

BULGARIAN LUTHERAN CONGREGATIONS IN TRANSYLVANIA

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Abstract An almost diminished community, subject to Hungarian and Saxon authorities, made the transition from its Slavonic identity to the Romanian and German by remaining (almost completely) loyal to Lutheranism. This denomination became a strong component of the Bulgarian identity in Transylvania and its only tie to the past. The Lutheran Church Records depict the assimilation of an ethnic minority into two of the major ethnic groups in Transylvania from the 17th to the 20th century A. D.

Keywords Bulgarians; Lutherans; Transylvania; Church History; Assimilation; Folklore.

Until the end of the 19th century, the Lutheran Church in Transylvania, besides its Hungarian minority, also had four Bulgarian congregations: Cergău Mic¹, Cergău Mare², Rusciori³ and Bungard⁴. These communities were the only Romanian speaking Lutherans in Transylvania. Their existence as such was guaranteed by the Province of Sibiu and the neighbouring Saxon villages. The bond between these four communities was their Bulgarian heritage.

The scholars are still divided regarding the origin of the Bulgarian population in these communes. Walter Horwath considers it a reminiscence of the great migration period, and argues with the plenitude of Slavonic toponymics in this region.⁵ Josef Ladislav Píč and Albert

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¹Cergău Mic, village of the Cergău Commune, south of Blaj Municipality, Alba County.

²Cergău Mare, main village of the Cergău Commune, south of Blaj Municipality, Alba County.

³Rusciori, village of the Șura Mare Commune, north-west of Sibiu, Sibiu County.

⁴Bungard, village of the Șelimbăr Commune, east of Sibiu, Sibiu County.

⁵Walter Horwath, "Erloschenes Slawentum in Siebenbürgen", *Zeitschrift für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, no. 1. (1984): 38–45.

Amlacher placed the arrival of its ancestors somewhere between 1116 and 1218, and are convinced that they were members of the Bogomil Sect. Fleeing persecution in Bulgaria they immigrated to Transylvania and adopted Catholicism, afterwards Lutheranism.⁶ Ion Muşlea, whose analysis includes philology and ethnology, alongside history, regards the Transylvanian Bulgarians as descendants of either mercenaries or war prisoners taken by the Hungarian King Stephen the 5th during his Byzantine campaign in 1263–1266.⁷

The earliest mentioned Bulgarian village is Cergău Mare in 1302, when the bishop of Transylvania donated the tithe of this parish to the Chapter of Alba Iulia.⁸ Cergău Mic is mentioned 1313 as possession of the Diódi family from Geoagiu.⁹ A boundary fixing from 1336 mentions *Csergewd Bulgaricum*.¹⁰ Rusciori is first mentioned in 1380 as *villa Ruthenica*.¹¹ The inhabitants of these villages were in the 16th century mostly Bulgarians with a Saxon minority.¹² Bungard had originally Saxon inhabitants, as mentioned in a papal document issued in 1429.¹³ After the Turkish incursions of the 15th century the village was destroyed¹⁴ and its original inhabitants replaced by Romanians, mentioned in 1494.¹⁵ The Bulgarians arrived here in the 16th century, and by 1607 they are along with the Saxons entitled to leadership.¹⁶

⁶Josef Ladislav Píč, Adolf Amlacher, “Die Dacischen Slaven und Csergeder Bulgaren”, in *Sitzungsberichte der königlichen böhmischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*, (Prag: Verlag der Königlichen Böhmischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften, 1888), 262–263.

⁷Ion Muşlea, “Şcheii de la Cergău şi folklorul lor”, *Dacoromania: Buletinul Muzeului Limbii Române*, no. V (1927–1928): 1929, 2–3.

⁸The name of the parish was at this time *Chergoud*, its priest must have been member of the Alba Iulia Chapter. *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen*, I, ed. Franz Zimmermann, (Hermannstadt, Michaelis, 1892), 224.

⁹The document mentions two villages with similar names: „terra Chergoud nobilium de Gyog [...], terra Chergoud capituli scilicet ecclesiae beati Mychaelis.” The first should be Cergău Mic, Zimmermann, I, 307.

¹⁰Zimmermann, I, 477.

¹¹The representative of the village, Manshercze, attends a meeting of the Provincial Council of Sibiu. *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen*, II, ed. Franz Zimmermann, (Hermannstadt, Michaelis, 1897), 530.

¹²The Province of Sibiu issued 1582 a regulation for the inhabitants of Rusciori, stating that half of the seats in the Local Council was reserved to the Saxons. If there were not enough Saxons, they had to elect German speaking Bulgarians. The head of the Council changed each year, from a Bulgarian to a Saxon. “Statuta pro incolis ex Reißdörffel”, 1–2, Romanian National Archives (RNA) – Sibiu County Branch, Colecția de documente medievale, UV 1127.

¹³*Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen*, IV, ed. Gustav Gündisch, (Hermannstadt, Verein für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde, 1937), 372–373.

¹⁴Johann Plattner, “Aus der Umgebung des alten Hermannstadt: Das Dorf Baumgarten”, *Siebenbürgisch-deutsches Tageblatt*, no. 16876, 1929, 3.

¹⁵“Rechnungen aus dem Archiv der Stadt Hermannstadt”, I, *Quellen zur Geschichte Siebenbürgens aus sächsischen Archiven*, ed. Verein für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde, (Hermannstadt, Michaelis, 1880), 182.

¹⁶Gernot Nussbächer, “Rumänen, Sachsen und Bulgaren in Baumgarten” in *Aus Urkunden und Chroniken: Beiträge zur siebenbürgischen Heimatkunde*, II, (Bukarest: Kriterion, 1985), 33. Adolf Amlacher, “Zwei

In the following, I will present the development of these four Bulgarian Lutheran Congregations, as depicted in Lutheran Church Archives.

Bungard

Bungard was the first from the four villages to receive Romanian inhabitants in the 15th century. Taking advantage of Sibiu being controlled by Prince Gábor Báthory, they erect a wooden chapel, which will be demolished next year by order of the Magistrate. They will erect their still standing brick church in 1693 with princely approval and the financial aid of the Greek Commercial Guild from Sibiu.¹⁷ The Romanians became the majority of the inhabitants of Bungard and remained Orthodox. With the beginning of the 18th century the Bulgarians began to assimilate into the Romanian population and to convert to Orthodoxy. The Lutheran minister noted the following conversions in his Parish Records:

“Anno 1735. die 28. Januarii apostasiert ein nährischer Jüngling Thome Gaal und wird aus unordentlicher Liebe zu einer Walachin ein verfinsterter abergläubischer Wallache. Verlässt also seinen in [der] Heiligen Schrift fest gegründeten wahren Glauben [...], Gott aber der Reich ist von Barmherzigkeit. [...] bringe diesen Elenden noch wieder zurecht [...] und richte Ihm seinen Abfall nicht zu, weil Er vielmehr aus Unwissenheit getan. Er regiere aber aller Herzen derer allhier sich befindlichen wenig Evangelischen, dass Sie die falsche Lehre meiden, die wahre lieben und beständig zu der darauf erfolgenden Seligkeit verbleiben. [...] Anno 1725 die den 5 Augusti hat sich es zugetragen des George Bene sein Sohn nämlich der Mihalij ist mit des Sztan Elj seiner Tochter [...] durch gegangen auf Westen¹⁸ und hat sich da wollen lassen kopulieren mit ihr, es ist aber verhindert worden, und sind zurück gebracht worden [...] den 6 Augusti zu Nacht sind die wieder durch gegangen auf Fagrosch¹⁹ da haben sie sich lassen kopulieren, darnach kommen die eheliche Leute zu Haus. Was aber die Ursache gewesen, dass sie sich mit einander verbunden haben, ist diese, die Ursache, so hatte die Magd [...] ein Kind gemacht, dass so die Kirchen Zucht nicht sollte ausstehen, [...] wendet sich zu den Wallachen, lässt sich vom walachischen Bischof taufen [auf den Namen] Mihella. Dieses

Urkunden zur Geschichte der Bulgaren in Baumgarten”, *Korrespondenzblatt des Vereins für siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, no. XXXI, 1908, 92–93.

¹⁷“Matrikel von Baumgarten”, I (1689–1802), RNA – Colecția Brukenthal, T1–6, Nr. 54, 4. 12.

¹⁸Veștem, neighbouring village.

¹⁹Făgăraș, municipality on the river Olt, in Brașov County.

ist zur Nachricht geschrieben, warum er seinen christlichen evangelischen Glauben hat verlassen.”²⁰

But Orthodox also converted to Lutheranism: “Copulatus filius Christiani Buziasch nominatus Petrus, cum honesta virgine Maria, quamvis vallachicae nationis, tamen religioni nostre evangelicae se adjungius die 17. Januarii. [...] Anno 1741 Janos Gyirkul, alias Gaal cum honesta virgine; Maria, ibidem vallachicae nationis, et evangelicae fecitae religionis die 19 Januarii.”²¹

According to these Records only four mixed weddings where celebrated in the 18th century. At two of them the bride followed her groom into the Orthodox Faith. At the end of the century the Lutheran Parish Records inform about mixed weddings celebrated in the Orthodox Church:

“Wird wohl nicht bei uns kopuliert, aber auch hier consigniert, die Kopulation eines walachischen Burschen Namens Szimjon Vojna, welcher die Tochter des verstorbenen Georgye Iuj János Gál zur Ehe nimmt, welche jedoch bei ihrer Evangelischen Religion bleibt und der Bräutigam sie in Religions- und Kirchensachen, weder mit Worten, [noch] viel weniger mit der Tat zu beschweren verspricht. [...] Onye Krißte, Sohn der Georgye Krißte, wird kopuliert mit Catarina Mihály Jacob in der walachischen Kirche [...] aber da der Bräutigam altgläubig und die Braut evangelisch [ist, haben sie sich] in meiner Gegenwart und ihres Nanasch²² Onye Toni Csora auf die Art vernommen, dass Catarina bei ihrer Evangelischen Religion bleiben solle und ihr der Mann dieser wegen keine Schwierigkeiten machen dürfte.”²³

More than 100 years long, from 1689 until 1801 the majority of Lutheran wedding ceremonies in Bungard were between local Bulgarians or those from Rusciori, Cergău Mare or Cergău Mic. Five weddings were between Bulgarians and Saxons, three between Bulgarians and Hungarians. The Lutheran ministers blessed 22 couples between 1802 and 1846, 11 are between Bulgarians from Bungard and Cergău Mic and nine between Bulgarians and Romanians. From the last ones only four brides converted to Orthodoxy. Regarding the ethnicity of the partners in this period, three were Bulgarian-Saxon and three Bulgarian-Hungarian couples.²⁴ From 1850 until 1862 only nine Bulgarian-Romanian couples were blessed in the Lutheran Church.²⁵ In the last three decades of the 19th Century the Lutherans diminish in Bungard. By 1870 only nine families are Lutheran, meaning 23 persons. Seven of

²⁰ Matrikel I, 77–78. All German quotes are adapted to Modern High German (András Bándi).

²¹ Matrikel I, 113.

²² Godfather.

²³ Matrikel I, 116–117.

²⁴ Matrikel von Baumgarten, II (1802–1890), RNA – Colecția Brukenthal, T1–6, Nr. 53, 109–112.

²⁵ Matrikel der Evangelischen Kirchengemeinde, A. C. Bongart (1838–1862), RNA– Colecția Brukenthal, T1–6, Nr. 56, 19–20.

them are mixed: Bulgarian-Romanian.²⁶ In 1878 six men immigrate to Wallachia, three move to work in Sibiu and Cașolț²⁷, one joins the army. From the women, three find employment as maids in Sibiu. In conclusion only these 11 Lutherans live permanently in the village:

“1. George Fluerasiu sen. samt seiner Frau. 2. Aglitia. Dieses Ehepaar ist derart verarmt, dass es sich nur durch Betteln und Dienen ernährt. Es hat kein Haus und Hof, kein Stückchen Land auf dem Hattert²⁸ und ist 70 Jahre alt. 3. Petru Flueras war zweimal schon im Zuchthaus. er ist sehr arm und ernährt sich als Tagelöhner. 4. Petru Hellner, ein Ehemann, aber derart verarmt, dass er nicht ein Vermögen von 10 fl. hat. 5. Juon Boila ziemlich anständiger Landbauer, ist nicht ganz arm doch hat er Schulden genug. 6. George Flueras ist ein 6 jähriges Kind. 7. George Hellner ist ein ausgezeichnete Schüler, ist 13 Jahre alt. Seine Eltern wollen ihn auf eine Lehre geben, da er höchst krumme Füße hat und sich mit Feldarbeit nicht ernähren würde können. 8. Petru Boila, ein 18 jähriger Bursche. 9. Mina Frátilla, 10. Maria Niculla, 11. Eva Frátilla.”²⁹

The dying Congregation was 1897 given to a travelling preacher by the High Consistory (Oberconsistorium) of the Lutheran Church in Transylvania. The preacher could however not attend the parishioners because he did not speak Romanian. The services were held by András János, the last elected minister of Bungard, who was officially retired since 1867.³⁰ After his death in 1925, the 11 remaining Lutherans converted to Orthodoxy.³¹

The Magistrate of Sibiu tried throughout the 16th century to recolonize Bungard with Saxon, but most of the new arrived left. Despite the high emigration rate and their minority status, the local Saxons and Bulgarians enjoyed the city's protection.³² Even so, in the 2nd half of the 18th century the Bulgarians adopted orthodox customs. In 1753, after his death, a Lutheran elder was buried according to: “variis tam ante quam post inhumanationem ceremoniis valachicis (pománe)³³ usus est [...] invitando pastores valachicos, qui, lectis demortuo vigiliis, ferme per horam praecipuas fecerant exequias”³⁴. Events like this became common in the next century, when the Bulgarians assimilation into the Romanian population accelerated. One explanation could be the fact that pastor Johann Michael Schuster († 1845)

²⁶Gedenk Buch für die evangelische Gemeinde Baumgarten, RNA – Colecția Brukenenthal, T1–6, Nr. 57, 17.

²⁷A nearby Saxon village.

²⁸Field.

²⁹Gedenk Buch. 63–64.

³⁰Actele Parohiei Evanghelice C. A. Bungard (1788–1902), RNA – Colecția Brukenenthal, T1-6, Nr. 43, 469. *Verhandlungen der 21. Landeskirchenversammlung*, (Hermannstadt, Drotleff, 1904), 23–24.

³¹*Statistisches Jahrbuch der Evangelischen Landeskirche Augsburgischer Bekenntnisses in Siebenbürgen*, XII, (Hermannstadt, Drotleff, 1922), 14; Plattner, Umgebung, 4.

³²Plattner, Umgebung, 3–4. Nussbächer, Rumänen, 33.

³³Funeral meal.

³⁴Matrikel I, 126–127.

did not speak Romanian. During his 31 year long service in Bungard, his parishioners attended mostly the orthodox mess. Schuster's successor preached Romanian, so the Bulgarians could understand him.³⁵

In the 19th century, when nationalism was rising, the Bungard Bulgarians had to make a decision: to become German speaking like the most Lutherans in Transylvania or Romanian speaking like the most inhabitants of their village. They chose the second alternative. According to one Pastor, Bungard Bulgarians hated everything Saxon. In 1807, Lisza Gál, a maid, married a Romanian lad and converted to Orthodoxy. This is her pastors comment on the apostasy: "Nicht aus Gewissensruhe noch Andachtsübung, sondern aus Hoffart und Liebe zu dem, mit roten Tüchern gezierten Kopftuch und Kleiderpracht der hiesigen Walachinnen und [die] Verabscheuung der sächsischen Tracht der allhier lebenden Evangelischen Serbinnen Weiber."³⁶ 70 years later, pastor András states that all the "Serbs" in his parish wear Romanian garments. He does not even consider them to be Lutherans at all: "Die griechisch orientalischen Feiertage werden von ihnen gefeiert; ja fast noch stärker als die ihrigen. Sie fasten, und wenn eine schwere Krankheit (fácáturá³⁷) ihr Haus besucht, so verzichten sie zwar auf die Hilfe ihres Seelsorgers nicht ganz, aber damit ist es noch nicht abgetan. Die wirksamste und sicherste Hilfe (maslu³⁸, festanie³⁹ etc.) sei nur vom griechisch-orientalischen Geistlichen zu erreichen."⁴⁰

Cergău Mare

The information about the Population of Cergău Mare is rather scarce. The Romanians in this possession are first mentioned in 1647, when they apply to the Principality for authorization to build a church. They state to be old inhabitants of the village, who however do not wish to attend the Lutheran Church of the Bulgarians.⁴¹ The entire possession will be donated 1738 by Emperor Carl the 6th to the Greek Catholic Archbishopric of Blaj. Georg Greul, the Lutheran Pastor of Cergău Mare complains to the members of the Zekesch Surrogacy⁴² in 1760 about

³⁵Gedenk Buch, 7–8.

³⁶Matrikel II, 118. Gedenk Buch, 7.

³⁷Romanian for sickness.

³⁸Romanian for unction of the sick.

³⁹Romanian for consecration of houses.

⁴⁰Gedenk Buch, 17.

⁴¹Joseph Kemény, "Bruchstück aus der Geschichte der vaterländischen geistlichen Zehnten mit besonderer Bezugnahme auf unsere Walachen", *Magazin für Geschichte, Literatur und alle Denk- und Merkwürdigkeiten Siebenbürgens*, II, (Kronstadt, Gött, 1846), 394–395.

⁴²The Zekesch Surrogacy (latin: Surrogatia Czekesdiensis) or Chapter of Spring was first mentioned in 1308 as a subdivision of the Chapter of Sebeş. The member parishes where all Saxon or Bulgarian possessions of noblemen east of the City of Sebeş. Georg Müller, "Die deutschen Landkapitel in Siebenbürgen und ihre Dechanten 1192-1848. Ein rechtsgeschichtlicher Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Landeskirche in Siebenbürgen", *Archiv des Vereins für siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, no. 48, 1934/1936, 10, 70–72, 76–80.

the administrators of the Archbishopric who are threatening the Lutheran Population with terminating their land leasing contracts, if they don't convert to Greek Catholicism. This may be the reason, why by 1789 the Lutherans became a minority on the possession and their pastor is afraid of losing his entire congregation.⁴³ Unfortunately we don't know how many Lutherans lived by this time in Cergău Mare. The 1765 church census counted 98 souls.⁴⁴ The next census in 1862 counted only 31.⁴⁵ Visiting the congregation in 1875, bishop Georg Daniel Teutsch mentions only 14 parishioners.⁴⁶ After 1897 the congregation becomes a dependency of Cergău Mic⁴⁷ and by the middle of the 1920 loses all its members, who convert to Greek Catholicism.⁴⁸

The first mention of the undergone Lutheran Congregation occurs 1554 by the Zekesch Chapter Records. The Minister of "Csörgöd" is being admonished by the Chapter to pay his taxes.⁴⁹ At this time both Cergău constituted one parish. In 1620 the possessions elders stated the membership of their parish to the above mentioned mostly German speaking Chapter. The headborough of Cergău Mare declared that his community had at first Bulgarian speaking Ministers (Adamus Bulgarus, Stephanus Wayda, Stephanus Kokosch), later on Saxons. But all of them were ordained by the Saxon Bishop. The 100 years old inhabitant, Adam Miklós recollects the names of the following Bulgarian ministers: „I. Zacharias Zavari. II. Michaellem Literati Bulgaricum, [...] Poppa Adam Bulgaricum, IV. Matthiam Vayda”⁵⁰. The hearing of these men was ordered by the Sebeş Chapter⁵¹, because the assumption was made, that the possession had the past Hungarian Calvinist pastors.

When 1653 the pastors seat was vacant, the Burgrave of Vingard recommends the election of the schoolmaster from Cergău Mic, who, even though being a Saxon, speaks both Bulgarian and Romanian.⁵² In 1708 the Synod admonished the high aged pastor of Cergău

⁴³ Pič, Amlacher, Slaven, 267.

⁴⁴ *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Evangelischen Landeskirche A. B. in Grossfürstenthum Siebenbürgen*, III, Hermannstadt, Closius, 1870, V. The 1763 school inspection records show different figures: „Membra ecclesiae sunt: Incolae conjugatti – 21. vidui 1. viduae 2. juvenes – 5. virgines 5. pueri 7 puellae 6.” “Kirchenvisitationen 1725–1831”, Central Archives of the Evangelical Church A. C. in Romania (CAECR), Sebeş Chapter Records, 209–DA–69, 251.

⁴⁵ *Statistisches Jahrbuch*, III, 49.

⁴⁶ Georg Daniel Teutsch, *Die Gesamtkirchenvisitation der Evangelischen Kirche A.B. in Siebenbürgen (1870–1888)*, ed. Harald Roth in "Schriften zur Landeskunde Siebenbürgens" 24, (Wien: Böhlau, 2001), 165.

⁴⁷ *Verhandlungen der Achtzehnten Landeskirchenversammlung 1897: Beiheft*, (Hermannstadt: Drottleff, 1897), LXIX.

⁴⁸ Muşlea, Şcheii, 9.

⁴⁹ Georg Friedrich Marienburg, "Verzeichniß der ältesten Pfarrer des Decanatus de Sebus, d. i. des Unterwälder Kapitels aus urkundlichen Quellen des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts", *Archiv des Vereins für siebenbürgische Landeskunde, Neue Folge*, no. VIII, (Kronstadt, Gött, 1867), 319–320

⁵⁰ Marienburg, Verzeichniß, 323.

⁵¹ The westernmost Saxon Chapter, it included the congregations west from the Sibiu Province. Müller, Landkapitel, 10, 49–53.

⁵² "Amtsschriften 1553–1699", Sebes Chapter Records, CAECR, 209-DA-13, CCCXX.

Mare to seek out for a successor and teach him "Serbian", avoiding this way the demise of the congregation.⁵³

The Bulgarians in Bungard and Cergău Mare assimilated the Romanian language and denominations during the 19th century. Both were possessions and while in Cergău Mare the landlord insisted on their conversion, in Bungard, their small number and harsh living conditions led to their downfall.

Cergău Mic

The largest off all four communities, Cergău Mic had 1765 presumably only Bulgarian inhabitants, 378 persons.⁵⁴ The Greek Catholic Parish was established 1852. In 1875 the number of Lutherans was 360⁵⁵, by 1927 it rose to 483. In this year the Greek Catholic Parish had 242 members, some of them being converts from Lutheranism. The majority of Bulgarians in Cergău Mic still spoke their native tongue around 1850, the last Bulgarian speakers died out 30 to 40 years afterwards.⁵⁶ Even though they adopted Romanian, did not lose their Bulgarian identity, which consisted in their loyalty to Lutheranism and the knowledge of being the "the oldest" inhabitants of the possession.⁵⁷

The Lutheran Parish ceased to exist by force of political changes. Its last pastor, Michael Simonis reported on February 27th 1946 to his superiors:

"1. Die gegenwärtige Seelenzahl der Evangelischen in Kleinschergied beträgt 57 Seelen. 2. Die Austritte aus der evangelischen Kirche seit 23. August 1944. bis zur Gegenwart betragen 451 Seelen. Der heutige Stand der Übertritte in die orthodoxe Kirche 368 und in die griechisch-katholischen Kirche 83 Seelen. Die Aus- und Übertritte erfolgten nach der Behebung der Sachsen auf Grund der Drohungen des Ortsrichters der zum Austritte aus der evangelischen Kirche und zum Übertritte in die griechisch-katholische Kirche aufrief, widrigenfalls auch die Evangelischen Kleinschergieds gehoben würden. Dieser Aufruf hatte Erfolg."⁵⁸

This headborough converted soon to Orthodoxy and decided to turn over the Lutheran Church and Rectory to the Romanian Orthodox Church. He threatened both Lutherans and Greek Catholics with expropriation of their homes and lands by the Land Reform Committee. He also promised land to the converts. In a short period of time the most Lutherans converted to Orthodoxy and the headborough along a newly appointed Orthodox

⁵³Carl Werner, *Die Generalsynode der evangelischen Kirche A. B. in Siebenbürgen vom Jahre 1708*, (Hermannstadt: Michaelis, 1883), 13.

⁵⁴Statistisches Jahrbuch, III, V. The census of the Chapter shows less inhabitants: „Membra ecclesiae sunt: Incolae conjugati – 70. vidui – 6. viduae – 16. Juvenes – 20. virgines – 16. pueri – 21 puellae – 25.” Kirchenvisitationen 1725–1831, 251.

⁵⁵Teutsch, Gesamtkirchenvisitation, 184.

⁵⁶Muşlea, Şcheii, 5–6.

⁵⁷Ibid., 6–11.

⁵⁸High Consistory Records, CAECR, 103–493/1946.

priest claimed the right to take over the Lutheran Church and Cemetery. With the help of the Ploughmen's Front Political Organisation the headborough seized all the buildings owned by the Lutheran Church and on July the 1st 1945 the Orthodox Priest moved into the Lutheran Rectory. The headborough used the Militia of the Party because a previous attempt to overtake the Church met the opposition of the Greek Catholics, who took up arms, defended the church and put the orthodox priest on the run. Simonis moved out off Cergău Mic on February 10th 1945, after being intimidated and accused by the orthodox priest of being a Nazi sympathiser and agitator against the Soviet Union. He also feared that some of his former parishioners could turn against him.⁵⁹

Some information from the history of this Parish is also known. At the hearing in 1620 the possession was represented by Istvan Kiletz, Ambros Pál, Peter Ferentz, János Kilitze, Philipp Pall, István Balas, Balul Mattjas and Nikola Gáspár⁶⁰. They declared the same as the inhabitants of Cergău Mare.

The most interesting document regarding the inhabitants of this possession and their religious customs is the *Speculum Religionis et Pietatis Christianae Bulgarorum Csörgediensium*⁶¹ from 1647 by pastor Andreas Mathesius⁶². It is a report of the pastor's troubles with his congregation. On September 27th 1647 a baby died and the pastor was called to bury it. Mathesius refused to go, because he was fallen ill. It rained and the streets were muddy. The sick pastor was not able to walk leave his house and asked the schoolmaster to go in his place to attend the funeral. In Saxon communities a pastor's place could have been held by preachers (deans) or schoolmasters. But the family refused the schoolmaster's service and send one of the elders, János Cancellaris, to persuade Mathesius to come to the cemetery. He refused again. Cancellaris proposed, that the pastor should be carried out by members of the community to officiate at the grave, arguing: "uns genügt am Schulmeister nicht, du musst da sein, denn du bist Pfarrer."⁶³ The pastor replied that he was too weak to even speak and added: "Ihr könnt ja dieses mit dem Schulmeister wohl verrichten, denn es erfordert des Pfarrers Praesens an solchem Ort nicht so sehr, als wenn ein Kind sollt getauft werden etc."⁶⁴ The elder refused the service of the schoolmaster and asked from Mathesius to send the Pastor from Cergău Mare to the cemetery. But Mathesius stated, that the other pastor will not come, because he asked him in the past and had always refused to help him out. "Hierauf wird der

⁵⁹He also reports, that after the spirits boiled down, some of the Bulgarians visited and asked him to administer them the Lord's Supper and promised to convert back to Lutheranism, as soon as the Romanian State will allow it. High Consistory Records, CAECR, 103-246/1946, 103-493/1946.

⁶⁰Marienburg, Verzeichniß, 324.

⁶¹Pič, Amlacher, Slaven, 268–275.

⁶²Andreas Nathesius aka Andreas Mathiae was Lutheran Minister in Cergău Mic from 1640 until ca. 1659, when he supposedly died. Ernst Wagner, "Die Pfarrer und Lehrer der evangelischen Kirche A. B. in Siebenbürgen, I. Band: Von der Reformation bis zum Jahre 1700," *Schriften zur Landeskunde Siebenbürgens, Band 22/1* (Köln: Böhlau, 2001), 239.

⁶³Pič, Amlacher, Slaven, 268.

⁶⁴Ibid., 268.

alte fromme scilicet Mann schellich⁶⁵, steht auf und läuft davon, sagend: Halte es im Sinn, Pfarrer, du willst nicht kommen und sagst, wir dürften keines Pfarrers."⁶⁶ Elder Cancellaris went straight to the people gathered in the cemetery and told them what he already had told the pastor. The parishioners got angry with Mathesius saying: „Wie kann der Pfarrer so reden, zu was haben wir ihn denn geholt?"⁶⁷ They decided to discuss a way to act against their pastor after the funeral meal. However, as the hurt minister recalls it: „Wurden aber hiervon durch ihr gewöhnliches Fressen und Saufen auf dem Leichenmahl abgehalten, der Granz⁶⁸ steckte aber in ihnen, dass sie Gelegenheit suchten, sich zu rächen, welches den 3 Tag anging,"⁶⁹

Mathesius had a second altercation with his parishioners that year, after on September 29th the village witch (öffentliche Landbisslerin) died. Two years earlier he admonished her to stop doing the "Devil's bidding" (Teufelswerk), otherwise he will have her buried like a donkey (Eselsbegräbnis), meaning without the participation of ordained ministers and ringing church bells. The admonishment had little effect. After a short while the women went back to her old ways and started also ruining Mathesius' reputation in Cergău Mic, as well by the common folk as by noblemen and headborough alike. The number of customers in the church mill dropped. So Mathesius confronted the woman and asked her if she went against his pastoral admonition. He also remembered her of the oath she took before God not to practice witchcraft. The wanton woman answered that she was only "Kräuter brauchen."⁷⁰ After this encounter the two avoided each other. Seeing that the woman showed no signs of contrition, Mathesius refused her the church burial. Doing so, his parishioners cited him before the Burgrave⁷¹ and the aldermen. They accused him of refusing performing his pastoral duties and remembered him of what Cancellaris said: Mathesius does not find his parishioners worthy of having a pastor at all. He begged for forgiveness stating that his words were twisted by his opponents.⁷²

After a violent dispute with Cancellaris, the pastor convinced the parishioners to let him ask permission for the burial from the Chapter Dean. The Dean denied it, which encouraged Mathesius to invite him and a Chapter delegation to Cergău Mic in order to investigate the malcontent of the Bulgarians with their pastor. These stated the following: the pastor preaches, that our daughters are whores, who come to church with their impure bodies. He also prohibits them their ancestral rights⁷³, of them they explained four to the Chapter delegation.

⁶⁵Wild, enraged.

⁶⁶Pič, Amlacher, Slaven, 268–269.

⁶⁷Ibid., 269.

⁶⁸Anger.

⁶⁹Pič, Amlacher, Slaven, 269.

⁷⁰Ibid., 269.

⁷¹Legal representative of the Landlord

⁷²Pič, Amlacher, Slaven, 270–271.

⁷³"Klagten sie mich an, ich beraubte sie alter ihrer Gerechtigkeit und hebe sie aus alter ihrer lieben Väter Rechte". Pič, Amlacher, Slaven, 272.

The first one is practised in spring. The youth goes in the forest, where a girl is dressed up in green brushwood and gets rolled over in the creek. They take her back into the village, where everybody can cast water on her by buckets and shout: "Regen, Regen hätten wir gern!"⁷⁴ After that, nobody will suffer on water shortage.

The second ancient Bulgarian custom is the go on "Colindalen". On Christmas Eve the Bulgarian youth begins at 3 a. m. to visit the homes of the villagers and sing Romanian Carols, which Mathesius calls "Gotteslästerliche Kolinden". The pastor is irritated by the fact, that at Christmas all Bulgarians are although busy sitting together and learning them sing. They show no interest in singing Church Hymns or Christian Psalms.⁷⁵

The third custom, which got prohibited by the pastor was to use candles "bei den Toten". And the last prohibition regards the so called "heiliger Michaelisbecher", a custom later depicted by the pastor.⁷⁶

Matthesius concludes his writing with a detailed description of Bulgarian funeral habits. When a sick person has problems breathing, the relatives light a candle and put it on his or hers hand, if necessary somebody holds the hand of the dying until he or she stops breathing. The pastor adds ironically: "Und das kann bei Verlust der Seelen Seligkeit nicht ausbleiben."⁷⁷

After somebody dies, the Bulgarians ring the Church bells as soon as possible. Meanwhile the women of the household and close relatives gather before the gate, on the street and put a straw pile on fire. As long as it burns they moan the deceased. They believe that church bells and fire raise the soul of the dead and that the next death will occur in the direction the smoke is blown by the wind.

The Bulgarians make excessive use of candles. The deceased is surrounded by crosses made of candle wax, even on his or hers chest is placed a whole bunch of them. Mathesius threatened his parishioners with pastoral punishments (*officium elencticus*), considering this practice being idolatry. The Bulgarians answered him: „Die Deutschen stürben wie das unvernünftige Vieh, weil sie ohne licht stürben.“⁷⁸ The pastor asked them proves from the Holy Scriptures, if the patriarchs, prophets, Christ, the apostles or martyrs, died by candlelight.

In Cergau Mic the Bulgarians sacrifice a large amount of sheep for the funeral meals at burials. The pastor asked them, why to they spoil their flocks for one meal only? They answered: "Dass, wo der Verstorbene in die Hölle gefahren, die Schafe, eins nach dem anderen kämen aus einem Wasser [heraus], die pflegten mit ihrer nasser Haut und Wolle, sich über den Verstorbenen im Feuer zu schütteln und dasselbe auslöschen."⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Pič, Amlacher, Slaven, 272.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 272.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 273.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 273.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 273.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 274.

While the Bulgarians are having their lavish and often quite joyful funeral meals, an especially ordained old woman holds a torch and a plate with glowing coal, enchanting rimes over the deceased and making noise with the pots, moving them around the room. Mathesius was not able to understand her words, nor could he get them explained by someone. His parishioner used candles even on cattle horns or ship heads, before they sacrificed them. Some even branded their cattle with glowing iron crosses, a practice the pastor did not comprehend.

Before the funeral meal, they put two buckets at the gate. One with water and one with glowing coal. They wash their hands and shed the water over the coal, meaning this will take the suffering of the moaning ones away. After the meal they go to the tavern, where they drink the St. Michaels's cup. Three consecutive days after the burial, the family of the deceased rounds up a few children from the streets and invite them to a meal by candlelight.⁸⁰

The pastor's big disappointment was that the Dean did not forbid the use of candles, he only asked the parishioners to sing Hymns and Psalms like the Saxons do and reduce the expenses on their funeral meals. The parishioners were also disappointed, that Mathesius did not get punished for being severe with them.⁸¹

On December 8th 1647 the Chapter held its convent in Cergău Mic. By this occasion the Dean made the parishioner's representatives to acknowledge and sign the following prohibitions: 1. Not to burn the straw pile and to abolish the "unmenschliches Geheule und Geschrei"⁸² of the women. 2. Stop using candles and the branding when slaughtering cattle and ship. 3. To abolish the rain rite in the spring. 4. Instead of Romanian Carols they should sing Christian Hymns at Christmas. 5. Instead of the "wunderlichen ceremoniis und gestibus" of the ordained old hug, they should speak the Lord's Prayer.⁸³

But the Bulgarians were not willing to abandon their old ways and were not satisfied with the judgement of the clergyman and appealed 1651 to the Burgrave, declaring by the testimony of their aldermen, „dass sie vormals ungarische Pfarrherrn gehabt hätten, und ehe sie den deutschen Pfarrherrn weichten, wollten sie abermal ungarisch werden.”⁸⁴ They also complained about Mathesius, who wanted to invite the bishop, to decide in their dispute. The Burgrave said them to appear only before the Prince, who will shortly pay a visit to the nearby town of Blaj.⁸⁵ He also added: "Sie werden ungarisch, so müssen sie das papistische Fasten dennoch lassen."⁸⁶ The parishioners accepted this condition if they were permitted to go on with their funeral customs. But, as Mathesius correctly assumed, the Bulgarians of Cergău Mic neither asked the Prince for an audience, nor pursued any further in this matter, remaining subjects of the Lutheran Church.

⁸⁰Ibid., 275.

⁸¹Ibid., 275.

⁸²Ibid., 276.

⁸³Ibid., 276.

⁸⁴Ibid., 277.

⁸⁵Ibid., 277–278.

⁸⁶Ibid., 277.

The controversy over the funeral customs reveals also the political status quo of both Cergău possessions. Their inhabitants were Serfs⁸⁷ who answered to the Prince and not to the Saxon University. Knowing this, the aldermen only threatened with conversion to Calvinism, however they never intended to do so.

Mathesius judged, from biblical perspective, the unique mixture between Bulgarian and Romanian folklore as being idolatry and paganism. The Bulgarians adopted Romanian customs from the surrounding villages and even started in the 17th century to adopt Romanian as their first language, a process that took about 200 years to complete. On the other hand, Muşlea stated at his visit in 1927, that the funeral and generally all Bulgarian customs are rather puritan in comparison to Romanian ones. The Lutheran clergyman succeeded in imposing Saxon customs on Cergău Mic inhabitants. One exception remained though: the wake. It was held by the parishioners with no assistance from their pastors. It meant to speak three Bulgarian prayers and once the Romanian Lord's Prayer. The straw pile and the two buckets were a long forgotten memory, recalled only by the very old cantor, who witnessed them as a child. The buckets were however still in use, but only by the gravedigger, to wash their hands in them.⁸⁸

At the Dean's visit in 1765 the Chapter scribe noted the Sunday Service order in the Cergău Mic Lutheran Church: the first Hymn or *introitus* was in Latin, the main Hymn or *Glaubenslied*, in German. The *Collecta* (prayer) was also German. The Lord's Prayer, the Apostolic Creed, the conclusive Hymn and the blessing in Bulgarian. The pastor read during the Service from the Romanian Bible.⁸⁹

The Bulgarian Lutherans in this possession had their own Hymnal Book called *Cantionale seu Graduale Bulgaricum*, written in 1812, a collection of 39 Hymns translated from German into Bulgarian.⁹⁰ The manuscript was used by the cantors and shown 1874 to the visiting bishop Georg Daniel Teutsch.⁹¹

⁸⁷In 1789 the pastor of Cergău Mic petitions the Chapter, that the knew Burgrave, appointed by the Bánffy landowner family forbids the Bulgarians to use their mother tongue and forces them to speak Romanian, a language he understood. The pastor also states, that because of the hardships imposed by their status, some parishioners emigrated to Hungary. Pič, Amlacher, Slaven, 267.

⁸⁸Muşlea, Şcheii, 28.

⁸⁹At the 1762 visitation the scribe noted that both possessions shared one school. The schoolmaster didn't taught his students nothing else, but quotes from the Bible. The Chapter Delegation was disappointed to see that the students knew nothing about Mathematics, Writing or Psalm Singing. Kirchenvisitationen 1725–1831, 225, 257–258.

⁹⁰Friedrich Wilhelm Seraphin, "Zur Geschichte der siebenbürgischen Bulgaren", *Korrespondenzblatt des Vereins für siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, no. XIX, 1896, 143–145.

⁹¹Teutsch, Generalkirchenvisitation, 164–165.

Rusciori

In opposition to both Cergău, Rusciori was a pertinence of the Fundus Regius⁹² under Saxon jurisdiction.⁹³ 1839 it had 298 Lutheran and 68 Orthodox inhabitants. More than a century later the Lutherans grew to 580, the Orthodox to 274.⁹⁴ The Bulgarians of Rusciori were first mentioned in 1563 as living alongside Saxons. The *Statuta* for this village, imposed by the Sibiu Seat, required that the Bulgarians learn German:

„Es sollen sich alle Einwohner zu Reißdörffken aufs höchste befleißigen, damit ein jeder die deutsche Sprache lerne, des Gottesdienst halben, auf das sie Gottes Wort, in welcher alles Heil und Seelen-Seligkeit begriffen wird, lernen verstehen, und auch in weltlichen Sachen oder Geschäften ihre Not und Anliegen der Obrigkeit deutsch mögen vortragen. Das gleiche, wenn der Hann⁹⁵ mit seinen Geschworenen zu Rat setzt auch wenn [...] etwas für die Kirche will anzeigen, soll alles in deutscher Sprache gehandelt werden. Wer nicht Deutsch kann, derselbe frage nach bis er unterrichtet wurde. Item auf den Hochzeiten und sonstigen Wirtschaften sollen sich die Wortler⁹⁶ der deutschen Sprache gebrauchen, damit ihnen die selbe Gemein werde.“⁹⁷

This regulation was not obeyed by the Bulgarians, who by the end of the 18th century used Romanian instead of German. In 1744 the pastor purchased a Romanian Bible, which means that he used this language in his sermons.⁹⁸ In 1802 most of the inhabitants mixed Bulgarian with Romanian, even though they despised Romanians and discouraged marriages between Bulgarians and Romanians.⁹⁹

Georg Adolf Schuller realised by studying the Rusciori Church Records for burials, marriages and baptisms, that between 1696 and 1700 a third of population was Saxon, who came from other places and married local Bulgarians.¹⁰⁰ The Saxon influence got even stronger and by 1860 the Parish Council asked the pastor to purchase a German Bible.¹⁰¹

The assimilation into the Saxons was also observed by bishop Teutsch who visited the Congregation on July 11th 1873. He states, that the "Serbo-Wallachian" students learn to read and write in German, a language they don't understand, by their parents would not have it

⁹²Transylvania region, where the Hungarian kings permitted the Saxons to settle.

⁹³Rechnungen, 1380–1516, 459.

⁹⁴Helmut Klima, "Die Slawen von Reußdörffchen", *Siebenbürgische Vierteljahrschrift, in Korrespondenzblatt des Vereins für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, (Hermannstadt, Krafft und Drotleff: 1936), 12.

⁹⁵Headborough.

⁹⁶Speaker.

⁹⁷Statuta, 1–2.

⁹⁸Klima, Slawen, 15.

⁹⁹Samuel Wolf, *De vestigiis Ruthenorum in Transylvania*, (Cibinii: Hochmeister, 1802), 6–7.

¹⁰⁰Georg Adolf Schuller, "Die älteste Matrikel von Reußdörchen", *Kirchliche Blätter*, no. 17/1913, 295, no. 17/1913, 209–210.

¹⁰¹Klima, Slawen, 15–16.

otherwise. In his opinion every student will be able to speak the official language of the Church after attending school for 8 or 9 years.¹⁰²

Teutsch sees one similitude between Cergău Mic and Rusciori. In both communities the funeral expenses are much too high. He asks the Parish Council and the Minister to abolish the lavish meals and unnecessary spending. Rusciori has also a multilingual Lutheran Sunday Service by this time: the introductory sermon (exordium, Vorpredigt) was in Saxon Dialect, the main sermon in Romanian.¹⁰³ In 1936, by the time Helmut Klima wrote his study, the Service was held exclusively in German.

The Bulgarians of Rusciori adopted German as their first language and assimilated into the Saxon culture. They also shared the destiny of the Saxons, being deported into the Labour Camps of the Soviet Union after Germany lost the Second World War. The vast majority of Rusciori Bulgarians emigrated to Germany after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1990 and live now as German citizens.

Conclusion

Two from four Bulgarian Lutheran Congregations had managed to survive until the 20th century, being aided during the 19th century from the outside. In Rusciori it was the Saxons and the mighty City of Sibiu, in Cergău Mic, the protection of protestant landlords. The Bulgarians in Rusciori adopted Romanian as their main language but at the beginning of the 20th century they dressed like Saxons and considered themselves to be Saxons.¹⁰⁴ Later on they switched to German and/or Saxon Dialect. In Cergău Mic the Bulgarians developed an own identity based on their Bulgarian folklore, the wish to stay apart from Romanians and their Lutheran faith. This particular identity reached its peak in the last two decades of the 19th century, when it was discovered by Slavists, Bulgarian Ethnographers and Historians. After Cergău Mic became 1920 part of Romania, the development of the Bulgarian identity stopped and assimilation into the Romanian majority accelerated. By the time Muşlea visited the village, some Bulgarians even got tired of their identity and choose to become Romanians. The oldest generation knew that the inevitable will happen: "Something should become of us. We are neither Romanians, nor Saxons, nor Hungarians."¹⁰⁵ The turning point was the expropriation and deportation of German Ethnic in 1945. The Cergău Mic Bulgarians seized the moment and cut the last string off, that held them to their Bulgarian past and identity, their Lutheran Church, becoming also indistinguishable from Romanians by tongue and Faith.

¹⁰²Teutsch, Generalkirchenvisitation, 86.

¹⁰³Ibid., 91, 99.

¹⁰⁴Schuller, Matrikel, Kirchliche Blätter, 19/1913, 225.

¹⁰⁵"Trebuie să se aleagă odată de noi: noi nu sântem nici Rumâni, nici Saşi, Nici Unguri." Muşlea, Şcheii, 9.

Being a small ethnic group with a low social status, the Bulgarians didn't have an intelligentsia of their own¹⁰⁶ and were therefore relying either on Saxon or Romanian role models. As the time went on, the only support they could get, came from the Church. But it was not enough, even if the quality of their clergymen got better in the 19th century. At the end, the Lutheran Bulgarians had to adjust their national and confessional allegiance according to historically established Transylvanian patterns.

¹⁰⁶We know off only one Bulgarian who attended the Lutheran Gymnasium in Sibiu between 1711 and 1714: "Petrus Klein Csergödensis [...] Nazione bulgarus et primus suae gentis hic in Transilvania, qui literis navare coepit." Rudolf Briebrecher, "Mitteilungen aus der Nagyszebener (Hermannstädter) Gymnasialmatrikel", *Programm des evangelischen Gymnasiums A. B. und der damit verbundenen Realschule zu Nagyszeben (Hermannstadt) für das Schuljahr 1910/1911*, (Nagyszeben: Krafft, 1911), 71, 74.