

Catholic Parishes in 17th–18th Century Moldavia (Diocese of Bacău): Economic Aspects

RAFAEL-DORIAN
CHELARU

We may assume that, unlike in the 17th century, when the revenues of most parishes were controlled by laymen, in the 18th century the initiative belonged to the parish priests (i.e., the Propaganda Fide missionaries).

Rafael-Dorian Chelaru

Assistant professor of medieval and early modern world history and Latin paleography, A. I. Cuza Police Academy at Bucharest, Faculty of Archival Sciences. His most recent work: **Colecția Microfilme Vatican: Ghid arhivistic** (The Vatican Microfilms Collection: An archival guide) (2007).

THE PRESENT essay intends to briefly describe and analyze some of the main aspects concerning the evolution of the economic structures of the Catholic parishes in 17th and 18th century Moldavia. The main documentary basis consists of narrative sources, mainly the correspondence (i.e. letters, reports) of Italian missionaries sent to the Sacred Congregation *De Propaganda Fide* in Rome between 1623 and 1789.

The Catholic Parish Churches in Moldavia: An Overview

THE TOTAL number of Catholic parishes in 17th and 18th century Moldavia fluctuated depending on the presence of priests or mis-

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sionaries and the existence of a church. In 1641, the bishop of Sofia, Petar Bogdan Bakšić, who made at that time an apostolic visitation in Moldavia, counted 12 parishes, but only four were served by parish priests.¹ In his report issued in 1643, the mission vice-prefect Bartholomew Bassetti stated that in Moldavia there were 27 communities and 24 churches (including those already ruined and deserted) served by six priests and four missionaries.² In 1648, the apostolic administrator of the Moldavian diocese, Marc Bandini, counted nine parishes from a total of 33 communities.³ In 1671, Vito Piluzzi, who was active as a missionary and mission prefect from 1653 to 1675, counted 26 parishes but only 8 priests and missionaries.⁴ In the 18th century, the vice-prefect Giovanni Ausilia mentioned 8 parishes in 1745.⁵ In 1762, the report of mission prefect Giovanni Hrisostomo dei Giovanni counted 11 parishes, while in 1789 the prefect Fedele Rocchi spoke about 10 parishes.⁶

The differences can be explained by the fact that in Moldavia the parish, as an administrative and territorial unit, did not exist until the end of 19th century, unlike in the case of Central and Western Europe. For the *Propaganda Fide* missionaries, a parish could be defined as a community having a church (in most cases built in wood and clay), a house able to shelter a priest and 1–2 servants and a source of revenue. The absence of one of these elements made it so that the community in question was stricken from the list of parishes. For example, in 1646 Archbishop Bandini refused to consecrate a parish priest in Roman, because the newly erected church had no revenues.⁷ Almost every parish church had also up to five ‘filial’ communities. The Catholics from these communities attended the parish church, where they had separated seats, shared according to certain agreements. There are various cases when filial communities succeeded in building their own church and parochial house, thus becoming parishes.

In the second half of the 17th century and the first half of the 18th, the numerous wars between the Ottoman Empire, Poland, the Habsburgs and Russians which took place in Moldavia caused the disappearance of some parishes (through the destruction of the church and the parochial house). On the other hand, the demographic ‘boom’ in the second half of the 18th century, caused by massive immigration from Transylvania, led to the foundation of new settlements, some of them quickly becoming parishes. After 1750, one may speak about a dynamic change in the landscape of the Catholic parish churches in Moldavia.⁸

Concerning the Catholic population, in the 17th century, the total number of Catholic believers in Moldavia decreased from around 5,000 in 1648 to merely 300 at the end of the century, due to the Polish-Ottoman wars. After 1700, the demographic curve slowly re-entered an ascendant direction. In 1745, vice-prefect Ausilia counted 787 families, approx. 3,900 Catholics. In 1762, this number increased to 6,000; in 1777 there were 10,000; finally, in the year 1789 around 16,000 Catholics were recorded.⁹ To the natural growth we may

include also the influence of the already mentioned immigration phenomenon. The average population of a parish was about 100–150 persons in the 17th century, increasing to around 1,000 persons at the end of the 18th century. Most of them were Hungarians with a few German communities.

To sum up, in order to become a parish, every community had to provide a source of revenue necessary to sustain the proper function and upkeep of the church and priest. The main argument of our presentation is to discuss the problem of parish revenues starting from the following aspects: a) the church properties and their juridical status; b) the sources of parish and parish priests revenue; c) the raw values of the income obtained by parish priests.

By church properties we understand real estate such as houses, fields, forests, shops etc. According to the questionnaire issued by the *Propaganda Fide* in 1660 for the usage of all missions,¹⁰ the so called *ecclesiarum bona* (questions no. 35–39 from the total of 90) were defined as *aedes, praedia, res vera, proventus* and *emolumentum*, that is, houses, real estates, parish revenue and priest income.

Firstly, our brief analysis will address 9 parishes for which we have sufficient data: Iași, Cotnari, Baia, Galați, Huși, Suceava, Trotuș, Neamț and Roman. Furthermore, we will construct a much broader picture encompassing the general features of the Catholic parishes in Moldavia from an economic perspective.

Church Properties

ALL THE above mentioned parishes represent urban communities and, therefore, they show a series of differences from the rural communities. The most important is that the land properties of the church were not subject to any seigniorial bondage like in the case of villages which, in Moldavia, were mainly the property of the prince, of boyars, or of the Orthodox Church.¹¹ According to all available sources, these land properties were represented only by vineyards, whose surface was rarely mentioned. A notable exception is Cotnari, for which Archbishop Bandini estimated a total surface of approx. 14 ha of vineyards, which makes it by far the wealthiest parish in 17th century Moldavia.¹² The parish of Iași is mentioned after 1750 with a total of approx. 9 ha of vineyards—at that time Cotnari was already in a long decline, most of its vineyards either being destroyed during the wars or deserted as the town population dramatically decreased. In all the other cases, only the number of vineyards is mentioned (from one in the case of Trotuș and Neamț to nearly 10 in the case of Suceava). In Iași, Cotnari, Baia and Suceava, the sources also mention the existence of wineries and cellars. Four parishes, i.e. Baia, Suceava, Roman

and Neamț, are mentioned as having their vineyards in the vicinity of Cotnari, this area being favorable to vine cultivation.

Besides vineyards, only one parish, Trotuș, was reported to also have cultivable/arable fields. Three parishes (Iași, Galați and Huși) also possessed a variable number of small shops and taverns which were rented out: Iași was reported to have the greatest number. Notably, the abovementioned parishes do not have large surfaces of vineyards—on the contrary, Cotnari did not have any shops to rent.

Concerning the juridical status of these properties, all sources agree that the *immunitas ecclesiastica* did not operate in Moldavia. Most of the Catholic clergymen complained about having no right to manage the parish assets, which were strictly controlled by laymen. The only exception was Galați, where the small property of the church (6 shops and a couple of vineyards as recorded in 1671)¹³ was entirely acquired by the missionaries. According to Archbishop Bakšić, the main reason for this exceptional violation of church rights was that the laymen distrusted the Catholic clergy (including the bishops themselves) accusing them of neglecting and even stealing the valuable assets of the parishes.¹⁴ Bakšić himself mentioned in his visitation report from 1641 that he failed to convince Prince Vasile Lupu to restore the *immunitas ecclesiastica* due to the same reason.

The situation seems to change in the next century: all related sources agree that the parish priests had control over the parish properties and revenues. This cannot be explained only through a possible restoration of mutual trust. At a closer look, one may notice that except for the parish of Iași (the residence of the mission prefect after 1696) no other parishes seemed to expand their assets. On the contrary, in several cases the surface of vineyards and cultivable fields shrank or even disappeared. Moreover, all of them were reported to be totally deserted. Actually, in our opinion, many parish priests tended to rely much more on other sources of income, such as trading operations, contributions from parishioners or regular taxation for religious services than on the capitalization of parish properties.

Sources of Income and their Value

VINEYARDS, SHOPS and taverns represented valuable sources of income for parish churches in 17th and 18th century Moldavia. The vineyards produced the necessary wine for liturgical needs, but they could also be easily capitalized by trading the surplus. Some sources provide data on the amount of the revenue earned from vineyards capitalization: in the case of Iași, the missionary Franciscantonio Manzi noted in 1743 a yearly profit of 40 Roman

scudi¹⁵ obtained by selling 7,5 casks of wine representing the crop from 3 ha of vineyards.¹⁶ Vice-prefect Ausilia mentioned in 1745 that the same vineyards produced 3–4 casks.¹⁷ Almost a century earlier, Bandini noted that the 14 ha of vineyards from Cotnari produced a yearly income of 1,500 Roman scudi, an enormous sum of money.¹⁸ Unfortunately, this money was not controlled by the parish priest: Bandini affirmed that he received only 1–2 vessels of wine as a donation from the parishioners. In 1689, Francesco Renzi noted that all 70 vineyards from Cotnari produced 400 casks of wine, a cask being evaluated in 1668 at 16 German thalers,¹⁹ thus giving a total of 6,400 thalers. For comparison, 3 vineyards from Baia produced in 1668 six casks of wine, amounting to 96 thalers.²⁰ A year earlier, a single vineyard in the parish of Neamț produced 80 small casks of grape juice. It is easily noticeable that the level of wine production varied in time and in relation to the cultivated area, but we may assume that the potential income of vineyards was considerably high.

The shops and taverns rented by urban parish churches such as Iași, Galați and Huși also represented a valuable source of income. In 1648, Bandini wrote that if the church in Iași succeeded in building 10 shops to be rented for 5–6 thalers per month, this potential revenue would solve the problem of income shortage for the parish priest.²¹ In the case of Galați, the prefect Piluzzi estimated the monthly rental at around 250–300 aspers, that is, 2,5–3 thalers.²² In 1743, the parish church in Iași used to rent out a shop for 6 Roman scudi per year, generating a total income of 48 scudi for 8 shops.²³ A close estimate is provided by mission vice-prefect Ausilia two years later, that is, 50 scudi. However, Ausilia mentioned that the shops were seldom rented out and the tenants usually did not pay in due time. In 1762, the parish of Huși rented out its two shops for 4 Roman scudi per year.

The Income of Parish Priests

IN ANNEX no. 1, I included the available data concerning the income obtained by parish priests (either friars or priests) as a part of the parish revenue obtained from the capitalization of their properties. It can be easily noticed that Cotnari, Suceava and Baia provided the highest revenues. As I mentioned earlier, the parishioners from Cotnari also administered the parish revenues of Suceava and Baia. In the second half of the 17th century, the close relations between the Gross (Suceava) and Bărcuță (Cotnari) families, who also gave the parish priests, i.e. George Gross and Ioan Baptista Bărcuță, determined a ‘smooth’ distribution of revenues between Suceava and Cotnari. However, this was not the case of Baia, where missionary Piluzzi was active after 1653. The long con-

flict between Piluzzi and Bărcuță, caused by the latter's attempts to obtain from the Papal Curia his nomination as bishop of Bacău, left Piluzzi deprived of most parish revenues. On the other hand, many Italian missionaries, being perceived by the parishioners as 'outsiders,' were not allowed to benefit from the parish incomes and were forced to carry out lucrative activities such as trading, incompatible with their status of friars. I will quote here an interesting fact related in 1648 by Archbishop Bandini: in 1641 the Catholics from Troțuș concealed the real situation of the church revenue to the apostolic visitor Bakšić to avoid the appointment of a missionary from Italy or the Ottoman Empire as their priest. We may conclude that until 1700 the priests recruited from among the local families were more successful in benefiting from the parish revenues than the missionaries, who based their income on the annual stipends sent by *Propaganda Fide*, on lucrative activities and on the parishioners' irregular contributions.

The fact that for the 18th century the data concerning the parish incomes are very poor is somehow counterbalanced by the data concerning the amount of parishioners' contributions for their priests. Since the 17th century, several sources mention that some missionaries used to collect taxes from their parishioners for various services. In 1644, a Hungarian Jesuit, Pál Beke, noted that taxes were often required for Eucharist and Confession,²⁴ a practice strictly forbidden by the Church. At the general council of the Moldavian Catholic Church, held in May 1663, Bishop Stephen Rudzinski accused the missionaries and the Jesuits of allowing the parishioners to work during the feasts 'in exchange for a quarter of a scud.'²⁵ After 1700, most available missionary sources affirm that very few parishes had their own revenue (an exception is Iași) and the priests earned their living from the contributions given by the communities they served. As you may see in Annex no. 2, these contributions turned after 1750 into a veritable system of tariffs collected for various religious services such as baptisms, weddings, funerals or private Mass. In June 1800 the mission prefect Vincent Gatti drafted a list of tariffs and circulated it to all Moldavian parishes, underlining their compulsory status. In reply to the numerous protests of the parishioners, he threatened to recall the missionaries from the parishes that refused to pay. Eventually, his initiative was successful, all the more so as the prefect also obtained the support of the secular power. Some Romanian scholars argue that this development led to the consolidation of the parish priests' authority in their communities.²⁶

The revenues of the Catholic parish churches in Moldavia also developed following the initiatives of several missionaries. Some of them, especially the mission prefects, contributed to the increase of the lands held by their parishes by the acquisition of vineyards. In the 18th century, the assets of the parish of Iași

increased with a total of 4,6 ha of vineyards through the efforts of mission prefects and vice-prefects such as F. Zavoli, Silvestro d'Amelio, R. Cardi, F. Madrelli, G. Ausilia and F. Manzi, mostly through acquisitions. According to an inventory drawn up in 1743 by Manzi, the mission vice-prefect F. Madrelli had spent 66 thalers (that is, 34 Roman scudi) in one year to buy three vineyards. Also, the prefect Giacinto Lisa was reported to have spent 90 Roman scudi on various improvements made to the parochial house in Iași. The financial capacity of the mission prefects seemed quite important: according to the same source from 1743, all the loans made by the parish of Iași amounted to approx. 508 Roman scudi.

In other cases, missionaries managed to mobilize local communities and resources to re-build ruined wooden parish churches and parochial houses, destroyed during the frequent wars between the Russian, Austrian and Ottoman armies fought on Moldavian territory (4 wars lasting for a total of 14 years).²⁷ From 1722 to 1743, Francescantonio Manzi is credited to have been built and re-built no less than six parish churches together with their parochial houses in Moldavia, one of them becoming a new parish (Grozești). In 1746, the Congregation of *De Propaganda Fide* rewarded his efforts with the title of mission prefect. In his new position, Manzi even tried to erect a stone church in Iași, despite the clear-cut Ottoman interdictions. In 1745, three other missionaries were praised by vice-prefect Ausilia for their implication in the reconstruction of parish churches.

In conclusion, despite the scarcity of sources (especially for the first half of the 18th century), a general picture of the economic situation of the Catholic parishes in Moldavia can be drawn. We may assume that, unlike in the 17th century, when the revenues of most parishes were controlled by laymen, in the 18th century the initiative belonged to the parish priests (i.e., the *Propaganda Fide* missionaries). However, although after 1700 the *immunitates ecclesiasticae* were gradually restored and the assets of the church in Iași increased significantly, most parishes, like Cotnari or Bacău, lost the greater part of their real estate especially due to wars. The crystallization of a system of tariffs collected for various religious services can indicate a consolidation of the authority of parish priests, but it may also prove a certain increase in the wealth of some Catholic communities.

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Annex no. 1

ANNUAL REVENUES OF PARISH PRIESTS
ACCORDING TO THE AVAILABLE MISSIONARY SOURCES

1. 1663 (prefect VITO PILUZZI):
 - *Baia* (where Piluzzi himself was active): 15 Roman scudi and 4 casks of wine;
 - *Cotnari* (where the lay priest Ioan Bărcuță was active): 50 Roman scudi;
 - *Săbăoani* (where the lay priest Mihály Rabcsony was active): 18 Roman scudi.
2. 1668 (prefect VITO PILUZZI):
 - *Baia* (where Piluzzi himself was active): 15 Roman scudi (Piluzzi stated that he had not received anything);
 - *Trotuș* (where missionary Benedetto Ballati da Cortona was active): 7,5 Roman scudi;
 - *Galați* (where missionary Antonio Rossi was active): 18 Roman scudi (from rentals);
 - *Cotnari* (where the lay priest Ioan Bărcuță was active): 40 Roman scudi.
3. 1670 (GIOVANNI BATTISTA DEL MONTE SANTA MARIA):
 - *Cotnari* (where the lay priest Ioan Baptista Bărcuță was active): 2 casks of wine and 10 Roman scudi from religious services;
 - *Suceava* (where the lay priest Grigore Gross was active): 25 Roman scudi;
 - *Baia* (where prefect Vito Piluzzi was active): 40 Roman scudi;
 - *Galați* (where missionary Antonio Rossi was active): 36 Roman scudi.
4. 1671 (prefect VITO PILUZZI):
 - *Cotnari* (where the lay priest Ioan Baptista Bărcuță was active): 50 Roman scudi and 3 casks of wine;
 - *Suceava* (where the lay priest Grigore Gross was active): 25 Roman scudi.
5. 1743 (FRANCESCANTONIO MANZI): *Iași* (the residence of the mission prefect): 89.05 Roman scudi.²⁸

Annex no. 2

ANNUAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE CATHOLIC PARISHIONERS (FOR EACH PARISH)
ACCORDING TO THE AVAILABLE MISSIONARY SOURCES

1. 1663 (VITO PILUZZI): usually, the priests received a cask of wine.
- 1668 (VITO PILUZZI):
 - *Trotuș*: 1 measure (ca. 15 kg) of wheat and 1 measure of oats per family (the total population was of approx. 240 families);
 - *Roman*: a cask of wine;
 - *Săbăoani*: 1 measure (ca. 15 kg) of wheat and 1 measure of oats per family (the total population was of approx. 200 families);
 - *Amăgei*: a cask of wine.

2. 1682 (ANTONIO ANGELINI): *Huși*: 2 casks of wine, 1 measure of wheat and 0,2 Roman scudi per family (the total population was of approx. 124 families).
3. 1743 (FRANCESCANTONIO MANZI): usually, the priests received payment for celebrating weddings (approx. 0.06–0.1 scudi) and also various products on the occasion of great feasts (Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Whitsuntide and the Dormition of the Holy Virgin), to a total value of 11 Roman scudi.
4. 1745 (FRANCESCO MARIA AUSILIA): usually, the priests received payment for various religious services as follows: 0.03 Roman scudi—baptism, 0.10 Roman scudi—wedding, 0.04 Roman scudi—funeral, 0.10 Roman scudi—read liturgy, 0.15 Roman scudi—recited liturgy. Other contributions: usually 2 measures of cereals (wheat, maize or millet) per family on the occasion of great feasts.
5. 1747 (GIOVANNI BARTHOLOMEW FRONTALI): usually, the priests received payment for various religious services as follows (shared with the deacon in a proportion of 2/3 to 1/3): 0.03 Roman scudi—baptism, 0.10 Roman scudi—wedding, 0.30 Roman scudi—an adult funeral, 0.10 Roman scudi—a child funeral, 0.10 Roman scudi—read liturgy, 0.20 Roman scudi—recited liturgy. Other contributions: either 2 measures of maize, or one measure of wheat or 0.1 Roman scudi.
6. 1762 (GIOVANNI HRISOSTOMO DEI GIOVANNI): usually, the priests received payment for various religious services as follows: 0.04–0.05 Roman scudi—baptism, 0.15 Roman scudi—wedding, 0.15 Roman scudi—funeral, 0.15 Roman scudi—read liturgy, 0.20 Roman scudi—recited liturgy. Other contributions: 1 measure of wheat or 0.15 Roman scudi per family.

Notes

1. The active parishes were Iași, Cotnari, Baia and Bacău. Săbăoani, Bacău and Troțuș had 4–5 filial churches each. The complete list of parishes as given by Bakšić is the following: Galați, Bârlad, Huși, Iași, Cotnari, Suceava, Baia, Neamț, Săbăoani, Roman, Bacău (the bishopric seat of the Moldavian Catholic Church) and Troțuș. Bakšić's visitation was published in the original language by Gheorghe Vinulescu, "Pietro Diodato e la sua relazione sulla Moldavia (1641)," *Diplomatarium Italicum* 4 (1939): 75–135.
- 2.. See Bassetti's report published in Romanian translation in *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. 5, eds. Maria Holban, Maria Matilda Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru, and Paul Cernovodeanu (Bucharest, 1973), 178.
3. Bandini mentioned the parish churches of Huși, Galați, Troțuș, Bacău, Săbăoani, Neamț, Baia, Cotnari and Iași. A synthetic list (including the names of the Catholic families for each parish) is provided by Bandini in his detailed *Codex* recently published in original by Traian Diaconescu, *Marco Bandini—Codex: Vizitarea generală a tuturor bisericilor catolice de rit roman din Provincia Moldova, 1646–1648* (Iași, 2006), 288–355.
4. *Călători străini*, 7: 95.

5. The parishes mentioned by Ausilia were Iași, Răchiteni, Huși, Fărăoani, Grozești, Călugăra, Săbăoani and Galați—see Piluzzi’s report sent to Rome on 26 August 1671 in *Călători străini*, 9: 316.
6. Fedele Rocchi’s letter sent to the *Propaganda Fide* on 4 April 1789 was published in original by Emil Dumea, *Catholicismul în Moldova în secolul al XVIII-lea* (Iași, 2003), 253–255.
7. *Codex*, 360.
8. See Dumea, 184–189.
9. *Ibid.*, 176–196.
10. See the full text of the questionnaire in *Moldvai csángó-magyar okmánytár/Documenta Hungarorum in Moldavia (1467–1706)*, vol. 2, eds. Kálmán Benda, Gabriella Jászay, Győző Kenéz, and István György Tóth (Budapest, 1989), 566–570; reprinted in I. Gy. Tóth, *Politique et religion dans la Hongrie du XVII^e siècle: Lettres des missionnaires de la Propaganda Fide* (Paris, 2004), 60–65.
11. See for example the case of the Catholic village of Trebeș (near Bacău), which was the property of the Orthodox monastery of Secul.
12. *Codex*, 240.
13. Piluzzi’s report sent to Rome on 26 August 1671 in *Călători străini*, 9: 316.
14. Bakšić refers to the case of Polish bishops of Bacău, accused by the Catholics from Bacău and Cotnari of stealing the bishopric revenues—see Vinulescu, 113.
15. 40 Roman scudi represented an amount equal to approx. two yearly missionary stipends paid by the *Propaganda Fide* (which was around 25 Roman scudi).
16. *Călători străini*, 9: 299.
17. *Ibid.*, 316.
18. *Codex*, 240.
19. Renzi’s report was published in the original by Viorica Lascu, “Documente inedite privitoare la situația Țărilor Române la sfârșitul secolului al XVII-lea,” *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie din Cluj* 12 (1969): 263.
20. *Călători străini*, 7: 81—Piluzzi’s report sent to the Papal nuncio in Poland on 14 December 1668 from Baia.
21. *Codex*, 276.
22. See Piluzzi’s report from 1668: *Călători străini*, 7: 81. The monetary equivalences are taken from Şevket Pamuk, *A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge, 2000), 371.
23. See Manzi’s report from 1743 in *Călători străini*, 9: 299.
24. *Ibid.*, 5: 277.
25. *Moldvai csángó-magyar okmánytár*, 2: 561.
26. Liviu Pilat, *Comunități tăcute: Satele din parohia Săbăoani (secolele XVII–XVIII)* (Bacău, 2002), 177.
27. The periods of warfare were the following: 1710–1711, 1736–1739, 1768–1774 and 1787–1791.

Abstract

Catholic Parishes in 17th–18th Century Moldavia (Diocese of Bacău): Economic Aspects

The present article introduces the reader to the complex problem of the Catholic Church revenues in 17th and 18th century Moldavia, intending to be the basis for a future and more comprehensive study. The author's argumentation is mainly intended to provide a brief description and analysis of the evolution of parish ecclesiastic assets and revenues based on the available published missionary sources (letters and reports sent to the *Propaganda Fide* Congregation in Rome). The approach is based upon three important aspects: 1) the church properties and their juridical status; 2) the sources of parish and parish priests income and 3) the raw values of the income obtained by parish priests. The author also emphasizes and explains the fact that after 1700 the missionaries succeeded in obtaining total control over parish revenues.

Keywords

Moldavia, diocese of Bacău, Catholic parishes, *Propaganda Fide* missionaries, Church properties, revenues