

ORTHODOX PRIESTS OF DOBROGEA DURING THE WORLD WAR I

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ABSTRACT:

IT IS 100 YEARS SINCE ROMANIA JOINED THE WORLD WAR I BESIDE THE ENTENTE. IF IN FIRST PHASE OF THE FIGHTS, THE ROMANIAN ARMY GOT A SERIES OF VICTORIES, IN THE AUTUMN OF 1916, THE ROMANIAN SOLDIERS WERE WITHDRAWING FROM ALL FRONTS. IN DECEMBER, BUCHAREST WAS ACCUPIED BY THE GERMAN SOLDIERS AND BY A FEW BULGARIAN, AUSTRIAN-HUNGARIAN AND TURKISH UNITS. DOBROGEA, WHERE THW ROMANIANS WERE CRUSHER BY THE GERMAN AND BULGARIAN TROOPS, ENTERED UNDER THE BULGARIAN CONTRAL. THE CITIES AND VILLAGES OF DOBROGEA WERE LOOTED AND THE MAJORITIY THE ASSETS PASSED IN THE SOUTH OF THE DANUBE. AFRAID OF WAR, MANY INHABITANTS OF DOBROGEA TOOK REFUGE TO MOLDOVA AND MUNTENIA. SOME OF THEM WERE A SERIES OF PRIESTS WHO, UNFORTUNATELY, LEFT THEIR FAITHFUL AND CHURCHES. THOSE WHO REMAINED IN THEIR PARISHES HAD TO SUFFER THE HARDSHIPS OF THE WAR OR THE TORMENTS OF THE PRISONS AND CAMPS OF BULGARIA, WHERE THEY WERE DEPORTED. THE BULGARIANS IMPOSED THE PRIESTS TO CELEBRATE UN THE BULGARIAN LANGUAGE, AND THOSE WHO REFUSED WERE DISMISSED AND IMPRISONED. MANY OF THE CHURCHES OF DOBROGEA WERE DEVASTATED AND DESECRATED, AND THE PRECIOUS THINGS STOLEN. WHEN THEY CAME BACK TO THEIR PARISHES, THE ROMANIAN PRIESTS FOUND THEIR OWN HOUSES RUINED AND ALL THEIR EARNINGS DISAPPEARED. THESE EVENTS PROVED THAT IN DOBROGEA A NEW CHURCH ADMINISTRATION WAS NEEDED. THIS IS WHY THE DIOCESE OF TOMIS WAS SET UP.

KEY WORDS: WAR, CHURCHES, PRIESTS, CAMPS, PRISONS, DESTRUCTIONS

INTRODUCTION

After the Congress of Berlin (1878), when Dobrogea was retroceded to the territory of Romania, the primate metropolitan Calinic Miclescu asked for the blessing of the ecumenical patriarch Ioachim III for the canonical unification of the Orthodox population of Dobrogea – under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitanate of Dristra at the time – with the Metropolitanate of Ungro-Wallachia.² A very clear image of the church situation in Dobrogea is provided by

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² Gheorghe Vasilescu, „Mitropolitul primat Calinic Miclescu și recunoașterea autocefaliei Bisericii Ortodoxe Române”, *Autocefalia libertate și demnitare*, Basilica Publishing House, Bucharest, 2010, 338.

various reports drafted by the church revisers, who presented the material state of the parishes and of the places of worship.³ The State decided, through an administrative law of Dobrogea, that every hamlet or village should receive a plot of land for building the school and church. The state authorities decided, just like in the rest of the country, that the Orthodox religion should be considered prevailing in Dobrogea. In 1902, Bishop Pimen Georgescu came to the leadership of the Eparchy of Lower Danube, who imposed a true programme for training the priests through priestly conferences. The priests were obligated to deliver sermons and catechise the faithful at every religious service celebrated. As a result of the facilities provided by the state and by the economic dynamics, the Orthodox population marked a permanent growth. In 1880, there were a little more than 70,000 Orthodox faithful registered, and in 1910, more than 204,000. In fact, the statistic of 1880 presented the Romanians as the largest of the ethnic groups of Dobrogea.⁴

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church was headed by exarch Joseph, seated in Constantinople, who led the clergy of Bulgaria through a vicar elected by the Bulgarian bishops and approved by the exarch. Unfortunately, in Bulgaria, part of the eparchies had a double church authority, as besides the Bulgarian bishops there also were the Greek bishops who depended on the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The state of things changed in 1906, when the Greek bishops were removed. But the Balkan wars brought Bulgaria into a disastrous political state. The Bulgarians lost a series of territories with several church eparchies at the end of these wars. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church lost the parishes of the Quadrilateral now, a province that was retroceded to Romania after the Peace of Bucharest. As soon as the World War I broke out, exarch Joseph decided to move the Exarchate to Sofia. The Bulgarians kept in Constantinople only a representation headed till 1945 by a Bulgarian bishop. After one year of war, exarch Joseph, a great church and political personality, died. No other exarch was elected to lead the Bulgarian Orthodox for the next 30 years, his attributions delegated to a metropolitan locum tenens for a determined period of time. During the hard years of the World War I and after the end of it, the presidents locum tenens of the Synod were metropolitans Partenie of Sofia (1915-1916) and Basil of Durostor-Cerven (1919-1920).

The Balkan wars brought about major changes in the geographic and ethnic configuration of Dobrogea. The Peace Treaty of Bucharest established that Romania's frontiers surround a territory of about 7,700 km² with a population estimated by the Bulgarian statistics in 1913 to 281,207 inhabitants, out of whom only a few thousand were Romanians. Getting the Quadrilateral caused little enthusiasm to the public opinion of Romania, maybe only the retrocession of Silistra pleased the Romanians. Although the Romanian diplomacy considered this time a great political success, for Bulgaria, who had increased its territory and number of inhabitants as a result of these conflicts, the loss of the Quadrilateral at the table of diplomatic negotiations in Bucharest was considered a true national catastrophe. This must have been the reason of the Bulgarians' hate when they occupied the Quadrilateral and Dobrogea in the autumn of 1916.

The organisation of the Quadrilateral was done creating two counties with administration identical with that of Old Dobrogea, with translators for the Bulgarian and Turkish languages. Soon, the Romanian authorities were faced with a series of difficulties in regard to the control

³ G. Ilinoiu, „Culte din Dobrogea”, *Dobrogea. Cincizeci de ani de viață românească, 1878-1928*, Published by Cultura Națională, Bucharest, 1928, 612-630.

⁴ Ioan N. Roman, *Studiu asupra proprietății rurale din Dobrogea*, Constanța, 1907, 79.

of the new territories where the Bulgarian population was in majority. Given the new situation, the Ministry for Religious Cults and Public Instruction and the Romanian Orthodox Church made a new religious organisation of the region. Thus, the Holy Synod delegated hierarch Bartolomeu Stanescu to inspect the Quadrilateral and present the situation of the Orthodox clergy.⁵ Hierarch Bartolomeu succeeded in setting up the first religious administration in the Quadrilateral.⁶ In the years of the Great War, Bishop Nifon Niculescu of Lower Danube (1909 – 1921) held the canonical jurisdiction of Dobrogea and Quadrilateral, a territory with a large social and confessional structure. Preoccupied with the religious realities of his eparchy, bishop Nifon informed about the state of things in the Quadrilateral through a Report presented to the Holy Synod in the working session of 24 October 1914, in which he proposed a series of measures for organising the parishes.⁷ On 30 March 1914, bishop Sofronie of Ramnic delivered a speech in the Senate chamber, on the occasion of voting the *Bill for the administrative organisation of New Dobrogea*, and asked for setting up a Metropolitanate at Tomis-Constanta: “Well, ministers and deputies, in the new territory that God formed for the second time, a Court of Appeal was voted, which we are sure it has never been here before, but it is to be set up as it is a must; why here, where three Metropolitanates used to be in the hard times of Christianity, couldn’t we set up at least one Metropolitanate, in the old Tomis-Constanta, and a bishop at Dorostor-Silistra, because a new impulse would be given to the faith and confidence of our Romanian nation”.⁸ The absence of a diocese in Dobrogea turned out to be dramatic during the war, when many priests, deprived of guidance, left their parishes for fear. The Diocese of Tomis was set up in 1923.

We must not forget that both in the churches and in the schools of the Quadrilateral, the opposition of the Bulgarians was very active. The opposition of the Bulgarians to the Romanian administration manifested through the organization of various societies, which under the pretext of defending the Bulgarians’ cultural rights introduced true terrorism in the region encouraging the actions of the ‘comitages’ (members of the Bulgarian revolutionary bands). The Bulgarian propaganda in the Quadrilateral was encouraged by the “Dobrogea Society” and by the “Dobrogean Brotherhood”, which activated in the territory of Bulgaria. The visit of King Carol I to Constanta in the spring of 1914, as well as that of Tsar Nicholas II, in June 1914, who congratulated the Romanian military actions of 1913, tensioned the Romanian – Bulgarian political relations.⁹ The issue of the Quadrilateral was included in the diplomatic discussions the moment the Entente tried to get the military support of Bulgaria. As soon as Bulgaria joined the Central Powers a possible political agreement between Romanian and Bulgaria ended in smoke.

⁵ See Vartolomeu S. Băcăoanu, *Carte pastorală destinată Clerului și Creștinilor drept măritori de Răsărit din Noul Teritoriu Dobrogean*, Published by Atelierele Grafice SOCEC&Co, Bucharest, 1914; See Vartolomeu S. Băcăoanu, *Raportul general către Sfântul Sinod privitor pe administrațiunea bisericească din noul teritoriul dobrogean pentru intervalul dela noembrie 1913 - ianuarie 1914*, Published by Tipografia Cărților Bisericești, Bucharest, 1914.

⁶ Cătălin Raiu, *Democrație și statocrație. Creștinismul social la Bartolomeu Stănescu, episcopul Râmnicului Noul Severin (1875-1954)*, Published by Bucharest University, Bucharest, 2014, 91.

⁷ Holy Synod Archives, File no 137/1914, f. 404; f. 432.

⁸ ***,,Cuvântarea P. S. Sofronie al Râmnicului Noul Severin în Senatul țării în ziua de 30 martie 1914, cu prilejul votării legii de organizare administrativă a teritoriului anexat”, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, Anul XXXVIII (1914-1915), Nr. 3, 270-274.

⁹ George Ungureanu, *Problema Cadrilaterului în contextul relațiilor româno-bulgare (1918-1940)*, doctorate thesis, Bucharest, 2008, 47.

SUFFERANCE OF THE PRIESTS OF DOBRUDGEA DURING THE WAR

Bulgaria joined the war together with Germany, and as a result of the conquests made, the Bulgarian Exarchate started re-establishing the old eparchies lost during the Balkan wars. The same phenomenon took place in the Quadrilateral and in Old Dobrogea occupied by the Bulgarian troops at the end of the year 1916. The Romanian army suffered great defeats on the front of Dobrogea, and many Romanian officers and soldiers were taken prisoners. When Dobrogea was occupied, the Quadrilateral was directly included in Bulgaria, and Old Dobrogea has become subject of dispute among Bulgaria, Turkey, and Germany. In the end, Dobrogea came to be under the leadership of a German governor who had a Bulgarian general subordinated with the rank of prefect, and in the communes with Bulgarian or mix population, Bulgarian-Romanian, Bulgarian mayors were appointed. The German – Bulgarian disagreements lasted all the war long, and to the end of 1918 Dobrogea was given to Bulgaria.

The war caused much sufferance to the Romanian Orthodox clergy from Dobrogea and Quadrilateral. Part of the Orthodox churches of Dobrogea were looted and damaged by the occupation troops. The majority of the priests who remained in their parishes suffered persecutions.¹⁰ The sufferance the Bulgarians caused to the priests of Dobrogea were similar to those of the Orthodox priests of Transylvania and Banat interned in the camps of Sopron county of Hungary and in the camp of Thalerhof.

In the county of Constanta, priest Gheorghe Oprescu from Topalu was imprisoned by Bulgarians and Germans because of his patriotic attitude. Ioan Grigorescu from Constanta, wounded at Flamanda village, was beaten by the Bulgarian soldiers. Ion Popescu from Dorobantu was beaten by the Germans because he did not give the money of the people's bank where he was president. Constantin Jipescu from Istria was beaten by the Bulgarians, and Ion Dumitrescu, from Sinoe commune, was maltreated by the Bulgarian inhabitants of the locality. Here, some of the Romanian inhabitants – men, women, and children – suffered too. Belizarie Popescu, captain priest of Regiment 34 Infantry of Constanta died during the battle of Turtucaia.¹¹ Priest Enciu Galicieanu from Satu-Nou-Constanta (Durostor) was beaten by the Bulgarian soldiers, although he was very old.¹² Nita Trandafirescu from Osmanfaca and his large family took refuge to Braila, where he suffered the persecutions of the Bulgarian soldiers.¹³

Petru Bagulescu from Asfatchioi-Durostor locality, who was a teacher in Greci-Romanati locality during the war, suffered because of the German authorities, having been sentenced to imprisonment in Germany, together with his wife, where from they were released in June 1918. In 1925, he was ordained priest and served in Asfatchioi. Priest Iancu Popescu, from Canalia-Durostor commune, was maltreated by Russians, and after returning to his parish, he and his son were beaten by the Bulgarian soldiers.¹⁴

Priest Atanasie Popescu, from Agighiol commune, county of Tulcea passed through great hardships: "On 6 January 1917, the day of the Baptism of the Lord, while I was celebrating

¹⁰ Grigore N. Popescu, *Preoșimea română și întregirea neamului - temnițe și lagăre*, vol. II, Published by Tipografia Vremea, Bucharest, 1940, 331-333.

¹¹ Eugen Drăgoi, *Ierarhi și preoți de seamă la Dunărea de Jos, 1864-1989*, Published by Arhiepiscopia Tomisului și Dunării de Jos, Galați, 1990, 172.

¹² Claudiu Cotan, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române 1600-2000. Studiu introductiv*, Vasiliana'98 Publishing House, Iași, 2009, 148.

¹³ Grigore N. Popescu, *Preoșimea română și întregirea neamului*, vol. II, 101-103.

¹⁴ Grigore N. Popescu, *Preoșimea română și întregirea neamului*, vol. II, 112-115.

in the holy church, seven soldiers took me and locked me in the school, together with 41 other Romanians, inhabitants of Domnita Maria parish, whom the Bulgarians of the commune accused to have been spies... In the morning they called out the roll and took us on foot up to Hamangia, where we were locked in a stable for sheep... From here, we were sent to Megida, into a long cellar, together with several prisoners... From Megidia we walked up to Cobadin, where we were entrained into a cattle wagon with ice and snow inside, and then to Sumla, where we were locked into a wooden hut together with many Romanian prisoners.

After staying six days there, we were sent to Stara Zagiram where from we had to pass to Asia Minor. But here, we were ordered to go back to Tulovo station, where from they took us, through rain and snow, up to Cazanlac city, in Turkey, where we were detailed to several jobs: some of us to take care of hay, others to stables in the city, to the carts and oxen requisitioned...

I was sleeping in the manger stable. This was my place of rest for 10 months and a half, feeding the cattle in the Balkans, at Sipca, suffering the greatest hardships, serious persecutions, curses, punished to starve, overworking, and all kind of other tortures. All their meanness was focused especially on me, always telling me: “you, priest, you taught your people to spy, and not to obey our commandments!”

The chief was a very mean Greek, who told our supervisor that I taught my people not to work faster, not to work as he wanted us to. After this accusation, the supervisor came to the stable to tie me and send me to “Ceaccii” camp for disobedience. It was very hard to escape from that place. In the Balkans, where I was grazing the cattle, bare footed because my footwear were broken, were several springs; one of them was running under some stones its water as sweet as milk. When we were hungry we drank that “holy water” and forgot about our hunger. It was an old walnut tree near that spring, and that was our place of prayer for getting rid of that punishment.

In October, on Saint Dimitrios’ day, our pardon came from Sofia and we were sent, accompanied by the Bulgarian soldiers, to our village, Domnita Maria, where we found a very bad chief guardian; he stopped us at the edge of the village and sent each of us, accompanied by a soldier, to see our houses. My house was completely destroyed. I went to the church too. It was devastated and defiled. The holy icons were shot and broken, the icon of the Mother of God shot in her breast, the Infant in her arms, the eyes taken out with bayonets. I felt sick and I fell down unconscious. The Bulgarian soldier put me up and took me to the chief guardian to whom he reported what had happened, and this one told me: “ priest, it was not us who destroyed your houses, but Taghe Ionescu and Bratianu, and your other people whom we want to catch and skin them alive!”...

I asked to stay in Sarighiol commune, at Ianculescu priest, because my wife with six children had taken refuge to Viforata Monastery, to the nuns over there, where my father was priest; my two eldest sons were on the front, where they fought with faith from the beginning till the end of war. After the conclusion of the truce I went to Viforata Monastery, where I found my wife and six children. The two elder sons had not come from the front yet. I did not know anything about them. So, after a while we came back to Domnita Maria commune...”¹⁵

Similar sufferance endured priest G. Dumitrescu from Niculitel locality, beaten and deported together with other priests to the camp of Calofer, till June 1918. Priest Marin Popescu

¹⁵ Grigore N. Popescu, *Preoșimea română și întregirea neamului*, vol. II, 331-333.

from Telita-Tulcea described the sufferance caused by the Bulgarian soldiers, after failing to get away, together with his family.¹⁶

The sufferance endured in the camps of Bulgaria is also described by the Romanian soldiers taken prisoners together with other military priests.¹⁷ Some other priests who suffered were: Constantin Ghinescu from Macin, interned in Bulgaria, N. Popescu from Jurilovca, maltreated by the Bulgarian population of the locality who destroyed and burned the archives and the religious books helped by the Bulgarian authorities. Priest Neculae Galescu from Posta commune was forbidden to serve because he did not celebrate in the Bulgarian language, so that he was replaced by a Bulgarian military priest. Priest Petre Arbore, graduate of “Veniamin Costache” Seminary served at Sarinasuf, where - after the locality was occupied by the Bulgarian troops - he continued to celebrate in the Romanian language and remember the Romanian royal family at the Divine Liturgy. Deported to Panaghiuristea, near Filipopol, he came back to the country in 1918 and served at Cocos Monastery for a time, where he was the only priest at the time, because the monks had been deported to Bulgaria. Monks Damian Nenciu, Agatanghel Chiriac, and Varasiile Luca were deported from Cocos Monastery to Russian Slava, together with six other priests, who died in the camp.¹⁸ Monk Acache Atanssiu from this monastery was killed by the Bulgarian soldiers who were retreating at the end of the war. Priest Vasile Aftenie from I. Gh. Duca locality was killed by Bulgarians on 10 May 1917, because he was celebrating in the Romanian language. Some other priests who suffered were: Zaharia Popoiu from Casimcea, Nicolae Popescu from Comana, Ion Popoiu from Fagaras, Petre Ianculescu from Sarighiol, Ion Iordachescu from Frecatei, and Emanoil Bogatu from Oancea.¹⁹ The following priests distinguished themselves on the front as military priests: Ioan Gheorghiu, father confessor of Regiment 73 Infantry, Ioan Grigorescu, father confessor at Brigade 9 Artillery, wounded during the fights, Vasile Vasilescu, father confessor at the Mobile Hospital no 9, Atanasie Popescu, father confessor of Regiment 12 Infantry, Ioan C. Beldie, father confessor of Regiment 51 Infantry, Ioan Georgescu, priest in Oltina, county of Constanta was father confessor at Hospital 15 Evacuation of Cernavoda and Tecuci, Alexandru Moroianu, Banica Rosescu, archimandrite Damaschin Popescu, hieromonk Stelian Doras from Cocos Monastery, father confessor of Regiment 15 Infantry, and Ioan Rosculeț, father confessor 9 Evacuation. We can also mention priests: Ioachim Visan from Cocos Monastery, Voinea Carol from Silistra, and N. Papadima from Tulcea. 11 monks from Cocos Monastery were called up as male nurses, a part of them serving in the hospital organised in the building of “Saint Andrew” Seminary of Galati, and the rest at the Diocesan seat. 15 nuns activated here as medical nurses. Following the appeal of Bishop Nifon Niculescu from Galati, the priests of his eparchy succeeded in collecting the bedclothes needed for 300 hospital beds at “Saint Andrew” Seminary and at the Diocesan seat, inaugurated on 5 October 1917. The clergy of the Diocese of Lower Danube succeeded in collecting an important amount of money, and bishop Nifon offered 2000 books of payer for the wounded, through the Red Cross. Religious singer Vasile Nejan from Moscu, county of Galati, mobilized in Regiment 15 Infantry, was wounded during the fights of Pestera, county of Constanta, and heroically died at Marasesti. Hieromonch Gherman Blanaru from Cocos Monastery who fought together with the Brigade 10 Artillery, was wounded, and

¹⁶ Grigore N. Popescu, *Preoțimea română și întregirea neamului*, vol. II, 333-335.

¹⁷ Ion Grosu, *Memoriile unui ofiter de informații*, Military Publishing House, Bucharest, 2009, 52.

¹⁸ Grigore N. Popescu, *Preoțimea română și întregirea neamului*, vol. II, 340.

¹⁹ Grigore N. Popescu, *Preoțimea română și întregirea neamului*, vol. II, 339-340.

yet he donated his salary for the war orphans' fund.²⁰ Besides the sufferance endured by tens of priests, we can also remember the destructions several churches of Dobrogea passed through, some of them ruined. Even the cathedral of Tulcea was used by the German soldiers as depot of armament.

The hard situation of Dobrogea seriously affected the activity of the priests who had no more antimises and were obligated by the occupation authorities to use the Bulgarian language in celebration.²¹ The Synod of Iasi of 1918 was very important because its working session also discussed the issue of the priests who had taken refuge from Dobrogea and found shelter in Moldova and Muntenia. The hierarchs concluded that the absence of the high church organisation allowed the priests to leave their parishes and faithful. The fear of the Bulgarian soldiers justified to a certain extent the attitude of the Romanian priests of Dobrogea, because many times the Bulgarians' hate focused on them. The members of the synod debated the state of the priests of Dobrogea at length during the working session of 2 July 1918. Bishop Nifon of Lower Danube presented the sad fate of priests Gheorghe Dumitrescu from Niculitel and Branza from Balcic who were tonsured by the Bulgarians and obliged to do hard works. Cocos Monastery devastated by the Bulgarian troops was in quite a sad situation too. The Bulgarian church authorities imposed a Bulgarian archpriest in Tulcea, who ignored the Romanian priests obligated now to celebrate in the Bulgarian language and obey some new administrative authorities. The members of the Synod of Iasi have also insisted that the Romanian Government should find a solution for the priests who fled from Dobrogea to go back to their parishes, where they had lost all their properties.²² On this occasion, Metropolitan Pimen of Moldova and Suceava criticised the attitude of the refugees, saying that they should not have left their churches, even if they had died a martyr's death. Metropolitan Pimen complained of the state of things saying that: "One of the terrible effects of the war is the loss of our Dobrogea. As a result of the disaster over there almost all the priests left their parishes for various reasons and came to the territory not occupied. Many of them came to my eparchy too and asked for parishes. I gave them temporary jobs in the country, where there were vacancies. But I did not promise them I would appoint them permanently because I did not know what decision would be taken in this regard. It was a mistake when these priests left their places and I would not have allowed them to, because the people who remained there needed their comfort. I think they should go back to their places, so that, when Dobrogea remains under Condominium, a well established group of Romanian priests should be there. One more mistake was that no Episcopal see was set up in Dobrogea to have the Quadrilateral in its jurisdiction too. It would have been a historical time and a proof of our rights over this part of the country beyond the River Danube. When the enclosing of the Quadrilateral to Dobrogea was discussed, a Vicarage for Dobrudgea seated in Constanta was promised. This promise was not kept, and it was a great mistake. We remember that when the setting up of such a Diocese in Dobrogea was refused here, because we had no means to, the Hungarian Diocese of Haidu-Dorog was set up in Transylvania at the same time. But we did not realize that. It is not right to let the villages of Dobrogea with no Romanian

²⁰ Eugen Drăgoi, *Ierarhi și preoți de seamă la Dunărea de Jos, 1864-1989*, Published by the Archdiocese of Tomis and Lower Danube, Galați, 1990, 171-184.

²¹ Marius Theodorian-Carada, *Efimeride, 1908-1928*, Roman, 1937, 81-82.

²² Holy Synod Archives, File no 145/1918, f. 171 f. v.

priests, so that the Government should intercede to send the priests from Dobrugea to their places”.

Hierarch Teofil Ploiesteanul said that many priests from Dobrogea had passed into the Metropolitanate of Wallachia, where they received temporary places for service. He has also said that according to his information the church of the “Falling Asleep” of Constanta had been changed in a Catholic church.

Metropolitan Pimen was sure that had a diocese been in Constanta, the priests of Dobrogea would not have left their parishes: “Yesterday, a monk from Cocosu Monastery of Dobrogea arrived in Iasi, who told me that he was there when the Bulgarians occupied Dobrogea. He told me that two Bulgarian monks were brought to Cocosu Monastery, while the Romanian monks were taken to Russian Slava. After two months he was taken to Bulgaria as prisoner, where from he came back again to Cocos Monastery, where he found everything almost in good order. This thing proves that if nothing was devastated in the Monastery, so would have been in villages, if the Romanian priests had not fled. The Government had better intercede so that the priests of Dobrogea could go back to their places”. Primate Metropolitan Conon has also mentioned the priests fled from Dobrogea, during the discussions, and said he had received them in his eparchy where there were 400 vacancies in various churches and chapels, where from the priests had fled to Moldova...”. Yet, the minister for Religious Affairs present at the synodal discussions explained: “There are two issues to be discussed: a material one, trying to see how we could send the priests to Dobrogea. But the latter one is more important, namely to know if according to the stipulations of the peace treaty we will be allowed to have Romanian school and church in Dobrogea. If this can be done, I think the refugee priests and teachers should be sent back. Yet, it should be known that they are endangered by the Bulgarians who have committed so many massacres in the Balkan Peninsula. I join the regret of His Eminence Metropolitan of Moldova not to have thought twice before and have an Episcopal see in Dobrogea. However, I know there is a hierarch entitled Constanteanul (of Constanta). He had better stayed there and the events found him there. It seems something quite illegal for a hierarch not to stay at the place of which name he bears. Thus, from now on this anomaly should never be repeated. Therefore, I agree that the priests should go back to Dobrogea...”.²³ The priests of Dobrogea went back to their parishes after war, many of them finding their houses, churches, and parishes ruined. The war destroyed many material goods, but most of all took the lives of hundreds of thousands of Romanians.

CONCLUSIONS

Romania joined the Great War in quite an unfavourable time. The Entente has not succeeded in observing the agreements signed with Romania and develop a large military action in the Balkans. The tsarist Army showed serious signs of fatigue, and the Bolshevik propaganda proved its efficiency through the indiscipline felt with the soldiers. Thus, Dobrogea became vulnerable when faced with the German-Bulgarian offensive. The cities and villages of Dobrogea were looted by the Bulgarian occupation authorities. Afraid of war and of the Bulgarians’ hate who lost the Quadrilateral a few years before, many priests of Dobrogea took refuge to Moldova and Muntenia. The priests remained in parishes suffered the hardships of the German-Bulgarian occupation. Some of the Romanian priests were taken to the prisons and camps of Bulgaria. After the conclusion of Peace at Buftea, the primate metropolitan Conon

²³ Holy Synod Archives, File no 145/1918, p. 163 v., 164 f. v., 193 f. v.

intervened to release some of the clergy interned in Bulgaria. As a result of this peace, the territories of Dobrogea were ceded at last to Bulgaria. At the end of the war, when the priests came back to Dobrogea, many churches were ruined, and the priests' house were dilapidated.

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