The Virtual Genealogical Archive (ArhGenVirt)
A Pilot Digitization Project of the Parish and Civil Status Registers in the Bucharest and Braşov County Archives (Romania)
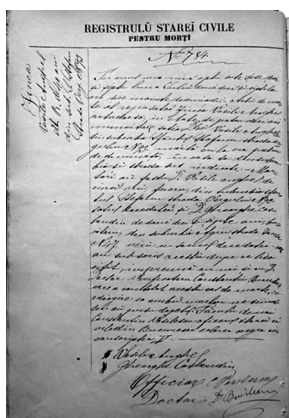
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Fig. 1. A death certificate recorded in 1867 from a civil register (Bucharest collection)

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Getting Started

IN 2013, the Executive Unit for the Financing of Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation in Romania, UEFISCDI (currently under the authority of the Romanian National Authority for Research within the Ministry of Research and Innovation) launched a national competition for collaborative research

projects (PCCA), financed from public funds[1] and opened to all consortia joining together public institutions (with research capabilities, such as universities or research institutes[2]) and private companies. The applicants had to propose research projects resulting in products with practical applicability and market potential, for both the public and for private sector.

In June 2014, a consortium led by the Faculty of Archival Sciences at Alexandru Ioan Cuza Police Academy and including the National Archives of Romania[3] and SIVECO Romania SA (a software company) was awarded a financial support of 1,250,000 lei (c. 275,000 Euros) for the development of an online database called *The Virtual Genealogical Archive: A Pilot Project Destined for the National Archives of Romania and Third-Party Users*.[4] The goal of the project is to create a database and a website through which two archival collections of parish and civil status registers become available on-line to the public in digital format. The two collections, namely the Bucharest Civil Status Collection and the Braşov Civil Status Collection, are currently preserved and administered by the National Archives of Romania in the repositories of Bucharest and Braşov. Following an official agreement concluded with Alexandru Ioan Cuza Police Academy, after the closure of the project activities the National Archives, the legal owners of the copyright, will receive a copy of the digital images taken from the documents. The project started in July 2014[5] and ended on 30 September 2017.

Civil Registers in Transylvania and Wallachia up to 1918: A Brief History

As the two collections contain parish and civil status registers referring to communities and individuals that lived in two different historical areas of nowadays Romania, namely Transylvania and Wallachia, a brief introduction to the history of civil status recordings is needed in order to understand the context in which such documents were created.

In Transylvania, their beginnings can be traced to the period following the Council of Trent (1542–1563), when the Catholic Church imposed to all parish priests the obligation to create and administer parish registers.[6] The practice had already been adopted by some Protestant churches in the first half of the 16th century, its usefulness for continuously checking the religious conformity of the parishioners becoming evident. In the case of the Catholic Church, at first the parish registers recorded only baptisms and marriages; in 1614, the reform supported by Pope Paul V established five types of registers (or protocols): for baptisms (the date of birth being also recorded), marriages, burials, confirmations

and a special register containing data related to the number of parishioners. The baptism and marriage registers had special headings to record also the names of the godfathers and the witnesses. To create the registers, special blank forms for recording the data were produced and, at the end of each year, the parish priests bound them. Later on, the "register for good agreements" (in Romanian: *registrul de bună învoială*) was introduced—it was used to record the pre-marital agreements concluded by the future grooms. All these registers were administered only by parishes, no civil authority being involved. Moreover, there is no evidence that parish registers were used as tools for state government until the end of 18th century—therefore, their primary purpose was as confessional instruments used by the churches to control their parishioners.

The few parish registers preserved until nowadays for the 17th and 18th centuries suggest that not all parish priests fulfilled this rather tedious obligation; on the other hand, to enforce it through sanctions was not quite of primary concern for the ecclesiastical authorities. Therefore, keeping the parish registers up to date was far from a regular practice among the recognized confessions (*religiones receptae*) in Transylvania. For example, the oldest extant parish registers produced on the territory of nowadays Brașov County date back to 1607 (Lutheran parish of Hosman), 1651 (the Reformed church in Făgăraș), 1687 (the Greek Catholic parish of Daia), 1784 (the Greek Orthodox parish of Orlat).[7] The oldest extant register containing recordings of a Jewish community in Brașov was compiled in 1835 for the village of Valea Lungă.[8] The first printed parish registers in Transylvania were produced in 1784 in a Sibiu printing house; however manuscript registers continued to be used until the 1850s.

The languages used in these documents were Latin (for Catholics),[9] Hungarian (for Calvinists and Unitarians), German (for Lutherans), Romanian[10] (for Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic communities) Armenian[11] (for Armenian communities). The Jewish religious authorities used either Hungarian or German and, more rarely, Hebrew.[12]

The state became aware of the importance of the civil status records only in the second half of the 18th century, when the Habsburg monarchs (Maria Theresa, Joseph II) enforced the legislation regarding military conscriptions and established border regiments. It became obvious that these measures could be efficiently carried out only provided that the state administration could control the dynamic of the local population. To accomplish this, a good recordkeeping of parish registers was needed. Thus, the regulations regarding military conscriptions issued in 1773 and 1784 by the Imperial Chancellery in Vienna also provided detailed instructions on how the priests of all Christian denominations should record births, marriages and deaths, using special forms provided by the state officials. The clergy was also obliged to periodically report to the secular authorities

on the demographic situation of each parish by compiling data on the increase or decrease of their communities. Additionally, other regulations issued in 1770 and 1774 decreed that the safe preservation of the registers[13] was a legal obligation for all parish priests, who risked severe sanctions in case they disobeyed.

Thus, in the second half of the 18th century the Habsburg authorities in Transylvania put into practice an incipient control over the process of recording and preserving the civil status data, on the one hand by turning it into a legal obligation incumbent upon all ecclesiastic structures, and on the other hand by issuing special rules and procedures. Consequently, the state ruled that every extract and certificate regarding civil status data issued by the parish priests[14] had juridical value in law courts, and every change in the civil status of a person, certified by the law courts, had to be also recorded in the parish registers. Moreover, to periodically compile conscription lists and demographic statistics for administrative purposes also became the responsibility of the clergy, who, eventually, was given a juridical status very similar to that of the state officials. Obviously, the main reason for which the state preferred to use the clergy to administer the civil status data was the lack of sufficient administrative personnel able to perform this task. However, one must also take into consideration the fact that, at least until the mid–19th century, the Habsburg monarchy was far from a genuinely secular state, church affairs being organically intermingled with those of the state.

An even stricter legal control over the parish registers was enacted in 1827, when Law no. 23 required that every register had to be compiled in two copies, one of which had to be filed at the archive of the local authority at the beginning of the next year.[15] Also, any change in the civil status data had to be recorded in both copies after its validation in the court. In 1850, new headings were added in the civil data recording forms: two headings for baptisms (used for recording the alive/dead newborn and for legitimate/illegitimate births), one heading for marriages (used for recording the status of the grooms as unmarried/widow) and one heading for deaths (used for recording the cause of death).

In the context of the military defeats suffered by the Habsburg monarchy in front of the Prussian armies, a law passed in 1868 and applicable also in Transylvania obliged the mayors to share with the local priests the legal responsibility for the correctness of the conscription lists and to check the identity of those who presented themselves at the recruiting commissions. The same law stipulated that the parish priests could opt for the language used in filling the registers and imposed new rules on the baptism of children born in mixed Christian families, rules which stirred strong discontent among the clergy.[16]

However, imposing administrative constraints on the clergy did not particularly encourage the smooth cooperation between the two authorities. Tensions arose especially when the constraints were enforced with sanctions. The eccle-

siastical authorities often denounced the illegitimate and abusive intrusions of the state in religious matters (especially in the case of baptisms) while the state officials pointed to the negligence of the priests in filling and administering the parish registers and the subsequent certificates. On the other hand, by the end of the century, the administrative apparatus of the local authorities had grown significantly and it was apparently ready to assume such responsibilities. Therefore, the law passed in 1894 (and applicable beginning with 1 October 1895) introduced the civil status registers, which replaced the parish registers as documents of legal value. The authorities created within the existing counties (e.g. Braşov and Făgăraş, now parts of Braşov County) new administrative units (called *circles*[17]) for registering the civil status data, each unit being provided with a civil status office which had the task of filling out and keeping the registers in good order.[18] Each year, the deputy prefect of the county had the responsibility to check and seal every register, which were to be preserved in the communal archives.

The legal effects of the 1894 law lasted until 1918, when Transylvania became part of Romania.

In the case of Wallachia, there is no evidence of civil status registers before 1831, when the Organic Regulation (the first constitutional act of Wallachia) was adopted under the pressure of the Russian Empire, which, after the Treaty of Adrianople (1829), maintained the military occupation of Moldavia and Wallachia until 1834. Russia was particularly interested in a long-lasting domination over the two Romanian Principalities, which could ensure Russian control over the mouths of the Danube, Europe's main commercial hub at that time. To accomplish this, a modernization of the local administration and state institutions was needed and the introduction of civil status registers represented a crucial part of this process. Previous attempts at introducing this practice can be documented in 1791 and 1828, when the Russian authorities asked the Orthodox Church in both Moldavia and Wallachia to introduce such registers, but with no success.[19] A possible explanation lays in the fact that, unlike in the case of Transylvania, a multi-confessional region, where each church was especially interested in having a good control over its believers, in Moldavia and Wallachia the Greek Orthodox church had practically no competitors.[20] Moreover, the majority of the Orthodox priests were practically illiterate and this situation changed significantly only by the end of the 18th century, due to the efforts of some cultured metropolitans and princes who believed in the importance of education.[21]

After 1831, following the dispositions of the Organic Regulations, the Orthodox parish priests in Wallachia began to constitute and administer parish registers under the supervision of their superiors. Each year, the Metropolitan

See in Bucharest collected all the registers with the help of the archpriests and stored them in special rooms located in its palace near the Dâmbovița River.[22] The state administration did not interfere in this process until 1863, when the Office for Statistical Data of the United Principalities (created in 1859 within the Ministry of Interior) was given the task to centralize the parish registers, thus replacing the Metropolitan See. Each year, the Office for Statistical Data (OSD) distributed to all communes a set of sealed and certified registers, three for recording births, marriages and deaths and one for recording wedding agreements, each in two copies.[23] The city houses had to re-collect them until 15 January of the following year at the latest, so the parishes could no longer keep registers. The obligation to record the civil status data still remained with the priests for similar reasons as in Transylvania—the lack of sufficient administrative personnel able to handle this task.[24] Moreover, the priests were obliged to issue civil status certificates in standard format, such as birth certificates, which were countersigned by the local civil authority and the OSD officer. Marriages could not be consecrated without the special attestation of the church (*peciuri* in Romanian), which proved that there were no legal impediments to prevent their conclusion.[25] Finally, every quarter each priest had to compile and deliver to the OSD a statistical report for his parish.

In addition, the Law of the communes (1864) established that the mayors bore full legal responsibility regarding the administration of the civil status registers; the law was accompanied by several instructions which detailed the procedures to be followed by the priests when filling out the registers and certificates. However, as the significant number of complaints preserved in archives suggests, not all the priests did fulfill these tasks with due rigor—there were reported many cases when the civil status data where either not recorded correctly or many entries were corrected without proper legal caution. Finally, the Civil Code of the Romanian Principalities, promulgated in December 1864 and coming into effect after one year, transferred the full responsibility of filling out and administering the civil status registers to the civil authorities.

The provisions of the Civil Code were enforced and detailed in the instructions issued in 1866, which introduced new procedures regarding the civil status registers. Four types of registers were introduced: births, marriages, deaths, and marriage agreements.[26] The civil status acts were compiled on separate sheets, which were then bound up at the end of each year, in the form of a register, each in 2 copies: one for the communal archive, the other for the county law court. Moreover, while handwriting a civil status act the officer had to leave a blank margin on each page for quick references, where the name(s) of the person(s) had to be written. This margin was also used for further legal annotations such as remarks on marriages, deaths (recorded on the birth certificates), divorces or

the Romanian citizenship (recorded on the marriage certificates). These annotations were made by the civil status officers, who also notified the law courts to record them in their copy.

In 1911, a new instruction on the civil status registers was issued (in force starting from January 1912)—it introduced a new type of register for births with pre-printed forms to be filled out by the officers. However, this type of register was used only to record legitimate births; the foundlings continued to be recorded in the regular registers as before 1911.

Characteristics and Significance of the Collections

THE BUCHAREST Civil Status collection includes 334 parish registers dating from the period 1832–1865, and 2095 civil status registers covering the period 1866–1912. Basically, there are 4 types of registers: those recording births, marriages, deaths, and marriage agreements. From 1866 until 1884, the civil records for Bucharest follow the administrative organization of the city into 5 color-coded sectors (red, blue, yellow, black and green). Therefore, in the Bucharest archives for each year of this interval there are at least five registers for every type of event, and for each sector the civil status records are numbered from no. 1 to the infinite. After 1881, the civil status data are recorded only under each year.[27]

The civil registers in the Bucharest collection, created especially since 1866, are rich in information not only on the vital data of the individuals, but also on their social and contextual milieu. If parish priests usually recorded data in a tabular form (see Figure 2), introducing only the basic data (i.e. name, surname, place of the event, name of the parents/godparents, witnesses etc.), the civil officers also recorded additional data such as social status, profession, age, religion, address etc. of the parents of the newborn child or of the newlywed grooms, not to mention the witnesses to the event. The narrative style of most civil records from before 1912, even if it uses a typically administrative language, adds more local flavor, turning the civil status certificates into veritable micro-stories (see Figure 1).

The Braşov county civil status collection holds 669 parish registers dating from 1639–1895, and 1570 civil registers from 1895–1968, all organized by communes.[28] In the case of the parish registers (*libri parochiales, felekezeti anyakönyvek, Kirchenbücher*),[29] 6 types were in use, as follows:

1. matricula (recording births, marriages, deaths [30]);
2. marriage agreement registers;
3. confirmation registers[31];

4. registers containing data referring to the number and status of the parishioners[32];

5. family registers;

6. ordination registers.

Archived in the Braşov civil status collection one can also find the minutes of the parish meetings concerning the status of the parish population, the financial contributions of the parishioners to their churches, ecclesiastic ordinances, lists with children enrolled in the parish or local school,[33] names of their teachers, data concerning vaccinations,[34] etc. Parish registers

Fig. 2. Page from a parish register of the Orthodox church in Braşov (1819)

are sometimes filled with marginal annotations on various topics such as local weather, political and social events, epidemics and other news.[35]

The importance of the civil status collections for researches in various disciplines is beyond doubt. Demography, genealogy, sociology, toponymy, onomatology, epidemiology, local history or family history etc. are among the most privileged.[36] As in the case of the archives in Western Europe and elsewhere, an increasing number of amateur historians and genealogists arrive in the reading rooms of the Romanian archives in search of the history of their ancestors, and the civil status collections represent their first choice. As historians have often said, the civil registers are in most cases the only documents which can shed light on the private life of an ordinary individual who lived in the past.[37]

There are several differences between parish registers and civil registers especially regarding the scope of vital data recording. The first difference lies in *the balance between individual, community and territory*. Parish registers usually cover very imperfectly a given territory—this is due to their scope focused mostly on the community of a parish (and parishes in Transylvania or Wallachia did not have precise territorial limits). Therefore, in some cases, civil status events were recorded with great delay or even escaped recording due to the great distances between the parochial office and certain areas of a parish, especially in the rural areas. On the contrary, the scope of the civil registers is mainly territorial: the registers include recordings referring to individuals living on a certain territory. Provided that all civil registers from a given region would have been preserved, one could reconstruct the main stages in the life of all individuals living in that particular region.

FIG. 3. Page from a finding aid
with data regarding marriages from 1910
(Bucharest collection)

However, almost no sense of community can be identified in these documents, simply because the individuals recorded in the civil registers usually came from different social and professional milieus and had different religious affiliations.

A second difference lies in the *religious vs. secular dichotomy*. The parish registers have a clear confessional scope, recording only those vital events that involved individuals sharing the same denomination (or religion) and which were consecrated by the church and marked by the customary religious rituals. Given the fact that during the 19th century, before the introduction of civil registers, the number of individuals who abandoned any religious affiliation becomes significant, their life events were hardly recorded in the parish registers. On the contrary, the civil registers recorded persons regardless of their religious affiliation.

A third difference is given by the *thoroughness of civil data recording*, more likely to be met by the civil registers than the parish registers. This is explained by the fact that, unlike in the case of civil status offices, whose main task was precisely civil data recording, the parish priests had many ecclesiastical duties, among which keeping parish registers was among the least important. Moreover, the parish priests were controlled not by state officials, but only by their ecclesiastical superiors, who proved to be more reluctant in chastising for errors or negligence in keeping parish registers than for other transgressions.

Lastly, in the two types of registers the information is organized differently—while the parish registers record births, marriages and deaths in a tabular format with a minimum amount of data, the civil registers contain the full transcription of the certificates issued for each type of event.

In the reading room of the Bucharest Municipal Archives, there are also available finding aids (in register format, handwritten), which offer a basic name indexing for births and marriages corresponding to each year from 1866 until 1912 (see Figure 3).[38] For the Braşov collection, there are no available indexing aids, with the exception of a basic inventory containing a short description for each register.

Project Summary

THE PROJECT team performed the complete digitization and basic indexation of the Braşov collection, the complete digitization of the finding aids, the complete digitization of the registers from the years 1866–1912 and the complete name indexation of births and marriages for the Bucharest collection, and finally the configuration of the database and the project website (http://www.arhgenvirt.ro). After 30 September 2017, more than 500,000 images in total will be available on-line for free consultation.

The digitization of the registers has been carried using compact cameras with 18 Mpx resolution mounted on photo stands. In the case of the Braşov collection, the registers were photographed as such, with two pages per frame, while in the case of the Bucharest collection the registers were photographed certificate by certificate.[39] In some cases, the digitization process was extremely difficult due to the poor state of conservation of several registers; in very few cases, the registers could not be photographed.

Unfortunately, due to the limited financial resources, the acquisition of large format book scanners was not possible. However, the quality of the captured images meets the standard requirements for public access, the photographic reproductions of all registers being easily readable. The primary .jpg files of c. 5 MB each resulted during digitization were post-processed in a format suitable for easy mapping by the database and accessible to users.

The indexation of the metadata was completed by manually introducing the relevant data from the available finding aids into Excel files. For the Bucharest collection, to complete the indexation by name required not only introducing the data, but also double checking them as most data were names (i.e. Romanian, German, Jewish etc. spelled in various orthographies[40]) and numbers, which required careful attention. In the case of the Braşov collection, in the absence of finding aids, a similar indexation was not possible within the project, as it required considerable human resources (i.e., several dozen employees able to read various languages and scripts and to collect all the metadata directly from registers in record time).[41] To accomplish this, a far more generous funding was needed.

The database was structured using the MYSQL 5.7 programming language, while the web application uses a Symfony framework 3.4 (with PHP 7.0) suitable for long term projects. The indexation of metadata was carried out using ElasticSearch 4, which significantly reduced the time for returning the results of queries. The files and all the software packages were installed on an Apache 2.2x server.

Among the functionalities and options to be provided for all users we can enumerate:

a. a search by name option and the visualization of the civil status record associated with each name (available for the Bucharest collection);

b. the page by page visualization of each register (available for the Braşov collection), with search options by current locality, parish and year(s);

c. personal working space available to each user, where "favorites" (records, links to images, personal comments etc.) can be listed and stored for further use;

d. an assistant application for creating one's own genealogical tree.

The Boolean search has been implemented in the web application, in order to narrow down the search results.

To use the database, each user has to create a personal account in order to register and to use the available working space, whose utility is of primary importance as the images cannot be downloaded or printed due to copyright infringement rules. As the National Archives are the legal owner of the copyright, only they can grant the permission to download or print images taken from the archival documents which are part of the National Archival Collection.

Difficulties and Challenges in Implementing a Digitization project in Romania

I N CARRYING out the activities necessary in order to achieve the expected results, the project team faced several difficulties, mainly related to limited financial resources and a precarious research and administrative infrastructure. The limitations of the project budget became clearer when the initial estimates regarding the workload had to be drastically adjusted and a proper balance between resources and expected outcomes had to be continuously and carefully ensured. For example, the acquisition of scanners was abandoned due to prohibitive costs, in favor of much cheaper compact cameras. The metadata indexing had to be limited only to those which can be collected from the available finding aids. Finding a common language with IT specialists was not an easy task and many discussions and exchanges of ideas were needed to harmonize the approaches.[42] Last but not least, poor administrative support (lack of sufficient personnel with competences in research projects working in support services) overburdened the management with additional tasks.

The main challenge for such projects is the long-term maintenance of the database, which has to be supported from resources to be identified in the future.

Conclusion

HOPEFULLY, THE digitizing of the civil status collections preserved in the Romanian archives will continue in the future years, as it represents the only solution to safeguard an important part of the national archival patrimony. The "Virtual Genealogical Archive" project is intended to open the path for similar endeavors and to show a possible way to reach the expected results.

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Notes

1. The budget allocated to the projects selected following the 2013 competition was part of the total budget of the National Plan for Research II launched in 2007 after Romania joined the EU.
2. Institutions from the public administration, such as the National Archives of Romania, were also accepted as members of such consortia.
3. The National Archives had to withdraw from the consortium due to the fact that it could not use the budget allocated through this program.
4. The consortium won the 1st place in the competition for the applications registered in the domain "Socio-economic and humanistic research."
5. The activities of the project could begin only after signing the financial contract with UEFISCDI in October 2014.
6. The first mentions concerning the necessity of registering baptisms, marriages and burials date back from the Second Lateran Council (1139): Paul Delsalle, *Histoires de familles, les registres paroissiaux et d'état civil, du Moyen Âge à nos jours, démographie et généalogie* (Besançon: Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2009), 17. One of the oldest parish registers preserved until today was compiled in Givry (France) in the 14th century, with records (baptisms, marriages, burials and lists of taxpayers) going as far back as 1303. Until the 16th century, parish priests recorded mainly data on donations and contributions paid by their parishioners for consecrating baptisms, marriages and deaths, the vital records constituting only additional information.
7. Liviu Moldovan, "Registrele confesionale de stare civilă din Transilvania," *Revista Arhivelor* (Bucharest) 1 (1958): 163.
8. The legal and procedural aspects of recording the civil status data for the Jewish communities in Transylvania were legislated for the first time in 1840. See Mircea Brie, *Registrele de stare civilă din Transilvania în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea: Semnificaţie documentară*; Dan Octavian Cepraga and Sorin Şipoş, eds., *Interpretazioni del documento storico: valore documentario e dimensioni letterarie* (Oradea: Ed. Universităţii din Oradea, 2010), 169.

9. In the years 1848–1857 Latin was temporarily replaced by Hungarian. Ibid., 170.
10. Until the middle of the 19th century, Romanian was written either in Cyrillic characters or in the Latin alphabet, with an orthography heavily influenced by Hungarian. From the second half of the 19th century, the Latin script remained the only option.
11. After 1829, Armenian parish registers were written in Latin. Brie, 170.
12. A special law on the recording of civil status data for the Jewish communities was issued only in 1840. Ibid., 172.
13. The registers had to be kept only in the parish residence and in case of fire they had to be rescued first (ibid., 174); see also Bogdan-Florin Popovici, "Consideraţii pe marginea prelucrării colecţiei de registre de stare civilă," *Buletin de informare şi documentare arhivistică* (Bucharest) 2005: 66.
14. Issuing such certificates was free of charge.
15. This second copy was to be used only when the first copy had been lost.
16. The law stipulated that boys should be baptized in the religion of their father, while girls should follow the religion of the mother. Many priests openly disobeyed as they considered this an abusive intrusion of the state in a matter considered strictly religious. However, the Hungarian authorities reinforced the rule with harsher sanctions in 1879 and 1890. Brie, 178.
17. Each circle included one or more communes. Popovici, 68.
18. In 1904 a new law established that in the case of villages the notaries had to also operate as civil status offices. Ibid.
19. Arcadie M. Bodale, "Colecţia de stare civilă—între realizări şi deziderate: Actele comunale de stare civilă de la djan Iaşi," *Revista Arhivelor. Archives Review* (Bucharest) 85, 1 (2008): 53.
20. The 17th and 18th century sources document the existence of small communities of Catholics, Reformed, Armenians and Jews in the few Moldavian and Wallachian towns (in Moldavia there were also several Catholic villages), which apparently did not reach a total of 10% of the population.
21. One of these princes was Constantine Mavrocordat, who ruled several times in both principalities between 1730 and 1769. In his second rulership in Moldavia (1741–1743), Constantin Mavrocordat ordered that all priests should pass a mandatory exam to prove that they could write and read the sacred texts, otherwise they had to attend special alphabetization courses; failure to do so led to the cancellation of the fiscal privileges usually granted to all priests. Daniel Barbu, *Bizanţ contra Bizanţ: Explorări în cultura politică românească* (Bucharest: Nemira, 2001), 125–127.
22. This task, however, was not carried out on a regular basis, and thus many parishes did not transfer their own registers to Bucharest: Gh. Ungureanu, "Actele de stare civilă sub regimul Codului civil. III," *Revista Arhivelor* 1 (1960): 32.
23. One copy was preserved in the archive of the city houses, while copy no. 2 was preserved in the archive of law courts. Ibid., 34.
24. The level of alphabetization was so low that many of the mayors of communes were illiterate, as the correspondence exchanged by officials of the Ministry of the Interior clearly testifies. Ibid.

25. Among the possible impediments one can count inbreeding or bigamy.
26. The rural communes used only two types: one for births, marriages and deaths, and one for marriage agreements. Ibid.
27. Data provided by Valentin Fuşcan and Marcel Varga, archivists at the Bucharest municipal archives.
28. Popovici, 66; see also the preface of the inventory of the Braşov Civil Status collection.
29. Moldovan, 162.
30. In Latin *Libri baptisatorum, copulatorum, mortuorum*.
31. In Latin *Libri aversorum et conversorum*.
32. In Latin *Libri status animarum, conscriptio, numerus animarum*.
33. Such lists are found in separate registers called *school registers*.
34. Such data can also be found in birth registers, under the heading "Observations."
35. Some examples in Liviu Boar, "Colecţia registrelor parohiale de Stare Civilă," *Îndrumător în Arhivele Statului: Judeţul Harghita* (Bucharest, 1988), 154–158.
36. Some considerations in Brie, 164–168; see also Bodale, 52–55.
37. Brie, 193.
38. In the case of death certificates, the available finding aids are incomplete and contain many errors, thus being practically useless.
39. Some civil records (usually marriage certificates) contain 2 or 3 pages, thus needing 2 photos per certificate.
40. Correctly transcribing many person names requires a deep familiarization with a multiethnic onomatology, as it was the case even for Bucharest; to these we may add also the minor difficulties in reading the handwriting of the archivists who compiled the finding aids (this, however, cannot match the difficulties in deciphering the original script).
41. The volume of metadata in the case of Braşov collection exceeds several times the metadata recorded for the Bucharest collection, mainly due to the fact that while registers in the Bucharest collection include certificates (sometimes of 2–3 pages each), most registers in the Braşov collection include civil status data recorded in tabular format, therefore one page can contain even ten or more entries. For comparison, Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj recently launched The Historical Population Database of Transylvania (http://hpdt.ro:4080/) containing data collected from various sources including parish and civil registers selected in several micro-zones. The total amount of data introduced in the database represents c. 6% of the total population of Transylvania between 1850 and 1914. See Bogdan Crăciun, Elena Crinela Holom, and Vlad Popovici, "Historical Population Database of Transylvania: Methodology Employed in the Selection of Settlements and Micro Zones of Interest," *Romanian Journal of Population Studies* 9, 2 (2015): 17–29.
42. This aspect points to the need of establishing in Romania the Digital Humanities, a domain with a respectable tradition in Western universities.

Abstract

The Virtual Genealogical Archive (ArhGenVirt): A Pilot Digitization Project of the Parish and Civil Status Registers in the Bucharest and Braşov County Archives (Romania)

The present article describes the pre-requisites, the development and the results of the research project "The Virtual Genealogical Archive: A Pilot Project Destined to the National Archives of Romania and Third-Party Users" (July 2014–September 2017) within the context of the digitization of archival patrimony in Romania. Alongside the historical overview of the parish and civil registers, the article focuses on the archival collection of civil status registers in the Bucharest and Braşov county archives, underlining their main features and significance for users.