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Pilgrimage and Its Infrastructure in Post- communist Transylvania

Architecture and communication pathways have truly become the infrastructure of the new pilgrimages, their nodal points and threads.

The Situation in 1989

THE ATHEISTIC nature of communism, the tendentious education promoted under that regime and the religious persecution perpetrated against the population have been dwelt on excessively, to the point of their becoming trite commonplaces in the literature devoted to this topic. In reality (and this might even be the subject of a separate monograph), especially after the communist takeover of power, there was a certain competition in matters of faith, which could provide a much more convincing explanation of the entailing religious persecutions. In the programmatic documents of the communist regime, it was repeatedly insisted that communism would effect not so much reversible physical transformations on the people, but irreversible “chemical” changes, by modifying the “material base” and the “superstructure” of society. Compared to the downfall of the communist regime, the collapse of the rightist totalitarian regimes (which had operated under capitalism) was quasi-complete; moreover, the latter

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regimes were sanctioned historically (internationally), as well as morally/politically (in those countries), far more drastically than the communist regime has ever been...

We can only surmise why only a small minority of the authors in the field have mentioned the possibility and ambition of communism being transformed into a religion and why the majority have considered it an aborted/abandoned process. As we are moving away from those events through a "time tunnel" whose effects are already visible, we should nonetheless recall a few elements.

For certain layers of the population, in the good tradition of offering "opiate to the masses," a certain "mystique" was developed, its panoply displaying hagiography, rituals, monuments, relics and reliquaries, and even a certain kind of pilgrimage. Leaving aside the hilarious aspects thereof (even though for the "heretical" victims of the time, they must have been far from hilarious), we ought to remember the pilgrimage to the "new Rome/Mecca," Moscow (which had aspired, throughout the Tsarist period, to become "the third Rome"), the adoption of the well-known occult phrase "the light comes from the east," the prostrations, processions and parades from the mausoleum of the infallible "Great Teachers," the mummification and worship of their relics, the celebration of the major rituals in personal or social life at the "Heroes' Monuments" (the new martyrs) and so on.

We do not know if it is to the religious instruction bestowed by Comrade Stalin, to his entourage or simply to certain fundamental elements of cultural anthropology that we owe those infamous binomials of the time, such as: confession/self-criticism, the Holy Spirit/the boundless wisdom of the party, the chosen people/the working class, catechumens/party candidates, the original sin/unsound origins, penance/re-education through labor and, of course, there are so many other correspondences...

On the very eve of the Eastern bloc's implosion, several concepts related to the so-called "new man" represented sublimated ingredients of the traditional cult of personality and marked the ever more poignant failure, the alienation and irrational abuses that had been spawned by a doctrine which had originally declared itself rational, in its pursuit of objective-dialectical materialism. Accordingly, the "orthodox" doctrine stipulated that it was the masses and progress that engendered personalities; it asserted that the role of a locomotive had been played by the great visionary leaders, who had "dragged," in their wake, production relations and production means; moreover, in certain places, even the "dynastic issue" reared its ugly head. Ironically, two of the factors that contributed to the final dissolution of this regime, on account of its loss of the techno-economic competition, resided in the banning of cybernetics and genetics on ideological grounds...

Romania was not spared by this tide: let us remember the monument in Carol Park in Bucharest and the dispute it sparked after 1990, the manner in

which the communist leaders of the time had to have a custom-made cell at Doftana Prison—just like Prophet’s chamber in the first mosque from Medina, or the literature, fine arts and “prison” music of the period. Still, in a country with such a rural demographic weight, the saving principle highlighted by Karel Čapek in *The Absolute at Large* was at work—in this case, in the well-known form of “double speak” or of the public vs. family life dichotomy, not to mention the numerous new churches erected outside Bucharest, the two Christmas trees celebrating Santa Claus (Moș Crăciun) and his communist foil, Moș Gerilă, on the balcony, etc.

The Situation Post–1989

IN THE countries of Eastern Europe, the post–1989 period has witnessed a return to pre-communist traditions and a re-synchronization with the West, including through a religious revival. The oscillation between synchronism and protochronism is somewhat traditionally entrenched in Romania’s history and the post-revolutionary religious revival has fuelled both of these configurations, sometimes leading them to the brink of exacerbation. Religion has benefitted from the prestige of: the Roman Catholic Church, considering its contribution to the victory over communism; the Protestant and Neo-Protestant Churches, regarded as saviours of the country from its economic morass, by virtue of the prosperity that can be derived from the work ethic they espouse; the Greek-Orthodox and Greek-Catholic Churches, because of their role in the preservation of the national identity and tradition; and Judaism, on account of its originary contribution.

In a manner similar to the “negative developing” strategies deployed in the former Iberian dictatorships, with a view to “compromising the church” in its association with fascism, European communist initiatives are still launched today, papal visits are accompanied by much-publicized protests, and Romania and most post-communist countries have become havens for the “true believers.”

Pilgrimage—a Dimension of Orthodox and Catholic Spirituality

ACCORDING TO most sources, pilgrimage is generally defined by an end-of-the-journey ritual; however, in some cultures, various elements of initiation and events occurring along the way can also become complementary. In Byzantinism, *proskinitis*, the term used to designate a pilgrim,

also meant worshiper. Another synonymous term referred to “peregrination, the wandering from one place to another of monks and ascetics who refused to settle in a human society of any kind.”²¹ The latter meaning is somewhat synonymous with “rupture, detachment, alienation, and voluntary exile.”²²

In the Latin area, *peregrinus*, derived from *per-agrare*, designated, by extension, a foreigner, the one who crosses a space or a frontier. Words from various other languages define a trinity: “the separation, the peregrination and the quest for the holy place.”²³ Byzantine Orthodoxy appears to have consecrated the practice of organizing processions during certain holidays (Lamentations to the Lord on Good Friday, Lamentations to the Holy Virgin, or walking on one’s knees around the church). The latter is not a monopoly of Orthodoxy, as in Catholicism it is related to the famous scallop shell. Pilgrimage sites are also associated with an aquatic element, in various forms, and they can also be related to various penitential practices. The journey may also be seen as effecting a “conversion,” “an abandonment of the self for a return to God” and a rebirth.

Historically, the first pilgrimages were made either to biblical places or to “famous” monks. The loss of Jerusalem and of the holy places in the Orient imposed a series of Western succedanea. Thus, the monuments erected on the sites of torture—the so-called *Martyria*—became consecrated sites of pilgrimage. Another important element that deserves mention is the fact that the society of pilgrims only lasts until the pilgrimage is complete, its nature being “ephemeral.”

Some clerics are firmly convinced that the organization of pilgrimages could also lead to “catechesis, conversion and the discovery of traditional values, the representatives of other confessions being barred from participating in them.”²⁴

Pilgrimage and Its Context in the New Europe

IN 1987, the Council of Europe launched the program *Cultural Routes*, which is based on the principles governing its policy on cultural diversity and identity, dialogue and cross-border mutual development. Its ultimate aim is that of interconnecting and raising awareness of the common European cultural heritage. Notably, the first pilgrimage route promoted by the newly established European Institute of Cultural Routes was *El Camino*—to Santiago de Compostela. After 1987, the program Cultural Routes and the specialized European Institute fostered the proliferation of several pilgrimage routes, including the *Holy Virgin’s Trail* for Central and Eastern Europe.

Let us take advantage of the context of this discussion and recall a few notions.⁵ Architecture and its image in an urban environment tend to become a platform for the assembly of people, as it functionally and quasi-permanently

interacts, in a somewhat unifying manner, with all the members of these cultures and sub-cultures that coexist under multiculturalism, sometimes ignoring or abhorring one another, in a more or less cordial manner. The Silk Road and Marco Polo have been replaced today by the apostles of syncretism or by those who circulate elements across these cultures for lucrative purposes. Architecture and communication pathways have truly become the infrastructure of the new pilgrimages, their nodal points and threads.

What is recognized as essential for traditional aesthetics is the “primacy of the complexes of feelings-moods-sentiments generated by mere contemplation, disregarding the use value of certain human creations.”⁶ The contemporary expansion of beauty is deemed to have the attributes of globalism, as it virtually affects all of humanity’s spheres of manifestation. As far as we see it, the phenomenon should not seem surprising, as some authors contend, but rather normal: if the aesthetic is to be associated with human creativity and if the present-day reversal of the relation between the natural and the synthetic (with all the prevalence given to the latter) is taken into account, it appears perfectly logical that the aesthetic should propagate itself proportionately, at the very least.

Another mutation refers to the increase in leisure time and in the spare time that can be devoted to aesthetic experiences. As regards the expansion of the beautiful through forms pertaining to the system of art, paradoxically, it is in the artistic domain that there is a certain restraint concerning the expansion of the beautiful, due to the fact that contemporary aesthetics takes the aesthetic rather than the beautiful as its object or level of approach (we are not referring here solely to the aesthetics of ugliness or to the Hegelian idea of the death of art). Regarding the expansion of art through the establishment of museum institutions (which are also architecture and, let us not forget, almost all the tenors of contemporary architecture have created museums, most of them demolishing the traditional functionality of the program), tourist mobility, the devotion of some leisure time to the growth and integration of the arts in the ambient and the ubiquity of the media, we may safely assume and state that, in this regard, art has indeed become a quotidian presence in people’s lives.

Let us return to our subject more concretely: starting from the second half of the twentieth century, with the shift from modernism to postmodernism (beyond its strict association with the architectural trend of the same name), the beginning of the post-industrial age, the democratization of entertainment and the great demographic migrations, the transition from the wars of culture to the strategy of “seduction through culture” and so many other transvaluations of values, there occurred a paradoxical mutation through which architecture has come to be recognized as a “resource” and to mark out the stages of cultural pilgrimages.⁷

Unlike the brutalization through labor prevalent at the turn of the Industrial Age, the Post-Industrial Age programmatically reduces work time and expands free time, and the latter can no longer be valorized in any superior and recuperating manner except through leisure. Hence, the great cultural tourism migrations of our time, the foregrounding of architecture as a “book of mankind” and the reimplantation of urban images and architectural configurations upon the return home.

Journeys have always had an important role in ventilating architectural concepts. Comparative architecture provides an abundance of data in this regard and shows how constructive and environmental determinisms have been overcome through knowledge and through the trafficking of models (see the French Romanesque School of pilgrimage churches). Emphasis has often been placed on the role that companionship or the Crusades played in the Middle Ages, on the importance of pilgrimages to Mecca for forging the synthesis and continuity of Islamic architecture, on the momentum of Jewish European architecture after emancipation, the allogeneic contributions to the First Temple in Jerusalem or the Temple Platform Rotunda and so on. Moreover, globalization and the consciousness of belonging to a certain community or configuration require expression, and architectural symbolism is acknowledged as a form of expression in this sense.⁸

Today, when the means of communication and transport are so diverse and comfortable, the widespread idea is that pilgrimage represents a fad of the twentieth century. In our view, the war of cultures has been silenced, and those in charge of the resources have moved to “seduction through culture,” a strategy that operates very efficiently through architectural images. Moreover, coercive measures and those of putting the opposition on the defensive (see the ban on parabolic antennae or the denial of access to the Internet, etc.) should not be targeted at the youth, for whom the architectural framework is very important (including for procreation). When I made a comparison with the genesis of the Middle Ages, I also evoked the oasis of prosperity besieged by the ravenous migratory tribes...

Pilgrimage and Its Infrastructure in Present-Day Transylvania

BY VIRTUE of its history and traditions, Transylvania has had a strong multicultural and multiconfessional character. In this area, there is a history of the pilgrimages undertaken to this day, nuanced for each denomina-

tion (Greek-Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Greek-Catholic, etc.) but also marked by mutual influences, a certain emulation and even consequences like changes in ownership over various places of worship. The post-communist period has brought about a typically postmodern dimension of pilgrimages: cultural tourism and the ineffable touch of ecumenical syncretism.

The pilgrimages of the Byzantine/Orthodox rite revolve around the monasteries of this denomination and have at least three main forms: pilgrimages to a particular place of worship, throughout the year; pilgrimages to monasteries, during their patron saints' feasts; pilgrimages organized along a route/circuit, inevitably tinged by tourism—in a more or less blatant manner.

Some of the most highly frequented monasteries and their sites, which are promoted on the Internet,⁹ would be:

- Afteia Monastery, for monks, dedicated to the Holy Great Sovereigns Constantine and Helen; pilgrimage day: 21 May (Sălișteea commune, Alba County, 14 km south of Sălișteea, 31 km south-west of Sebeș, 40 km west of Orăștie).

- Annunciation Monastery, a nunnery dedicated to the Annunciation; pilgrimage day: 25 March (under the hills of Șimleu, near the town Șimleul Silvaniei, Sălaj County, 5 km south-east of Șimleul Silvaniei, 25 km west of Zalău), established in 1994.

- Băișoara Hermitage, for monks, dedicated to the Holy Cross; pilgrimage day: 14 September, a pilgrimage day repeated on the first day of May (Băișoara commune, Cluj County, 37 km south-west of Cluj-Napoca, 35 km west of Turda), established in 1991.

- Bălan Monastery, for monks, with a nascent congregation, dedicated to the Assumption of the Mother of God; pilgrimage day: 15 August (Chendrea village, Bălan commune, Sălaj County, 13 km south of Jibou, 47 km east of Zalău), established in 1993.

- Bârsana Monastery, a nunnery dedicated to the Synaxis of the 12 Apostles; pilgrimage day: 30 June; also the third day after the celebration of the feast (Bârsana commune, Maramureș County, 22 km south-east of Sighetul Marmăției), which was re-established in 1993.

- Berevoi Monastery, for monks, dedicated to the Holy Apostle Andrew; pilgrimage day: 30 November (Berivoi village, Recea commune, Brașov County, 12 km south of Făgăraș, a monastery founded in the seventeenth century, attested in 1748 and 1761), re-established in 1992.

- Berevoii Mici Hermitage, for monks, dedicated to the Holy 40 Martyrs; pilgrimage day: 9 March (Berivoi village, Recea commune, Brașov County, 12 km south of Făgăraș), re-established in 1993.

- Bixad Monastery, for monks, dedicated to the Assumption of the Mother of God; pilgrimage days: the feast days of the Theotokos on 15 August and 8

September; The Holy Apostles Peter and Paul on 29 June; the Beheading of St. John the Baptist.

- Bohot-Baraolt Monastery, a nunnery dedicated to the Nativity of the Mother of God; pilgrimage day: 8 September (Bohot village, Beclean commune, Braşov County, 10 km north-west of Făgăraş, 7 km north-west of Băile Rodbav, 37 km south-east of Agnita), re-established in 1992.

- Boiereni Monastery (Rohiţa), for monks, dedicated to the Protection of the Mother of God; pilgrimage day: 1 October (Boiereni village, part of the town Târgu-Lăpuş, 13 km south of Târgu-Lăpuş and 31 km north of Dej), re-established in 1993.

- Brâncoveanu Monastery at Sâmbăta de Sus, for monks, dedicated to the Assumption of the Mother of God; pilgrimage day: 15 August, as well as to the Healing Spring; pilgrimage day: first Friday after Easter (Voila commune, Braşov County, 30 km south of Făgăraş, 11 km south-east of the town Victoria).

- Bucium Monastery, for monks, dedicated to the Transfiguration; pilgrimage day: 6 August (Şinca commune, Braşov County, 17 km south-east of Făgăraş, attested from 1737), re-established in 1990.

- Buneşti Monastery, a nunnery dedicated to St. George; pilgrimage day: 23 April (Buneşti commune, Braşov County, 18 km north-west of Rupea, 35 km south-east of Sighişoara), established in 1991.

- Călene Hermitage, a nunnery dedicated to the Protection of the Mother of God; pilgrimage day: 1 October (without a pilgrimage tradition, Călene is part of the town of Cugir, Alba County, 8 km east of Cugir, 35 km east of Orăştie), which opened in 1992.

- Căşeiul de Jos Hermitage, without a church and congregation (Căşeu village, Cluj County, 7 km north-west of Dej, 65 km north of Cluj-Napoca, mentioned as a monastery in 1774), currently not in operation.

- Căşiel Monastery of Strâmbu, for monks, dedicated to The Exaltation of the Holy Cross; pilgrimage day: 14 September (Strâmbu village, Chiueşti commune, Cluj County, 28 km north-east of Dej, founded in 1765), re-established in 1991.

- Cârţişoara Monastery, a nunnery dedicated to The Holy Apostles Peter and Paul; pilgrimage day: 29 June (Cârţişoara commune, Sibiu County), re-established in 1990.

- Cergău Mic Monastery, for monks, dedicated to The Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, without a pilgrimage tradition (Cergău Mic village, Cergău commune, Alba County), re-established in 1992.

- Cetatea Colţului Hermitage, a monastery for monks without a monastic congregation at present, dedicated to All Saints; pilgrimage day: 26 June (Suseni village, Râu de Mori commune, Hunedoara County, 24 km south-west of Haţeg, 56 km south-west of Simeria), re-established in 1991.

- Ciucea Monastery, a nunnery dedicated to the Nativity of the Mother of God; pilgrimage day: 8 September (Ciucea commune, Cluj County, 20 km west of Huedin, 70 km west of Cluj Napoca, 83 km east of Oradea, built in 1775?).
- Crișan Monastery, for monks, dedicated to the Nativity of the Mother of God; pilgrimage day: 8 September (Ribița commune, Hunedoara County, 10 km north of Brad, 46 km north of Deva, founded in the seventeenth century), re-established in 1991.
- Dejani Monastery, for monks, dedicated to the Protection of the Mother of God; pilgrimage day: 1 October (Dejani village, Recea commune, Brașov County, 14 km south of Făgăraș, 75 km west of Brașov, attested before 1700).
- Gai Monastery of Arad, a nunnery, dedicated to St. Simeon Stylites; pilgrimage day: 1 September (Gai district of Arad City, 50 km north of Timișoara, 153 km north-west of Deva, 115 km south-west of Oradea), re-established in 1964.
- Holy Trinity Monastery in Feleac, dedicated to The Holy Trinity; pilgrimage day: the second day after Pentecost (Feleacu village, Cluj County, 8 km south of Cluj-Napoca and 23 km north of Turda).
- Voievozi Monastery, a nunnery dedicated to the Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel; pilgrimage day: 8 November (Voievozi village, Popești commune, Bihor County, 24 km south of Marghita, 36 km north of Aleșd), re-established in 1993.

Like in the rest of Europe, by far the most important is the Feast of the Assumption of the Mother of God,¹⁰ celebrated on 15 August. The calendar date (15 August) brings the summer altar outdoors, as one of the focal points of the ritual's infrastructure. According to most sources, "Honouring the Virgin Mary gained tremendous impetus in the Church, particularly starting from the fourth century, more precisely, after the Third Ecumenical Synod of Ephesus, in 431."¹¹ Several sources recommend: Izbuc, Nicula, Dobric, Strâmbu, Bixad, Rohia, Sâmbăta de Sus and Moisei as seven monasteries where important pilgrimages take place on the feast of Saint Mary, on 15 August, every year.

The Pilgrimage to Nicula Monastery

THE MOST important traditional pilgrimage in Transylvania, with a dramatic history, has been, since 1990, also the most important and publicized pilgrimage, probably due to the involvement of the politicians who wanted to manifest themselves antithetically in relation to communist atheism; this, however, has not diminished its significance, thanks also to the tens of thousands of faithful who come here annually.

The ritual has certain specific elements, as the pilgrims usually arrive the day before, walk up the imposing hill, chanting *pricesne* and hymns, attend religious services and a memorial service, as well as the procession following the miracle-working icon (dated 1681, painted by Luca of Iclod, who cried for an entire month three centuries ago: 15 February – 12 March, 1699) around which the sanctuary was established in successive architectural layers. Notable, compared to the motorized secularization of pilgrimage today, is the pedestrian flow of the believers from the villages surrounding the area.

Compared to the current developments, the preservation of certain traditions verges on press events, as evinced by the title of Simona Munteanu's article, "Pelerinaj de sacrificiu: 180 de kilometri pe jos pentru a se închina icoanei făcătoare de minuni de la Nicula" (A sacrificial pilgrimage: 180 kilometres on foot to worship the miracle-working icon from Nicula): "50 pilgrims from the Maramureş locality Lăpuşul Românesc . . . walk all the way there and back, and have been doing this for decades"; "We have believers who have been doing this for no less than 30 years, as they learned from their parents"; and "They would travel up and down a 180-kilometre long road, eat what they have brought from home or what they receive on the road, and spend the night in the Cluj locality of Căşeu, in the locals' homes, as they have been doing for years."¹²

We do not want to enter any disputes concerning the origin of Romanian traditional pilgrimages, organized by strict rules: the assembly of the believers, before departure, in the village church, where special services are celebrated and blessings are given; the prayers in the churchyard, which must precede the departure; those who go on pilgrimage learn specific songs, which they will sing on the way; the crosses and crucifixes from the crossroads where the "pilgrims stop, sing the verse of a special chant, say a prayer and then carry on walking;"¹³ the thrice repeated perambulation and a short prayer in the churches encountered by the pilgrims along the way.

"Tourist" Pilgrimages

THE ASSUMPTION of the Mother of God also occasions a contemporary approach, with a secular touch, as demonstrated by one of the many tourist brochures circulating on the "market":

The "circuit" version: 1-12-13-14-15-16-17 August 2014; ROUTE:

Day I—Departure from Bucharest, Ploieşti and Braşov—Făgăraş—Brâncoveanu Monastery, Sâmbata—Sibiu—Alba Iulia—Râmeţ Monastery, accommodation.

Day II—Cășiel Monastery—Robia Monastery, the icon of the Mother of God, N. Steinhardt—Sighetul Marmăției—Săpânța Merry Cemetery and Săpânța Peri Monastery—Bârsana Monastery, accommodation.

Day III—Ride on the mocănița in Vișeu (optional)—Horses' Waterfalls Borșa (chairlift ride, optional)—Moisei Monastery: worshipping the icon of Virgin Mary—the Church of Ieud—Bârsana Monastery, accommodation.

Day IV—Bârsana Monastery, free time, evening: attending the Lamentations to the Holy Virgin, accommodation.

Day V—Bârsana Monastery, Holy Liturgy, Feast of Assumption of the Mother of God—Nicula Monastery: worshipping the icon of the Virgin Mary—Râmeț Monastery, accommodation. Lupșa Monastery—Arieș Valley—Turda Gorge: hiking—Râmeț Monastery, accommodation.

Day VI—Râmeț Monastery, Holy Liturgy—Sighișoara, the Fortress and Sighișoara Monastery—Brașov—Ploiești—Bucharest.

Transportation by coach, air conditioning, audio devices, event organizer and invited priest.

Participation in the Holy Liturgy; celebration of the Feast of the Assumption of the Mother of God, Maramureș traditions, an atmosphere permeated by spirituality, as well as relaxation.¹⁴

Catholic Pilgrimages in Transylvania

TOGETHER WITH the architect György Orbán, the author of the present study initiated, in 2011, a scientific doctoral research at the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, focusing on the valorization of the built heritage of the Roman Catholic Church in Transylvania along the pilgrimage route known as the “Holy Virgin’s Trail” (best known so far mainly because of its branch ending in Medjugorje, Bosnia), which, for circumstantial reasons, was completed as a doctoral thesis in engineering rather than in architecture or urbanism.

The end point of this pilgrimage route is Șumuleu-Ciuc in the Ciuc Depression, one of the most representative areas of the Roman Catholic denomination in Transylvania, inhabited by Franciscan monks since the beginning of the fifteenth century; the present-day church and monastery were built between 1804 and 1834 in Baroque style, and they shelter the Miracle-Making Statue of the Holy Virgin Mary (1510–1515).

Catholics go on pilgrimage to Șumuleu-Ciuc during Pentecost (in the fifteenth century they gathered here on the occasion of the feast of the Virgin Mary). 1567 was an important year, which marked the crystallization of the pil-

grimage phenomenon: thus, the Prince of Transylvania, John Sigismund, tried to impose the Unitarian faith upon the believers in the Szekler seats of Ciuc, Gheorgheni and Casin, but the Catholics, under the leadership of the priest István from Joseni, managed to defeat them, under the protection of the prayers their families had uttered.

One of the branches of this route connects Austria to Romania, totalling approximately 1,400 km; Romanians would also embark on this route, in the spirit of “tearing down the inter-ethnic wall,” the statement of a participant sounding as follows: “*Via Mariae* contributes to the preservation and conveyance of the Christian values to future generations, advocates mutual awareness, peace and understanding, and helps us draw nearer to God and to ourselves.”¹⁵

This kind of pilgrimage conforms to the pattern of European Catholic pilgrimage, a journey with daily stages, of about 30 km (in the reader for the course on the History of the City, I found the same pace for Transylvania, which can be travelled on foot in 60 days; its infrastructure is an obvious necessity, the *Via Mariae* Route in Romania, inaugurated in 2010, beginning to be effectively marked in 2011). *The Trail of the Blessed Virgin Mary* is thus a network of tourist and pilgrimage routes currently under construction, “whose main axis links the Marian shrines *Mariazell* in Austria and *Șumuleu-Ciuc* in Romania;” furthermore, “along the route, the pilgrims receive visas and custom-made beads, with which they can then make their own rosary, after completing the entire route.”¹⁶

In our opinion, deliberately stressed in this text, the new century stands under the aegis of cultural anthropology, the impact vector of globalization residing in a certain “cultural seduction” and the appropriation of models, including a certain religious syncretism.

A long time ago, a certain ecumenism operated under the umbrella of the Greek-Catholic Church, which adapted, for the Uniates, certain pilgrimage-related Roman Catholic elements. The historical background of the Greek-Catholic Church is also relevant for the practice of pilgrimage, which lasted until the prohibition of this denomination in Romania by the communists. During the episcopate of Iuliu Hossu, there was a revival of pilgrimages to monasteries across the diocese, starting on 21 June 1921 at Bixad, 15 August at Nicula, 6 September at Moisei, and 14 September 1926 at Cășei Monastery near Strâmbu. As Bixad and Moisei were transferred, in 1930, into the Diocese of Maramureș, Lupșa Monastery in the Western Mountains came under the Diocese of Cluj-Gherla, where the bishop presided over the pilgrimage of 20 July and, after the settlement of the Basilian monks at Calvaria Monastery in Cluj-Mănăștur in 1947, he set the pilgrimage for 29 June.

Instead of Definitive Albeit Premature Conclusions

IN TRANSYLVANIA, the phenomenon of pilgrimage occurs essentially among the Roman Catholics, the Greek Catholics and the Orthodox/Byzantine, with characteristics that are specific to each rite.¹⁷ Among the members of the other denominations that flourished in this area at various times, such manifestations verge on cultural tourism and express nostalgia for those times.¹⁸ In all cases, the exigencies of contemporary life affect tradition (to a lesser or higher degree) and an infrastructure that is appropriate and functional is essential for a pilgrimage to unfold.

Roman Catholic pilgrimage follows the Western model, its infrastructure in Transylvania being an infrastructure that is both spiritual (an attribute of the clergy) and material: the road, accommodation and sanctuary infrastructure. The latter category involves compiling geo-referential databases featuring the administrative structure, highlighting the buildings, marking the roads for tourism, drafting the design themes for the buildings of the pilgrimage centres, and the valorization of these buildings.¹⁹

Greek-Orthodox pilgrimage is marked by the phrase whereby “the Church is the flock of believers, not a mere building,” by specific features pertaining to liturgics and to rituals (migration from the church, the position during religious service and so on), territorial organization, etc. Thus, even though there is also a certain formal architectural conservatism, it can be stated that the largest number of “technical and managerial innovations” are currently underway in its bosom, in sharp contrast with the innovations of the eras when Byzantium was “Europe’s Schengen of the Dark Middle Ages.”²⁰

Greek-Catholic pilgrimage bears the brunt of the postwar tragedy it incurred, of post-December frustration and resentment (including that related to the patrimony) and the dilemma—heartbreaking and unfortunately rather poorly solved after 1990—of whether there will be, in the future, a Catholic Church of Oriental rite in this part of Europe (as desired ever since the establishment of this Church, as well as by the papal congregation upon its restoration) or it will gradually melt into Roman Catholicism.²¹

As the Transylvanian charm stems precisely from multiconfessionalism, multiculturalism and coexistence, we believe that we are witnessing an ongoing process, whose pathways and routes are, indeed, initiated.



(Translated by CARMEN-VERONICA BORBÉLY)

Notes

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Abstract

Pilgrimage and Its Infrastructure in Post-communist Transylvania

The atheistic nature of communism has been dwelt on excessively, to the point where it has become a trite commonplace. In reality, especially after the communist takeover of power, there was a certain competition in matters of faith, which could provide a much more convincing explanation of the entailing religious persecutions. In the countries of Eastern Europe, the post-1989 period has witnessed a return to pre-communist traditions and a re-synchronization with the West, including through a religious revival. Transylvania, by virtue of its history and traditions, also has a decidedly multicultural and multiconfessional character. In this area, there is an entire history of pilgrimages undertaken to this day, nuanced for each denomination (Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, etc.), yet also marked by mutual influences, a certain degree of emulation and even consequences such as changes in ownership over various places of worship. The post-communist period has brought about a typically postmodern dimension of pilgrimages: cultural tourism and the ineffable touch of ecumenical syncretism.

Keywords

post-communism, religious revival, synchronism and integration, pilgrimage and its infrastructure, sacred geographies