will buy all the new clothes from the church and pay 300 lei for them, that is, more than they cost, or you will take other ones instead. You will bury me with them.

Make me a nice vault, with a good cross and my photo in it at Mihăestii-de-Jos. May God protect you”. Left prematurely widowed and with “3 young offspring”, the deceased’s wife would serve 6 months of detention herself for this unfortunate and regrettable accident (Bobulescu, 1930, pp. 110-115).

Instead of an epilogue, we record that, after almost 53 months of apocalyptic fighting, with a victorious Entente and a Central Powers camp exhausted and losing on all fronts, the First World War ended on 29 October /11 November 1918, by the armistice signed by Germany in wagon 2419 from Compiègne. Preceding and similar political acts were initialled by the Entente, in the same year, in Thessaloniki with Bulgaria (16/29 September), in Mudros with Turkey (17/30 September), in Padua with Austria-Hungary (21 October/3 November) and in Belgrade with Hungary (31 October/13 November).

Internally, after the withdrawal of the government led by Alexandru Marghiloman (24 October/6 November 1918) and the appointment of a transitional cabinet headed by General Constantin Coandă, the executive from Iasi gave an ultimatum to Field Marshal

August von Mackensen, by which he was asked to withdraw his troops from the occupied territory.

On 12/25 November 1918, Bucharest was free, and shortly after, the Romanian Armed Forces, led by King Ferdinand and Queen Maria, made their triumphal entry into the restored capital. That great day of 18 November/1 December 1918 also coincided providentially with the proclamation in Alba Iulia of the happy end of the constitution of Great Romania, considered as a veritable day of the Resurrection of the nation.

“BLACK FRIDAY” OF THE OCCUPATION OF THE CENTRAL POWERS IN THE DIOCESE OF THE CURVED CARPATHIANS

The ancient city of Buzău, attested from a documentary point of view with the martyrdom of the Holy Martyr Sava Gotul, from 12 April 372, came under German occupation, starting from the night of 1/14 - 2/15 December 1916 (Buzău Archives, file 24/1919, p. 16).

Similar to other regions of Romania, the area under the occupation of the 12th Bavarian Cavalry Division was quickly and systematically organized out of the yearning of the enemy military authorities to exploit the natural, material and human resources as judiciously and profitably as possible.

Thus, Squad no. 264, which included the submontane area of the county, was based in Unguriu commune and was led by Major Radke. In turn, Squad no. 271, had its command point in the city of Buzău, and the one bearing no. 225, covered the Râmnicu Sărat area and was at the disposal of the famous General Erich von Falkenheim (Nicolescu, Stan, 1999, pp. 272-273), Chief of the German General Staff and Commander of the 9th Army.

Referring strictly to the church issue, we specify that the Buzău Diocese, an old hearth of Orthodox spirituality and Romanian culture, founded in 1502, had Bishop Dionisie Climescu (1894-1921) at its head during the war. The brave hierarch stoically endured the wave of offenses coming from the occupation troops, who appropriated the entire complex of buildings of the diocesan centre, except for two rooms that remained at his disposal (Cocora, 1986, pp. 187-189).

According to the assessments of Iuliu Scriban, he did not leave the community of believers entrusted to him for shepherding: *“Bishop*



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Some of the Orthodox churches in Buzău were assigned a different destination than the one for which they were originally designed and built. While some places of worship served as warehouses for ammunition, equipment, prison camps and even slaughterhouses, the "Banu" Church in Buzău was transformed into a hospital, and the "Holy Angels" Church became a German garrison church.

Dionisie was the only one of the three bishops of Muntenia who stayed in the diocese during the German invasions of 1916. He was satisfied with himself that he stayed at his job and was happy to testify at the Church House in 1917 that the Hungarians praised him for not having left his role during the plague" (Scriban, 1921, p. 492). It should also be remembered that the archives of the Buzău Diocese were destroyed during this period (Cotan, 2018, p. 155).

By virtue of the unwritten right of the occupier to take everything that could be taken, they did not even overtake the bells of some churches in the Diocese of Buzău, which they confiscated and turned into raw material, for the purpose of producing weapons and ammunition, needed on the battlefield troops of the Second Reich. Among the better-known urban places of worship that were damaged by such priceless objects of worship, we highlight the churches "Merchants" (today "Greeks") – 2 bells, "Assumption of the Virgin Mary" – 2 bells, "St. Nicholas" – 1 bell, the cemetery "Dumbrava" – 1 bell (Stan, 2008, pp. 77-78).

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In turn, the "Saint Archangels" Church in the village of Nișcov, founded in 1830, was used by the Germans as a stable for their cavalry structures.

Regarding the situation in the city of Râmnicu Sărat, occupied by the Germans on a festive day, on 14/27 December 1916 (Kiriteșcu, 1922, p. 460), of the 8 places of worship that were active, the "Saint Apostles" church was used as a stable, and "Saint Paraschiva" was assigned to soldiers of the Protestant denomination (Nicolescu, Stan, 1999, p. 275).

We also note that at the "Chesarie Episcopul" Theological Seminary, a Romanian hospital, a Russian one (Cocora, 1988, p. 48) and a German one (Nicolescu, Stan, 1999, p. 272) operated consecutively.

Among the sacred spaces that were affected because of the serious damage caused by the attackers, we bring to mind the case of the Ciolanu Monastery, where the Bavarians devastated part of the rooms of the inhabitants and stole appreciable amounts of food

and hay. An identical phenomenon also happened at the Rătești nunnery, subjected by the occupants to a treatment of plundering important quantities of food, drinks and other basic necessities (Stan, 2008, p. 78).

In such circumstances, an important segment of people in Buzău and Râmnic showed patriotism, dignity, courage and solidarity and obstinately opposed the coercive measures adopted by the occupiers, which drastically limited their civil rights and freedoms, often of a religious nature.

On 20 March 1917, Field Marshal August von Mackensen signed an ordinance in which the main Christian-Orthodox holidays were fixed (the Baptism of the Lord, the Annunciation, the Ascension of the Lord, the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, the Assumption of the Mother of God, the Nativity of the Mother of God, the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, Saint Nicholas and Christmas), as well as their performance in accordance with the peculiarities of the Gregorian calendar. Those who did not comply with those requirements were liable to punishment "up to five years in prison and a fine of up to 50,000 lei or one of these punishments" (Nedelcu, 1923, pp. 191-192).

Showing firmness, a group of priests in Buzău, among whom we mention Ion Guriță – Vadu Pași Parish, Nicolae Efrimescu – Săgeata Parish, Voicu Constantinescu – Zilișteanca Parish, C. Angelescu – Lapoș Parish, defied the prescriptions of the mentioned official document (Stan, 2008, p. 109).

On a different note, one of the sources of income for the temporary masters in Buzău and Râmnicu Sărat was the obligation to perform forced labour. Surprisingly, the students were not spared from such chores either. As it appears from Report no. 68 of the Buzău Diocese to the City Hall, dated 17 January 1919 "Their attitude (of the German military authority, a.n.) during the execution of the chores towards the students and towards the teachers was merciless, insulting and brutal. Under the control of four soldiers, the students were made to dry the puddles around the city, exposing them to malaria, or to clean and dig the maidans in the city. One day, as the students showed up in small numbers for the chore, Lieutenant Leringen, the assistant of the city commander, called all the teachers to the headquarters and, not wanting to hear the explanations we wanted to give them, he ordered us to bring them 100 students per hour, and if we do not comply with the order, he will lock us up in the commandery's churches.



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The students who had presented themselves with us were whipped with a whip and locked up until the evening in the cellar of the National Bank, together with gypsies and vagabonds, exposing them to the contamination of typhus fever that was haunting the city among the population weakened by hunger and uncleanliness”.

Very succinctly, the analysed official address also characterizes the reference period approached through the present research, concluding that: *“the German occupation left sad memories about the civilization and the soul of the German people, from the years 1916-1918”* (Buzău Archives, file 37/1919, pp. 15-16).

There are sources that certify that some prelates were arrested because they offered prayers and services for the victory of the Romanian Armed Forces, because they mentioned the king and the refugee authorities in Iași at the officiated religious services (Popescu, 1940, p. 311) or because they had made propaganda and had acted against the Germans.

Related to the chapter of national resistance, it is quite well known that, along the front line, from the Mountains of Buzău to the land of Vrancea, there operated a vast and effective information network created and led by the patriot Vasile Chilian, from the commune of Tichiriș, Putna county. Among his collaborators, villagers, priests and teachers, who took care, between December 1916 and May 1917, of housing, feeding and organizing the crossing of over 2000 officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers, escaped from prison camps, or who had lost contact with their units, we mention the hieromonk Iosif Ionescu from the Găvanele Hermitage, who served as a guide for some of them (Nicolescu, Stan, 1999, pp. 283-284). Disguised as a servant and using an oxcart as a means of transport, he collected a series of extremely useful information from the enemy, which he made available to the Romanian Armed Forces (Stan, 2008, p. 127).

The case of the priest Traian D. Popescu from Nehoiașu commune, who was imprisoned between 29 June and 12 July 1917, being accused of espionage and for facilitating the passage of fugitive Romanian prisoners to Moldova, is also worth mentioning. He was initially sentenced to death, but later his sentence was commuted to house arrest, together with his family in the town of Scărlățești, in Brăila county, until 5 April 1918, when he was released (Popescu, 1940, pp. 58 -59).

The priest Constantin Georgian, parish priest in the commune of Gura Teghii, *“a patriarch of his land”* and *“true Romanian”*, was also accused of favouring the passage of some Romanian soldiers to Moldova. He did not limit himself only to exhorting his parishioners, both in the church space and outside it, to support them *“as best as / they can”*, but he personally involved himself in this kind of saving, but, equally, extraordinarily risky initiatives.

At the end of December 1916, the Hungarians picked him up and took him to a *“red house in the Varlaam commune, where he was imprisoned for three weeks, suffering all the rigours of those imprisoned, until, thanks to the people’s perseverance, he gained freedom, not from Hungarians, but from the Germans”*. Even after his release, at the Holy Liturgy and the other services he officiated, he was guarded by a German soldier with a bayonet (Ib., pp. 60-61).

Archimandrite Eftimie and Vartolomeu from Tisău also ran through the gauntlet of detention on the grounds that they sheltered and fed several Romanian soldiers and officers, refugees from the occupied territory and eager to fight on the Moldovan front (Stan, 2008, p. 126).

Addressing in this scientific approach, with predilection, the cases of *“church personalities”*, we also evoke here the monk Eftimie Obrogea, the former abbot and treasurer of the Ciolanu Monastery, who was imprisoned and beaten several times for the courage to have defended his monastic settlement from the violations and abuse of foreign robbers (Popescu, 1940, pp. 59-60).

We benefit from information according to which some clerics stood up to the aggressors even with a weapon in hand, as did the priest Vasile Iliescu-Buzoianu from Homoești Parish. Forced by circumstances, he opened fire on a large group of German soldiers, who planned to attack his daughters’ chastity. The account of the armed intervention of the brave cleric recorded the killing of 4 enemy soldiers and the wounding of 20 others. His heroic attitude had a huge impact on public opinion at the time, impressing even the great historian Nicolae Iorga, who wrote the following: *“He was a priest with original ideas and willingly in their service, who upon the approach of the Germans, whom <good Romanians> were waiting for, took the rifle and fired at them until the last cartridge and the last breath. He deserves a monument and certain people should be invited to the inauguration”* (Ib., p. 230).



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The command that settled in the area approved the archpriest's request to provisionally appoint available priests instead of the ones mobilized on the front or refugees and agreed to the holding of the Easter divine service. On the other hand, the ringing of bells was not approved, which was prohibited and punished, in order not to obstruct air alerts. It is unusual that, in January 1917, the Germans installed an observation post on the "Saint Nicholas" Church to give the alarm when enemy planes approached.

During the confrontations at Râmnicu Sărat (9/22-14/27 December 1916), called by the Germans the "Battle of Christmas" – "Weihnachtsschlacht" (Tănase, 2011, pp. 287-298), priest Vasile Iliescu from Homoiesti was fatally shot, by the troops of Kaiser Wilhelm II. The atrocity was committed in the parish house, located near the church, under the assistance of Elisaveta Teodorescu, the niece of the deceased, only 8-year old, who managed to escape alive (Stan, 2008, p. 59).

A similar "treatment" was also applied to the priest Ghiță N. Giurgescu, from Bălănești commune. A widower for a month and with two boys on the front, he was killed in his house with bayonets in December 1916. In the chapter of human losses, we also record the daughter of the priest Nae Vasilescu, from Unguriu commune, "one of the most beautiful girls from Valea Buzăului", who was shot on Easter in 1917, "because she did not allow herself to be raped" (Popescu, 1940, pp. 58-59).

As it was stipulated, among others, in the *Law for the organization of New Dobrogea*, issued on 1 April 1914, Brăila county figured, from an ecclesiastical jurisdictional point of view, in the configuration of the Eparchy of Buzău (Cotan, 2018, p. 174). The occupying troops, made up of Germans, Austrians, Bulgarians and Turks, entered the well-known Danube port city on 23 December 1916/5 January 1917, between 12:30 and 1:30 p.m. (Urse, 2012, p. 158). Although according to articles 8 and 17 of the *Declaration on the Religions and Customs of the War on Land*, published in 1874, the occupying military authority was obliged to protect religious objectives, in Brăila those provisions of international humanitarian law were flagrantly violated. And there, as in the rest of the occupied territory, the churches suffered destruction caused by bombings and were exposed to robberies by Turkish soldiers.

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Three months later, the same military institution, which also had administrative responsibilities, required the leaders of the parish units to declare on their own responsibility the current situation of all stocks of wax and paraffin. It ignored the protest of the priests who blamed the lack of candles for deaths, relics and memorials of the deceased.

Another measure applied by the German Command was that of requisitioning the bells, belonging to the 11 Orthodox churches in the city, allowing only a medium-sized one to remain in position. Following the intervening protests, a certain concession was made that benefited the "Saint Apostles" Church. The place of worship in Brăila was allowed to keep a massive bell, previously manufactured in Munich, which had a special artistic value and was also difficult to dismantle.

The Germans' "rush" for metals caused a new ordinance, dated 2 March 1918, to impose the lifting of the other remaining bells at the cult units. A month later, the copper roofs of the churches were also targeted (Ib., pp. 169-171).

Among the priests in Brăila who suffered a multitude of hardships and sometimes paid with their lives for not aligning themselves with the demands of the occupiers, we mention the priests Gheorghe Balaban, from Viziru, killed by the Bulgarians together with his wife, and Dumitru Danielescu from Gemenele, accused of espionage and sent, up to November 1919, in the Hellberg camp (Germany). They were joined by Stan Apostol, from Movila Miresei, who suffered beatings from Turkish and Bulgarian soldiers because he did not agree that they should use the church where he served as a cattle stable. And in order for the persecution to be complete, the Hungarian troops expelled him from the house he owned (Popescu, 1940, pp. 62-63).

A trio of priests from Jirlău Parish, consisting of Grigore Popescu, Radu Anghelache and Voicu Ionescu, were taken to Surdila Greci and brutally beaten. After they were released by the German military authorities for lack of evidence, they soon passed away (Gaiță, 2002, p. 142).

Constantin Filotti, the mayor of Buzău, also demonstrated a very commendable conduct. In the atmosphere of patriotic effervescence, created around the great event of the union of Bessarabia with Romania (27 March /9 April 1918), the mayor had the courage to submit a request to the German squad command requesting permission

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Seven months later from this event and the day after the departure of the German troops from the city of Buzău, on 8/21 November 1918, a religious service was held at the City Hall in memory of the great voivode Mihai the Brave. The troops of the 9th Infantry Brigade marched "under a splendid triumphal arch, decorated with flags, flowers and greenery, and in the middle having designated a map of Greater Romania". Commanded by Colonel Lascăr Caracaș, they were the first Romanian military forces to enter the liberated city.

to officiate, in all the churches in the city and county, "a Tedeum of gratitude that would be attended by schoolchildren and the people" (Stan, 2008, p. 151).

The demonstrations took place on 8/21 April 1918 and had as points of interest a Tedeum, officiated at 09.00 in the Episcopal Cathedral by a council of priests, a procession in front of the City Hall and a historic speech delivered by priest Constantin Proviaan, director of the Theological Seminary "Chesarie Episcopul" (Stan, 2008, p. 151).

Exactly seven months later from this event and the day after the departure of the German troops from the city of Buzău, on 8/21 November 1918 (the feast of Saints Archangels Michael and Gabriel), a religious service was held at the City Hall in memory of the great voivode Mihai the Brave. The troops of the 9th Infantry Brigade marched "under a splendid triumphal arch, decorated with flags, flowers and greenery, and in the middle having designated a map of Greater Romania". Commanded by Colonel Lascăr Caracaș, they were the first Romanian military forces to enter the liberated city (Bianu, 1926, p. 107).

In the liturgical space of the same Episcopal Cathedral in Buzău, on 11/24 November 1918, prayers of thanks were offered to the Almighty for the help given to the Romanian nation to become whole and to see its secular desire to unite in one Christian country (Ib., p. 114).

CONCLUSIONS

The Romanian Orthodox Church, called by Mihai Eminescu "the spiritual mother of the Romanian nation, which gave birth to the unity of the language and the ethnic union of the people", participating in all the crucial, glorious or fateful moments in the Carpatho-Danubian-Pontic space.

The failure of the first military campaign of the Total War, carried out for 3 months by the Romanian armed forces, in the summer and autumn of 1916, generated its painful retreat towards Moldova, the abandonment of 2/3 of the national territory, including the capital, in favour of the Central Powers.

Between December 1916 and November 1918, the occupying armies forced the population of Romania, the church hierarchy and the monastic order to carry their national cross on a real Golgotha.

Like the members of the Christian communities they shepherded, the servants of the Holy Shrines had to endure material limitations, moral suffering and the vexations of the conquering authorities.

Orthodox priests offered prayers and church services for the victory of the Romanian armed forces over the enemy and, at the same time, raised the morale of the countrymen, who felt miserable because the deplorable condition in which they found themselves.

The ecclesiastical life of Bucharest and the temporarily occupied territories was affected by various episodes from the "breaking news" category: the attempt to change the Julian calendar to the Gregorian one, the requisition of church bells to be used in the armament industry of The Second Reich and the planning of the theft of the relics of St. Pious Demetrius the New, with the intention of their relocation to the Bulgarian space. This gloomy landscape was completed by the destruction and desecration of some places of worship of patrimonial importance and the confiscation of church assets, with spiritual, historical and symbolic value.

The echo of the terrorist regime and the robbery organized in detail also reached the plains of the Diocese of the Curvature of the Carpathians. And in this geographical and ecclesiastical space, the attempts of Germany and its allies to interfere with the "modus vivendi" of the Orthodox Church faced the brave opposition of some representatives of the clergy and some living in the monastic environment, as well as parishioners, guided by a vigorous Christian, national and civic conscience.

Some protested vigorously against the inhuman acts committed by the invaders and suffered physical and moral aggression, arrests, convictions, hard years in prison and even the ultimate sacrifice, because they hid and helped the Romanian soldiers who escaped from captivity or went astray during the retreat, to reach Moldova.

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