

ROMANIANS OR BULGARIANS? ON THE ETHNIC ORIGIN OF ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS IN MEDIEVAL BRAȘOV

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ABSTRACT

The ethnic origin of Romanians in the city of Brașov and their arrival in this city has been the subject of lengthy debates. The interpretation of historical sources over time has left much to be desired and has led to confusion and misinterpretation. In the following article, we propose a review of historical sources and how they have been viewed by various authors.

Keywords: Brașov, Romanians, Bulgarians.

1. SHORT INTRODUCTION

In 1896, Bulgarian linguist Liubomir Miletici put forward the theory that the Romanians in the city of Brașov were originally Bulgarians who came from south of the Danube at the end of the 14th century and were assimilated by the Romanians in the middle of the 18th century. His argument was based on a literal interpretation of historical sources preserved in the Brașov archives, mainly the 17th century chronicle of Priest Vasile from St. Nicholas Church, which states in its first sentence that a Bulgarian community settled in Brașov in 1392. The name of the neighborhood west of the city, Belgerei/Bulgaria in German, and the designation of the inhabitants of this neighborhood as “Bulgarians” in most documents only reinforced Liubomir Miletici’s belief that a Bulgarian community lived in Brașov in ancient times – he ruled out the possibility that there was also a Romanian community.

In reality, the Bulgarian linguist fell victim to several layers of confusion and errors accumulated over the centuries in the local historiography of Brașov. Miletici’s thesis was refuted by historians Sterie Stinghe³² and Vasile Oltean³³, but the idea that the Romanians of Brașov were originally Bulgarians periodically reappears in various popular articles in a polemical form. Starting from the chronicle of Priest Vasile, we propose to analyze the sources referring to the issue

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³² Sterie Stinghe, *Întemeierea orașului Brașov și originea românilor din Șcheii Brașovului* [The Founding of Brașov and the Origin of the Romanians in Șcheii Brașovului], Brașov, 1936.

³³ Vasile Oltean, *Junii brașoveni și troițele lor din Șcheii Brașovului* [The Youth of Brașov and Their Roadside Crosses in Șcheii Brașovului], Semne Publishing House, 2000.

of the origin of the Romanians in Braşov and how this issue has been interpreted over time.

2. COPIES OF THE CHRONICLE OF PRIEST VASILE FROM ŞCHEI

The chronicle of Priest Vasile from Şchei (c. 1590–1659) covers the period 1392–1633 and has been preserved in four manuscript copies, three in German and one in Romanian, being the main narrative source at the origin of the discussion on the ethnic origin of the Romanians in Şchei. The original Romanian manuscript of Priest Vasile's chronicle still existed during the first half of the 18th century but, unfortunately, it has been lost. A detailed presentation of the preserved copies and especially of the authors of these copies can help us better understand the evolution of this issue.

The oldest German copy of Vasile's chronicle was made by the doctor of Braşov, Johann Albrich (1687-1749), an avid collector of local chronicles. Dr. Albrich's copy was most likely made between 1726 and 1749. Even though it is unclear whether the translation from Romanian into German was done by Albrich himself or someone else, it is a fact that it was personally handwritten by him³⁴.

Another German copy of this Romanian chronicle can be found in the collection of Joseph Trausch (1795-1871), written by an unidentified person, as the handwriting cannot be attributed to anyone. The dating of this text is rather vague, somewhere in the 18th century, most likely long before Trausch's birth³⁵. The third copy also comes from Joseph Trausch's collection and, unlike the other two, the unidentified copyist gave it the title "Historia Valachica de Bulgarorum in suburbium Coronense adventu a Poppe Basilio Coronensi scripta" – "Romanian history from the arrival of the Bulgarians in the suburbs of Braşov, written by Priest Vasile of Braşov". This copy is important because it bears the note "Ex Vallachico translate" – "translated from Romanian"³⁶. Linguistic characteristics also place this copy in the middle of the 18th century.

Last but not least, the manuscript of Priest Radu Tempea³⁷ (1691–1742) entitled "The History of the Holy Church of Şcheii Braşovului" has survived to this day, which includes and continues the chronicle of Priest Vasile³⁸. Radu Tempea's manuscript was most likely written between 1716 and 1742. The last entry made by

³⁴ Wilhelm Seraphin, "Pope Vassilie", in ***, *Quellen zur Geschichte der Stadt Kronstadt [Sources on the history of the city of Kronstadt]*, Vol. V, 1909, p. II.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. III.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ Ioachim Crăciun and Aurora Ilieş, *Repertoriul manuscriselor de cronici interne sec. XV–XVIII privind istoria României [Repertory of manuscripts of internal chronicles from the 15th to 18th centuries concerning the history of Romania]*, Academy Publishing House, Bucharest, 1963, p. 381.

³⁸ Sterie Stinghe (ed.), *Istoria bisericii Şcheilor Braşovului. Manuscris de la Radu Tempea [History of the Church of Şcheii Braşovului. Manuscript by Radu Tempea]*, Braşov, 1899.

the hand of Priest Radu Tempea was dated January 24, 1742, and the next one, written by another hand, was dated May 14, 1742, recording his death. A careful look at the manuscript of Priest Radu Tempea reveals that it is much more than a chronicle, but a collection of chronicles (including that of Priest Vasile), documents, and accounts in the spirit of and extremely similar to those made by Saxon scholars in Braşov in the first half of the 18th century.

Returning to the four copies of Priest Vasile's chronicle, it can be said that they are virtually identical, both the translations from German and the Romanian version. The episodes recounted and their dates are identical in all four preserved versions of the chronicle, the only differences being the replacement of some words, the merging of some sentences, or the shortening of some accounts. In the German versions, the moment when Vasile becomes priest of the Church of St. Nicholas in Şchei is recounted in the first person – which attests to the fact that he is the author of the chronicle – “In that year, I, Vasile, remained in my brother's place”³⁹, while in the copy made by Radu Tempea, the same episode is recounted in the third person – “At that time, Archpriest Vasile remained in his brother's place”⁴⁰.

It is highly possible that it was Priest Radu Tempea himself who provided Dr. Johann Albrich with the original manuscript of Priest Vasile; during the plague epidemic of 1718–1719, the city authorities fled before the quarantine was established, and for almost two years the city of Braşov was practically ruled by Dr. Johann Albrich, who took a rational and scientific approach to adopting measures to limit the spread of the disease; on the other hand, Priest Radu Tempea remained with the Romanians in Şchei during the epidemic. Although we have no documentary evidence of a meeting between Dr. Johann Albrich and Priest Radu Tempea, such a meeting likely took place under the circumstances described above. In any case, in the first half of the 18th century, there was interest in Priest Vasile's chronicle in Braşov: Dr. Johann Albrich made a German translation of it, which was copied by two other Saxons from Braşov in the following years, while Priest Radu Tempea made a copy of this chronicle in Romanian in his collection of accounts and documents relating to the rights of Romanians in Braşov. All of this must be understood in the context of the emerging interest in local historical sources, which erupted in Braşov in the first half of the 18th century among both Saxons and Romanians.

3. A FAMILY CHRONICLE

Priest Vasile's chronicle covers eight generations of priests from the same family who served at St. Nicholas Church in Şcheii Braşovului between 1484 and

³⁹ ***, *Quellen zur Geschichte der Stadt Kronstadt [Sources on the history of the city of Kronstadt]*, p. 5.

⁴⁰ Sterie Stinghe, *quoted work*, 1899, p. 7.

1659, with a single reference to the year 1392, when the arrival of the Bulgarians in Braşov is mentioned. One element that stands out is the triple dating of the events mentioned: from the birth of Jesus Christ, from the Creation of the World, and from the arrival of the Bulgarians in Braşov.

It is a chronicle that is extremely uneven in content: the information about priests between 1484 and 1576 is relatively scarce and lacking in detail, some of it being erroneous (such as the indication that in 1495 the ruler of Wallachia was Neagoe Basarab). In most cases, one can find the name of the priest and the period in which he served; starting with 1576, the amount of information contained in the chronicle is much greater and richer in detail. Thus, accounts of various events that took place during the lives of three priests can be found: Mihai (priest between 1576–1605) and his sons Constantin (priest between 1605–1628) and Vasile (priest between 1628–1659). Most of the information refers to priests Mihai and Constantin, while Vasile, as the author of the chronicle, shows a modest restraint in recounting episodes related to his own life.

This situation can be easily explained if one considers Priest Mihai, the chronicler's father, as the main source of information for Priest Vasile, respectively for the events prior to the chronicler's birth, while the chronicler was certainly a direct witness to the events during the life of Priest Constantin. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that the vast majority of the episodes recounted refer to events during the life of Priest Mihai and his father, Priest Dobre. We can thus imagine Priest Vasile, somewhere between 1628 (when he became a priest) and 1633 (the year of the last event recorded by him in the chronicle) putting on paper his father's memories of the main events of his life, along with what had certainly already become an oral tradition by 1600 (in which dating errors had crept in) of the succession of priests from the Church of St. Nicholas in Braşov who came from the same family.

The motivation that prompted Priest Vasile to write this chronicle is explained in the first paragraph:

“as it was and how the priesthood fell to this place, to this holy church, from the old Priest Petru to the Priest Constantin and others, how they struggled to keep the holy church and worked hard to uphold the law, so that it would not change”⁴¹.

Priest Vasile wanted to leave a written testimony about the struggle of the priests from his family to preserve the Orthodox confession among the Romanians of medieval Braşov. Last but not least, it should be noted that *in the mid-17th century, priest Vasile was the last in the dynasty of priests established by Petru in 1484, a dynasty that led the Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas in Braşov for eight generations*. After the death of Priest Vasile in 1659, a long period of confrontation over the leadership of the church ensued. It is unclear whether Priest Vasile had no

⁴¹ „precum a fost lucrul şi cum a căzut preoţia la acest loc, la această sfântă biserică, de la popa Petru cel bătrân până la popa Constantin şi la alţii, cum cu lupta trudindu-se au ținut sfânta biserică şi s-au nevoit cu multă osteneală de au purtat lucrurile legii, de nu s-au schimbat”, in *Ibidem*, p. 1.

children or only daughters, but one may consider that he was aware that he was the last priest in his family line, which could have been a compelling motivation for him to write down his family's oral tradition.

The most important information for the issue discussed in this article is Priest Vasile's mention from the beginning of the chronicle regarding the arrival of the Bulgarians in Braşov in 1392, and the dating type of the events mentioned in the chronicle in relation to this event. In the German copies of the chronicle, the event is recounted as follows:

“Anno mundi 6900, anno Christi 1392 sind die Bulgaren hier an diesen Ort (id est bei Cronstadt) kommen”⁴².

In the Romanian copy made by Priest Radu Tempea, the account is slightly different:

“In the year 1392 (6900), the Bulgarians came to this place, which is called Bolgarsec”⁴³.

In the absence of the original chronicle by Priest Vasile, one cannot know precisely how he formulated the opening sentence of his chronicle.

The year of the Bulgarians' arrival in Braşov is used throughout the rest of the chronicle to date events alongside the year of the creation of the world and the year of the birth of Jesus Christ in the following form: “from Christ 1484, and from Adam 6992, and since the arrival of the Bulgarians 92” in Radu Tempea's copy, the German translator preferred to use Latin for these dates: “a domino nostro Jesu Christo 1484, ab Adamo 6992, ab adventu Bulgarorum 92”. This particular type of dating, from the arrival of the Bulgarians, is used by Priest Vasile in a relatively consistent manner for dating events related to the Church of St. Nicholas. In contrast, for political or other events that were not directly linked to the church only the dating from the birth of Jesus Christ and from the creation of the world was used. The successor to Priest Vasile's chronicle after 1633 (presumed to be Priest Radu Tempea from the 18th century) abandons the use of the dating from the arrival of the Bulgarians, the death of the chronicler Priest Vasile being mentioned as follows:

“And when it was the year of Christ 1659, from Adam 7167, on February 25, Priest Vasile, brother of Priest Constantin, son of Priest Mihai, passed away”⁴⁴.

⁴² „În anul de la facerea lumii 6900, de la naşterea lui Hristos 1392 au venit bulgarii în acest loc, adică lângă Braşov” [In the year of the creation of the world 6900, since the birth of Christ 1392, the Bulgarians came to this place, that is, near Braşov] in ***, *Quellen zur Geschichte der Stadt Kronstadt* [Sources on the history of the city of Kronstadt], p. 1.

⁴³ „Anul 1392 (6900) au venit Bolgarii în acest loc, care să zice Bolgarsec”, in Sterie Stinghe, *quoted work*, 1899, p. 1.

⁴⁴ „Iar când au fost anul de la Hristos 1659, de la Adam 7167 februarie 25 s-au pristăvit preotul Vasile, fratele preotului Constantin, fiul preotului Mihai”, in *Ibidem*, p. 8.

The rest of Radu Tempea's chronicle uses this double dating with one exception: the arrival of Priest Radu Tempea senior from Făgăraș to Brașov in 1699 is recorded using the year 308 since the arrival of the Bulgarians⁴⁵.

In his chronicle, Priest Vasile seems to consider the arrival of the Bulgarians in Brașov in 1392 as a founding event in relation to the Church of St. Nicholas and uses this year as a temporal reference point for important events related to the church. The continuator of his chronicle abandons this view of a supposed founding event in 1392 related to the arrival of the Bulgarians – this continuator is believed to be Priest Radu Tempea Jr. although the amount of information and its accuracy regarding events related to the Church of St. Nicholas in the 17th century are truly impressive, on par with those provided by Priest Mihai to his son, the chronicler Priest Vasile. The account of events in the manuscript of Priest Radu Tempea ends in 1692, and eight pages are missing from the manuscript, with the chronicle resuming with the account of events related to the union of the Romanian Orthodox churches in Transylvania with the Catholic Church. Radu Tempea Jr. probably considered his father's arrival in Brașov to be one of a series of important events for the Church of St. Nicholas and resorted to dating this event after the model of the priest chronicler Vasile, but only for this occasion.

The anonymous 18th century German translator may have made the translation from the Saxons' point of view and chose to phrase the opening sentence to mean that the Bulgarians who came in 1392 settled near Brașov, without mentioning the name of the neighborhood west of the fortress. In Radu Tempea's version, the name of the neighborhood is mentioned in Hungarian – Bolgarsec (Bolgárszeg) – which is strange, since this is the only time the Hungarian version is used; in the rest of Vasile's chronicle, the neighborhood is mentioned with the Romanian toponym "Șchei". In Old Romanian, the term "șchei" meant "Bulgarians" in the plural, and "șcheau" in the singular. All variants of the name for the Brașov neighborhood located west of the city in a mountain valley mean "area where Bulgarians live": German "Belgerei", Hungarian "Bolgárszeg" (Bulgarian corner), Romanian "Șcheii" (Bulgarians). However, the toponym should not be confused with the ethnicity of the inhabitants: the term "Bulgarians" is used to specify their place of origin, their neighborhood of origin but, whenever ethnicity is relevant, Brașov sources specify that the inhabitants of "Belgerei" are Vlachs/Romanians. Priest Vasile's chronicle specifies that the church books printed at the end of the 16th century in Brașov were in Romanian and in the Slavonic language. It is also worth mentioning that whenever he refers to the inhabitants of the Șchei neighborhood, Priest Vasile collectively refers to them as "Christians", without resorting to ethnic identification.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

A careful analysis of Priest Vasile's chronicle allows us to draw a number of conclusions:

- It is the only source that accurately identifies 1392 as the year of arrival and settlement near Braşov of a group of Bulgarians who gave their name to a neighborhood;
- Priest Vasile's chronicle is mainly a family chronicle, based on his father's memories and the oral tradition of the family of priests at St. Nicholas Church, to which are added his own direct experiences; the older the information provided by Priest Vasile's chronicle, the more succinct and imprecise it is;
- The dating based on the arrival of the Bulgarians in Braşov in 1392 is used only by Priest Vasile in his chronicle and only for events related to St. Nicholas Church and its priests, which indicates an attempt to establish a founding moment and a tradition;
- The variants of the ethnonym "Şchei"/Belegerei/Bulgaria are used as place names or to indicate origin, without ethnic connotation. Most likely, somewhere at the end of the 14th century, a group of Bulgarians settled in Braşov and gave their name to a neighborhood. However, as shown below, they were neither the first, nor the only Orthodox Christians to settle here.

4. THE INVENTION OF A TRADITION

In the first half of the 18th century, following the annexation of Transylvania to the Habsburg Empire, Saxon intellectuals in Braşov produced a series of historical studies on the city's past in an attempt to justify and preserve their ancient privileges. This intense historical research activity gave rise to a veritable school of historiography in Braşov, which gradually began to use scientific principles and criteria. For example, the thesis that the Transylvanian Saxons were the descendants of the ancient Dacians, based on a false synonymy between the Getae and the Goths⁴⁶, was proven false and rejected. However, in many cases, confusion remained, or explanations were added for historical phenomena that in reality had no support in historical sources. Thus, some 18th-century Saxon historians contributed by adding layers of unsupported information to the question of the arrival of the Bulgarians in Braşov.

Around 1743, the Saxon Priest Joseph Teutsch (1702–1770) compiled a chronicle of the Bârsa and Braşov regions, in which he included the news of the Bulgarians' arrival in Braşov in 1392, citing as the source of this information "Vall Hist". (*Vallahorum Historia*) "The History of the Vlachs", more precisely the

⁴⁶ Adolf Armbruster, *Dacoromano-saxonica. Cronicari români despre saşi. Românii în cronistica săsească [Dacoromano-saxonica. Romanian chroniclers on the Saxons. Romanians in Saxon chronicles]*, Bucharest, Scientific and Encyclopedic Publishing House, 1980, p. 123.

chronicle of Priest Vasile, which at that time had already been translated into German and was circulating among the Saxon intellectuals of Braşov⁴⁷. Joseph Teutsch showed a critical spirit or special intuition in his use of Priest Vasile's chronicle and correctly separates two moments that are combined in the Romanian version of the account. Namely, he places in 1495 a request by the Romanians of Şchei, supported by several boyars, to replace the old Orthodox wooden church with a stone church, and mentions for the year 1512 the accession to the throne of Voivode Neagoe Basarab, to whom he attributes the construction of the stone church of St. Nicolae, while Priest Vasile mistakenly considers Neagoe Basarab to be the founder in 1495.

The next Saxon scholar to use Vasile's chronicle was Thomas Tartler (1700–1770, rector of the gymnasium in Braşov and later a priest), who between 1735 and 1749 wrote an extensive chronicle of the history of Braşov⁴⁸. Thomas Tartler attempts to explain the Bulgarians' arrival in Braşov at the end of the 14th century by the need for labor to build the Black Church. The Bulgarians were encouraged to come, and because of the long duration of the church's construction, they received permission from the city authorities to build houses and settle in Braşov. And these Bulgarians are said to be the ancestors of the Romanians⁴⁹. Tartler is the first Saxon historian from Braşov to link the arrival of the Bulgarians in Braşov to the construction of the Black Church and to claim that these Bulgarians are at the origin of the Romanians in Braşov – without there being any other source to confirm this information apart from Tartler's statements.

In 1801–1802, George Michael Gottlieb von Herrmann wrote a history of Braşov that remained unpublished for a long time, in which he took up Thomas Tartler's statements regarding the origins of the population of the Şchei neighborhood, with some modifications: at the end of the 14th century, Bulgarians from Bulgaria and Romanians from Wallachia came to work on the construction of the Black Church and received permission from the city authorities to settle near Braşov and build an Orthodox church⁵⁰. Thus, one can see how the statement in the family chronicle of Priest Vasile that in 1392 a group of Bulgarians settled in Braşov (without this implying that there was no Romanian community here before) led, through the overlapping of successive layers of information that became tradition, to the statement that Romanians came to Braşov together with Bulgarians at the end of the 14th century.

⁴⁷ Joseph Teutsch, *Kurzgefasste Jahr-Geschichte von Siebenburgen, besonders Burzenland* ["A brief history of Transylvania, especially the Burzenland region"], in ***, *Quellen zur Geschichte der Stadt Kronstadt* [Sources on the history of the city of Kronstadt], p. 98.

⁴⁸ Adolf Armbruster, *quoted work*, pp. 137–138.

⁴⁹ Thomas Tartler, *Colectanea zu einer Partikulär Historie von Kronstadt aus unterschiedlichen Documenten zusammengebracht* [Colectanea on a particular history of Kronstadt compiled from various documents], quoted by Sterie Stinghe, *quoted work*, 1936, p. 3.

⁵⁰ George Michael Gottlieb von Herrmann, *Das alte Kronstadt* [Old Kronstadt], Bohlau Verlag, Cologne, 2010, p. 25.

It must be taken into consideration the fact that much of the information recorded by Saxon historians in Braşov in the 18th century is based on oral traditions or interpretations intended to give meaning to the partial information available at that time. Such information, which is not supported by independent documentary sources, should be considered at most as 18th century oral traditions relating to events that took place hundreds of years earlier. An example of this is the period of construction of the Black Church in Braşov – Saxon chroniclers from the 17th and 18th centuries are not very sure of when work began, giving different dates for an event at the end of the 14th century⁵¹. Historical research carried out in the 20th century showed that work on the Black Church had begun at the end of 1384.

Another example of information from the oral tradition of 18th century Saxon historians: Thomas Tartler records that the legendary ruler of Wallachia, Negru Vodă, donated a mountain to the city of Braşov in exchange for permission for the Romanians of Braşov to build a church, and that there is a portrait of Negru Vodă in the Church of St. Nicholas. Obviously, the information provided by Thomas Tartler is not supported by other documentary sources⁵².

5. 19TH CENTURY BULGARIAN NATIONALISM

In 1895, Bulgarian linguist Liubomir Miletici researched the archives in Braşov, looking for medieval Bulgarian documents, and the results of his research were published in 1896 in an extensive study⁵³. Miletici had access to the archives of St. Nicholas Church, where he studied the manuscript of the chronicle of Priest Radu Tempea and the historical documents kept there, as well as the collections compiled by Saxon historians in the 18th century and the old archives of Braşov.

In his study, Miletici takes up the statement from the chronicle of Priest Vasile according to which the Bulgarians came to Braşov in 1392 and links it to the fall of the Bulgarian Tsardom of Tarnovo that took place in the same period, suggesting that the emigration of Bulgarians to Braşov occurred under pressure from the Ottoman advance south of the Danube. He also takes up Thomas Tartler's unsubstantiated claim that the Bulgarians who came to Braşov in the 14th century were brought there to participate in the construction of the Black Church. From the tax lists of the inhabitants of the Şchei neighborhood, the Bulgarian linguist chose

⁵¹ Maja Philippi, *Die Bürger von Kronstadt im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert [The citizens of Kronstadt in the 14th and 15th centuries]*, Bukarest, Kriterion, 1986, p. 152.

⁵² Adolf Armbruster, *quoted work*, p. 359.

⁵³ Л. Милетичъ, Дако-ромънитѣ и тѣхната славянска писменостъ. Часть II. Нови влахо-български грамоти отъ Брашовъ, Сборникъ за Народни Умотворения, Наука и Книжнина, книга XIII, София, 1896, стр. 3-152 [*The Daco-Romanians and their Slavic writing. New Vlach-Bulgarian documents from Braşov*, Collection of Folklore, Science and Literature, Vol. XIII, Sofia, 1896, pp. 3–152].

only names of Slavic origin to demonstrate their Bulgarian ethnicity, ignoring many names and nicknames of clearly Romanian origin (Furcă/Pitchfork, Ursu/Bear, Crețu/Curly, etc. – the issue of the names of the “Bulgarians” in Brașov in the 16th and 17th centuries deserves a separate article). Miletici’s thesis was that all the inhabitants of Șcheii Brașovului were originally Bulgarians from south of the Danube who were assimilated by Romanians, a process of assimilation that ended sometime in the 18th century (Miletici also claims that the members of the Greek Company of Brașov were all Bulgarians!).

For the Bulgarian linguist, the fact that old Romanian documents were written in Slavonic, together with the confusion between the toponym and the ethnonym “Bulgarian” was enough to lead him to the conclusion that the Orthodox population of the city of Brașov in the Middle Ages was of exclusive Bulgarian ethnicity and had been assimilated during the 18th century. The maintenance and perpetuation of this thesis ignores evidence such as the mid-16th century description of Brașov corrected by local reformer Johannes Honterus, which showed the ethnic composition of the city:

“It has three suburbs located on three distinct valleys, one of which is inhabited by Bulgarians, *i.e.*, Vlachs, another by Hungarians, and the third by Saxons”⁵⁴.

In any case, if the only Orthodox Christians in medieval Brașov were ethnic Bulgarians, from where and when did the Romanians who supposedly assimilated them appear?

A papal document from the end of the 14th century, published in 1902, largely clarifies these successive layers of confusion. It is an indulgence issued on December 15, 1399, by Pope Boniface IX to support the conversion of Orthodox Christians in Brașov to the Catholic faith. The relevant passage is as follows:

“As we have learned that in the city of Corona, called Brașov by the people, in the diocese of Strigonium, located on the edge of Christendom, there live a multitude of Greeks, Romanians, Bulgarians, Armenians, and other infidels who have a church in that city which they use for the worship of God and Christ (...)”⁵⁵.

This document, most likely drafted on the basis of information transmitted from Brașov, allows us to draw a number of conclusions:

- In 1399, there was a large multi-ethnic Orthodox community in Brașov. Documents from the following centuries do not confirm the presence of

⁵⁴ „are trei suburbii aflătoare pe trei văi deosebite, din care pe una o locuiesc bulgarii, adică valahii, pe cealaltă ungurii și pe a treia sașii”, in ***, *Călători străini despre țările române [Foreign travelers on the Romanian lands]*, Vol. I, Bucharest, Scientific Publishing House, 1968, p. 216.

⁵⁵ „După cum am aflat că în orașul Corona, numit de popor Brașov, în dioceza Strigonului aflată la marginea creștinătății, se află și trăiesc o mulțime de greci, români, bulgari, armeni și alți necredincioși care au o biserică în acel oraș pe care o folosesc pentru slujirea lui Dumnezeu și a lui Hristos (...)”, in ***, *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen [Documentary history of the Germans in Transylvania]*, Vol. III, Hermannstadt, 1902, p. 246.

Greeks, and a Greek community is attested here much later in the 18th century, which may lead us to consider the term “Greeks” as referring to the Orthodox confession. It is highly likely that the order of enumeration (Romanians, Bulgarians, Armenians, and others) refers to the proportion of these ethnic groups within the Orthodox community.

- There was an Orthodox church in Braşov in 1399, which contradicts the oral tradition of the priests at St. Nicholas Church, recorded in writing in the late 18th and 19th centuries, according to which the “Bulgarians” who arrived in 1392 first erected a cross near which they prayed, and only in 1403 were they given permission to build a wooden church, which was replaced by a stone one between 1485 and 1512⁵⁶;
- This papal document from 1399 has no connection with the construction of the Black Church in Braşov, but other indulgences from the same period have been preserved that are given for this purpose⁵⁷, which is probably where the confusion and oral tradition linking the arrival of the Bulgarians in Braşov with the construction of the Black Church originated. However, it is much more likely that the safe conduct granted by the Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Straţimir of Vidin (1356–1396) to the merchants of Braşov may be an indication of the existence of a community of Bulgarian merchants settled in Braşov around the same period.

6. INSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS

A relatively recent study brings some new elements to the above discussion⁵⁸. Maja Philippi shows that there was clearly a community of Slavic origin in the neighborhood west of the walls of Braşov, its name being preserved in the toponyms given to the area in German (“Belgerei”), Hungarian (“Bolgarszek”) and Romanian (“Şcheii”) – all of which reflect the “Bulgarian” ethnonym.

The key question is: was there a Romanian community present before the arrival of the Bulgarians sometime in the late 14th century? Maja Philippi believes that the mountain valleys west of Braşov were inhabited by Romanians since ancient times, possibly even before the colonization of the Saxons. This researcher’s opinion is that initially there were two separate communities of Romanians and Bulgarians; the tax registers of Braşov from the end of the 15th century, almost a century after the arrival of the Bulgarians, refer to only a few streets in the immediate vicinity of the city walls as “Belgerei”, while the rows of

⁵⁶ Sterie Stinghe, *quoted work*, 1936, pp. 7–8.

⁵⁷ Maja Philippi, *quoted work*, 1986, pp. 152–153.

⁵⁸ Maja Philippi, “Von der Gründung der Stadt bis zur Erringung der Autonomie in 1500” [“From the founding of the city to the attainment of autonomy in 1500”], in Harald Roth, *Kronstadt. Eine siebenbürgische Stadtgeschichte [Kronstadt. An History of a Transylvanian City]*, Munich, Universitas, 1999, pp. 37–41.

houses towards the mountains inhabited by Romanians were designated by other toponyms. According to these tax registers, the area between the city walls and St. Nicholas Church was inhabited at the end of the 15th century by a mixed community of Saxons, Hungarians, and Romanians/descendants of Bulgarians who had arrived at the end of the 14th century. West of St. Nicholas Church, only taxpayers with Romanian names are attested, which would constitute further evidence for the existence of two separate communities.

Maja Philippi's interpretation of the 15th century tax registers and the papal indulgence of 1399 paints a picture that explains the oral traditions recorded in writing 200 years after the events. In 1399, there was already an Orthodox church west of the walls of Braşov that served two separate ethnic communities: Bulgarians, who lived alongside Germans and Hungarians in the streets near the fortress, and Romanians, who lived in the mountain valleys near the city. The arrival of the Bulgarian community in Braşov at the end of the 14th century to build the Black Church is not attested by any historical source close to the time of the event, but only by a late 18th century oral tradition, while we have documentary evidence of the existence of a commercial relationship between the city of Braşov and the Bulgarian Tsardom of Vidin at the end of the 14th century, a context in which a community of Bulgarian merchants could have settled in Braşov.

At the end of the 15th century, the name "Belgerei/Bulgaria" referred to several streets near the city, a name that gradually spread to the Romanians in the mountain valleys, so that in 1547 Johannes Honterus pointed out that "Bulgarians" in Braşov meant Vlachs/Romanians. Priest Vasile's chronicle contains an oral family tradition, often inaccurate when it comes to historical data, but it remains the only source that places the arrival of the Bulgarians in Braşov in 1392. The local historiography of Braşov in the first half of the 18th century was concerned with the origin of the Romanians here, but in the absence of access to historical documents, it preferred to add new layers of tradition, without really clarifying the issue in question.

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