

How Much Did Wives Matter?

The Role of Spouses and In-Laws in the Socio-Political Careers of Romanian Politicians in Transylvania (1861–1918)

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In such an eminently masculine world, the wives of these politicians remained in the shadows, stoically assuming the mission for which they had been educated: that of raising their children, supporting their husbands and ensuring that the family remained as united as possible.

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MUCH HAS been written in recent years about the great female personalities of the nineteenth century and their role in Romanian social, cultural and political life. Little, however, if anything, has been written about the many unknown women, those women whose faces and lives have most often remained confined to the mere names inscribed in parish registers or civil status records. They left no memoirs, notes or correspondences that might allow historians to get acquainted with their personal universe, or to understand what their expectations, joys and sorrows were.

However, some of them, few in number, escaped oblivion thanks to the men they stood beside—their

This study was supported by the project no. 20-19463X of the Czech Science Foundation, “Social Mobility of Elites in the Central European Regions (1861–1926) and Transition of Imperial Experience and Structures in Nation-States.”

fathers, siblings, husbands, or sons. Thanks to them, these women are today more than simple entries in parish registers or names etched on tombstones. In their various roles as mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, they remained in the shadows, and that explains why their historical memory tends to be tied to the collective destiny of their families, rather than to their individual or personal achievements. At the same time, through their social origins and marital options, they did contribute substantially to the socio-political advancement of the male members of their families.

Among them were, with few exceptions, the wives of the Romanian Greek Catholic deputies in Transylvania, from the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. Born in middle class families of intellectuals, with a finishing education they received mainly in the family or in monasteries, most of these women stayed away from the public sphere, which was by and large reserved to men. Their purpose was to watch over the wellbeing and balance of the family, to provide adequate education to the children, and to obey their husbands. Rarely, particularly around the turn of the century, some of them stepped into the public life. When they did, they were mostly involved in charitable actions, in educational and cultural initiatives. Their discreet public presence did in no way diminish their major role in supporting their own families and in building and strengthening the socio-political careers of their spouses. Research on these aspects may provide excellent insights for the study of social mobility among the Romanian political elite.

Methodology and Sources

THIS ANALYSIS centers on a sample of 34 women. They were the wives of Romanian Greek Catholic deputies who served in the Transylvanian Diets and, subsequently, in the Hungarian Parliament between 1861 and 1918. To identify them, we started from the number of married deputies and relied on socio-prosopographic data provided by historical sources. For each of the 34 wives we reconstructed a brief biographical profile. The information has been centralized and corroborated and forms the basis of this analysis.

Methodologically, the research was centered on those aspects that can provide essential data for reconstructing the role that women and their relatives held in the socio-political rise of their husbands, or in maintaining and enhancing their socio-economic status over the analyzed timeframe. No less relevant were the data on their marital behavior, such as age at marriage, the number of live-born children and their life expectancy, since these complementary factors

influenced their position and relationship in the couple. Who were the wives of the Romanian deputies? What socio-confessional backgrounds did they come from? At what age did they get married? What was their life expectancy? These are just some of the research questions we have tried to answer in this study. Starting from these assumptions, the main themes we have approached are: 1) identifying the social background of Romanian the deputies' wives between 1861 and 1918, starting from the socio-professional origin of their parents (especially their fathers); 2) reconstructing the family networks, based on several case studies, in order to determine to what extent the socio-economic status of the families from which the wives came and their connections in various socio-political milieus influenced the sons-in-law's social advancement; 3) ascertaining the role played by one's religious denomination in the configuration of marital options in the second half of the nineteenth century; 4) examining several behavioral-marital elements, such as the age at marriage, the number of children and the average life expectancy in the analyzed sample.

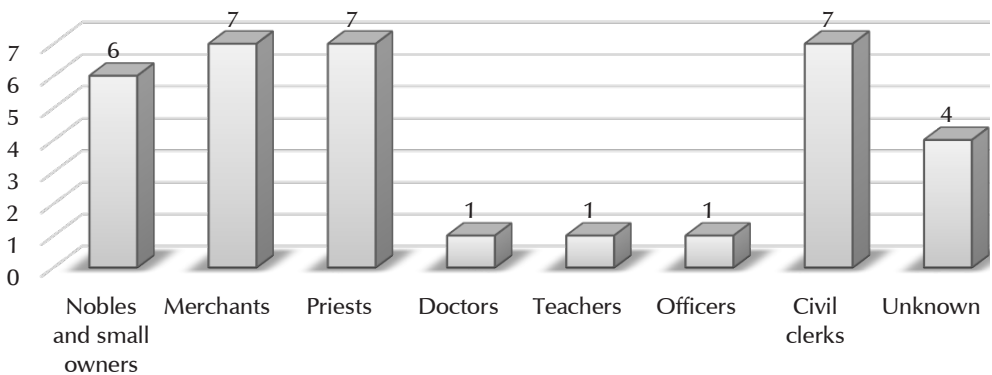
The sources used were parish civil status registers, where these allowed the reconstruction of the data, as well as obituaries, encyclopedias, newspapers, memoirs, biographies and gender studies dedicated to the women in the analyzed sample, their spouses and families.

I. Socio-Professional Origin

ON 30 October 1849, Elena Oltean, one of the daughters of the family of Ioan and Ana Oltean from Reghin (Sächsisch-Regen, Szászrégen, Maros-Torda County), married the lawyer Vasile Ladislau Pop. She came from a merchant family with five children, descended, on the maternal line, from that of the Enlightenment thinker Petru Maior. He was one of ten children of the Greek Catholic priest Ananie Pop from Berind (Berend, Kolozs County). A few years later, this time in Braşov (Kronstadt, Brassó), the young Emilia Orghidan married the lawyer Ioan Raţiu, from Turda (Thorenburg, Torda). Although the daughter of an Orthodox priest, her faith did not prevent her from marrying Ioan Raţiu,¹ descended from an old Greek Catholic noble family.² Like the two Romanians above, another 32 Transylvanian women chose to marry lawyers, teachers or military men, whose entry into politics brought them the status of deputies' wives in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Their social origin, little investigated to date, may be a relevant indicator for the socio-political advancement of their spouses or for the consolidation of their existing status at the time of their marriage.

A general look at their social origin shows that of the 34 women (wives of Romanian Greek Catholic deputies, whose biographical data have been used in order to reconstruct their profile), 7 (20%) came from families of civil servants (lawyers, county or state officials); 7 (20%) from families of priests; 6 (18%) from noble or small landholder families; 6 (18%) from merchant families; 1 (3%) from families of large landowners or bankers; 1 (3%) from military families; 1 (3%) from families of doctors; 1 (3%) from families of teachers/professors. The social origin could not be ascertained for four of them.

GRAPH 1. SOCIAL ORIGIN PROFILE OF THE SPOUSES



As shown in the graph above, most wives came from families of civil servants and priests, two social categories with different, albeit complementary trajectories in Romanian society. While priests were still the elite in the Romanian villages, with a long tradition in Transylvania, civil servants represented a highly dynamic professional category, socially, politically and culturally, and tended to impart a new orientation to the Romanian world.³ Merchants turned out to be no less actively involved in the social-cultural life of the time, and so were local petty nobles and landowners: 12 of the deputies' wives came from such a background. Their presence in the socio-political life of Transylvania became more and more visible, starting from the middle of the nineteenth century, when we find them involved in various economic, cultural, and political initiatives and projects. From the establishment of banks,⁴ cultural societies,⁵ newspapers, to the funding of school scholarships, their activities allowed them to get involved directly and indirectly in the cultural-political life of Transylvania.

The girls who came from these backgrounds had a well-structured education, focused on family values. They also had a substantial dowry, which made them very eligible young ladies. To give one example, Anastasia Matei, the wife of

jurist and politician Ioan Florian, came from a family of great merchants from Sibiu (Hermannstadt, Nagyszeben), with strong connections in the circles of the Orthodox Metropolitan See of Transylvania. She had been educated in such a way as to impose herself, from very early on, as a constant female presence, alongside her father, in the world of the Sibiu bourgeoisie, where she participated in numerous charitable activities. Her family had cultivated spiritual kinship relations (as godparents) with many people in the area and had created a dense network of friends and relatives by marriage, which meant that they had ample connections in the economic, political, and cultural milieus. Anastasia's marriage to Ioan Florian, a young judge at the Court of Sibiu, was regarded as a very good choice, given the intellectual potential of the young man and his career opportunities.⁶ His upward administrative-political trajectory, in the years following his marriage to Anastasia Matei, confirmed the expectations of his Sibiu-based family. Ioan Florian successively held the following positions: deputy judge at the Sibiu court, first notary of the Năsăud (Nussdorf, Nászód) District, head prosecutor, deputy in the Diet of Sibiu and, to crown all these achievements, president of the Court, first in Năsăud, and then in Odorheiu Secuiesc (Odorhellen, Székelyudvarhely).⁷ Anastasia Matei and her family always supported him in his career.

Another social group identified in this study consisted of the wives of professional men, such as doctors, teachers, and army officers. Their small number in this sample indicates their small proportion in Romanian society; hence, the low number of matrimonial alliances with girls coming from these families.

The noble status of some of these women's families was also very important when it came to asserting one's social position or having it recognized. For example, 6 of the 34 wives were of noble birth. Because of this, it was often the case that they chose a husband with a similar noble status. These were families of petty nobles, who had acquired this rank in the Middle Ages, usually for military merits, which had brought them, in time, a noticeably improved economic situation and implicitly facilitated their access to a distinct social status. For example, Wilhelmina Clococean came from such a noble family.⁸ She was the second wife of Deputy Paul Dunca of Sajó, whom she married in 1850. She came from a family of officers, from Veneția de Jos (Untervénitze, Alsóvenice), while he was the son of a priest from Valea Gurghiului,⁹ also descended from a noble family from Maramureș (Marmarosch, Máramaros). Paul Dunca was 51 and on his second marriage,¹⁰ while Wilhelmina was 40 years old and had never been married before. Beyond any affective ties, their noble status must have played a major role in their marriage.

II. Matrimonial Alliances and Family Networks: Factors Favoring Social Mobility

THE DATA below shows to what extent the social and noble status of the families from which these women came influenced, on the one hand, their matrimonial options and, on the other hand, the subsequent career of their sons-in-law. All of the 7 families of civil servants directed at least one of their daughters towards marriages with lawyers, jurists, state or county officials. Lawyers, jurists and civil servants were also the marriage partners chosen for one of the daughters of each of the 7 families of priests, 6 families of nobles and landowners, 7 families of merchants, one family of officers, one of doctors and one of teachers. In the case of 4 of the deputies' wives whose social origins could not be detected, the marital options illustrated their preference for the legal professions.

What can be noticed is that we are dealing with both vertical and horizontal social mobility, inside the same professional category. From the data analyzed in this sample, it appears that alliances with families of lawyers, jurists and civil servants constituted the most frequent choice among the 34 families of origin of the deputies' wives.

Regarding the preference of these Romanian socio-professional categories from the second half of the nineteenth century to marry their daughters to jurists, the explanation lies in the socio-political climate of Transylvania. More specifically, this was a period of great national effervescence, when legal studies were regarded as an opportunity to create a native intelligentsia, capable of defending and promoting the Romanians' political rights. In addition, law graduates could insinuate themselves more easily into the administrative-legal system of the state, from where they could effectively support and promote the interests of Romanians.

Given the quantitative and qualitative limits of the analyzed sample, we chose to focus on some case studies that are illustrative for the role that the wives' families of origin and, respectively, the kinship networks created around them played in the socio-political careers of their husbands/sons-in-law.

A preliminary analysis of the existing data indicates the existence of several marital patterns involving these deputies' wives, whose families of origin significantly influenced the career paths of their husbands.

A first matrimonial pattern was represented by the marriages concluded by the daughters of merchants and jurists. A good example would be that of Elena Oltean, the wife of Deputy Vasile Ladislau Pop. The two got married in 1848, when young Elena Oltean had just returned home from Iași, where her education had been entrusted to an aunt. Vasile L. Pop had recently graduated in law

at Târgu-Mureș (Neumarkt, Marosvásárhely).¹¹ They initially settled in Reghin, where they benefited from the support of the Oltean family and its relatives, which facilitated young Vasile L. Pop's access to the circles of the local intelligentsia. A family of merchants, the in-laws of Vasile L. Pop had a good reputation in the area, and Elena's maternal uncle, a shopkeeper, had openly supported the union of the two.¹² Their marriage coincided with the establishment of the neo-absolutist regime in Transylvania, which would also allow Romanian officials to join the administration of the province.¹³ In the autumn of the same year, 1849, Vasile L. Pop was appointed district commissioner, and shortly afterwards, adviser of the Bistrița (Bistritz, Besterce) District Court. It was the beginning of a meteoric administrative-political career, which, over the next two decades, would bring him to the highest positions and dignities ever held by a Transylvanian Romanian. From a judicial adviser in Bistrița (1852) to adviser at the Supreme Court in Sibiu (1854), he was later promoted to adviser at the Ministry of Justice in Vienna (1859). The peak of his career coincided with the years of the "liberal thaw" at the beginning of the 1860s, when he was appointed vice president of the Transylvanian Gubernium and president of the Supreme Court of Transylvania. In 1863, he was appointed "intimate State adviser to the emperor."¹⁴ He was then only 45 years old and had managed, thanks to his higher education and the support provided by his in-laws, to hold some of the most highly valued positions in the state.

Another case was that of Anastasia Matei, the daughter of a prominent Orthodox merchant from Sibiu, who married the jurist (and then deputy) Ioan Florian. By joining this family, Florian, who was a Greek Catholic, approached the Orthodox circle of Bishop Andrei Șaguna, together with whom he served in the Diets of Sibiu (1863) and Cluj (Klausenburg, Kolozsvár) (1865). This career path was greatly facilitated by the relations of his father-in-law, Grigore Matei, with the economic, cultural and political circles of Sibiu. Thanks to his brilliant reputation, Grigore Matei came to occupy the position of secretary of the Greek Commercial Company in Sibiu. He was among the founding members of the Astra Association and, later, he became the second depositor at the Albina Bank of Sibiu. He used his good name and the financial power he accumulated over several decades exclusively for the benefit of his family, unconditionally supporting the career designs of its members.¹⁵

Similar marital options can be found among other deputies' wives in the analyzed sample. We shall limit ourselves here to mentioning the cases of Eufrosina Blebea, the daughter of a merchant from Brașov, married to Ioan Axente Sever, who fought in the 1848 Revolution and then became a deputy,¹⁶ and of Viorica Vaida, the first wife of politician Teodor Mihali, who came from the Vaida family, a family of large landowners, related to Deputies Alexandru Bohățiel and

Alexandru Vaida Voevod.¹⁷ Alexandru Vaida Voevod's wife Elena Safrano came from a family of Greek merchants from Braşov.¹⁸ The families of these young women contributed substantially to the well-being of the new couples, endowing the newlyweds with estates and money, but especially by including them in entire networks of relationships and friendships in various socio-political and cultural environments. All these cases prove the importance of economic support in the social ascent of these families' sons-in-law and in the polarization of political groups in the studied period.

An interesting example, somewhat of an exception to the above pattern, was the case of Katalin Bojtner, the wife of Alexandru Pop, a deputy in the Parliament of Dual Hungary. Katalin was the daughter-in-law of the Harácsék family, owners of one of the largest trading companies in Transylvania, based in Baia Mare (Frauenbach, Nagybánya).¹⁹ Widowed at the age of 35, with four children, she decided, after many years of widowhood, to marry Deputy Alexandru Pop. She did so in 1906, when she was 47 and he was 66. Alexandru Pop married Katalin Bojtner late in life, when he was nearing the end of his political career. She was no longer in her prime either. And yet, we can ask ourselves, what was the motivation behind this matrimonial connection? In the absence of explicit testimonies in this regard, their marriage may have been the expression of socio-cultural affinities, which they tended to legitimize through marriage. Undoubtedly, her socio-economic status gave Alexandru Pop the opportunity to consolidate his influential social position in the political and economic world of Baia Mare and Hungary at the beginning of the twentieth century. To what extent this was achieved is difficult to determine, since Katalin Bojtner died in 1909,²⁰ only 3 years after her marriage to Alexandru Pop, while he survived her until 1915.²¹

Another marital pattern encountered at the level of this elite group consisted of marriages between the daughters of county or state civil servants and young jurists or lawyers, who came from the same professional background. We shall limit ourselves to mentioning here the marriages of Carolina Orbonaş, the daughter of the president of the Royal Court in Târgu-Mureş,²² to Vasile Butean, a lawyer turned government adviser and member of the Hungarian Parliament;²³ Emilia Nemes,²⁴ who came from a family of civil servants (her father had been a tax official), to Matei Nicola, the son of a priest, who became a lawyer and a deputy;²⁵ Izidora Mihalca, daughter of the vice comes of Maramureş (considered a high state official) Vasile Mihalca, to the jurist Iosif Pop from Şomcuta Mare (Großhorn, Nagysomkút), who came from a family of civil servants.²⁶ Such matrimonial alliances offered, on the one hand, the guarantee of preserving their social and professional status, and on the other, the chance of career advancement for the men, through the connections and influence of the families from which they and their wives were descended.

A third pattern, and the last on which we shall focus in the present study, was that of marriages concluded between the sons and daughters of nobles. In other words, the noble origin continued to play the role of an additional social bond, alongside the economic and professional ones. An emblematic case is that of Wilhelmina Clococean,²⁷ the second wife of the royal government adviser Paul Dunca de Șieu.²⁸ Both came from noble families: she from the family of Major Clococean, from Veneția de Jos, who had actively fought in the 1848 Revolution, and he was descended from an old noble family of Șieu (Maramureș). Their noble origin and their affinities, unarguably engendered by their privileged social status, facilitated their matrimonial alliance. In fact, the Clococean family was related, through one of Wilhelmina's brothers, to the Anton family,²⁹ a family with a priestly and military tradition associated with the former Border Regiment of Năsăud.

Wilhelmina Clococean married Paul Dunca in 1850, when she was 40 and he was 51 years of age. It is difficult to prove to what extent Paul Dunca's social rise was fueled by his joining the Clococean family. The fact is, however, that his 23 years of marriage to Wilhelmina coincided with the most prolific part of his socio-political career. Starting with the neo-absolutist decade, Paul Dunca successively held positions and offices such as: gubernial adviser, deputy in the Diet of Cluj, member in the Imperial Senate of Vienna, founding member of the Astra Association, vice president of Albina Bank in Sibiu and president of the National Conference of the Romanians in Transylvania.³⁰

As for the family networks created through matrimonial alliances, the most relevant case is that of Ana Pop Lemeny, the first wife of Alexandru Bohățiel. Born into a family of large landowners, descended from the family of the Greek Catholic Bishop Ioan Lemeny, Ana Pop Lemeny was related to many families of Romanian priests and petty nobles in Transylvania, among them the family of her future husband, Al. Bohățiel, who was her first cousin. By marrying Alexandru Bohățiel, she remained in the same family network until their only daughter, Ana Bohățiel, married Dionisie Vaida, a wealthy Romanian militant politician, who was also descended from an old noble family. They became parents to Alexandru Vaida Voievod, a renowned politician and a member of the Parliament in Budapest. Through his alliance with the Vaida family, the Bohățiel family's kinship network expanded further in the following years, when Dionisie Vaida's niece Viorica Vaida married Teodor Mihali, a well-known Transylvanian Romanian politician. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Corneliu Coposu, the Romanian politician, was born in yet another branch of the Vaida family, which was also related to the Bohățiel family through one of Alexandru's sisters, Ludovica. Thus, during the second half of the nineteenth century, the Bohățiel family gave four politicians thanks to the matrimonial alliances it fos-

tered: the brothers Alexandru and Mihai Bohățiel, from the first generation, and the grandchildren Alexandru Vaida Voevod and Teodor Mihali, from the third generation.

In the case of Elena Oltean, the wife of politician Vasile L. Pop, the support of her family and their connections in various socio-political circles greatly influenced her husband's advancement. For example, all four of Elena Oltean's brothers occupied a respected social position in society, as follows: Constantin was a professor in Craiova and an administrator of estates in Wallachia;³¹ Maria was married to George Filip, a lawyer in Alba Iulia (Karlsburg, Gyulafehérvár); Ana was married to Nicolae Șandor of Viștea, a lieutenant in the Austrian army, and Ioan was in charge of the commercial affairs of the Oltean family.³² In turn, each had children, whose matrimonial alliances further expanded the family circle. For example, Aurelia Pop, the daughter of Vasile L. Pop and Elena Oltean, was to marry Ioan Iurca, the son of the former vice comes of Maramureș,³³ and one of the daughters of Constantin, Elena Oltean's brother, married Daniel Barcianu,³⁴ the son of the Orthodox priest Sava Popovici Barcianu.³⁵ Thanks to these matrimonial alliances, the Oltean family managed to weave around it an extensive family network, which included lawyers, officers, merchants and priests, who supported and promoted each other. As for Elena Oltean and the role played by her family in the case of the politician Vasile L. Pop, it is worth mentioning that she spent all her life in the shadow of her husband and remained entrenched in collective memory as "Baroness Pop" (after her husband was elevated to the rank of baron), rather than as the daughter of the merchant Oltean, who had facilitated her husband's political ascent.

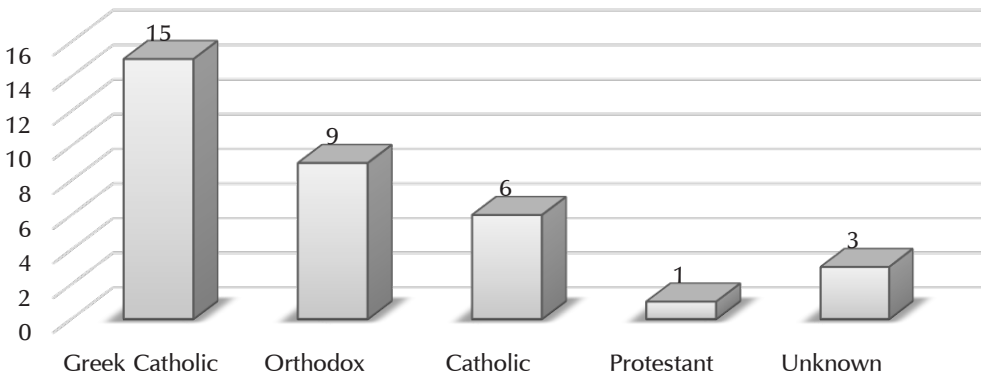
III. Religious Affiliation: An Incentive to Matrimonial Attachment or an Individualizing Element?

A SAMPLED ANALYSIS of the 34 wives of Romanian Greek Catholic deputies from Transylvania shows that at least half of them belonged to a denomination other than that of their husbands. Thus, 15 of them were Greek Catholic, 9 were Orthodox, 6 were Roman Catholic, one was Reformed, and in the case of 3 of them the religion could not be determined.

This diverse confessional affiliation indicates, on the one hand, the existence of "religious tolerance" among this elite group. On the other hand, it shows that social solidarities often prevailed over religious and ethnic ones. As can be seen from the above data, about half of the marriages concluded were between members belonging to the same denomination, followed numerically by those between Greek Catholics and Orthodox. There was no shortage of marriages be-

tween Greek Catholics and Roman Catholics or Protestants (Calvinists). As regards marriages with partners outside one's own denomination, we should mention here the cases of Carolina Orbonaş (Orthodox), married to Vasile Butean (Greek Catholic); Anastasia Matei (Orthodox), married to Ioan Florian (the son of a Greek Catholic priest); Emilia Orghidan (the daughter of an Orthodox priest), married to Ioan Rațiu (Greek Catholic); Elena Safrano (Orthodox), married to Alexandru Vaida Voevod (Greek Catholic); Isidora Mihalca (Roman Catholic), married to Iosif Papp (Greek Catholic); Julianna Csoma (Reformed), married to Alexandru Bohățiel (Greek Catholic) etc. Marriages between Greek Catholics and Orthodox were more frequent, since they belonged to the same Eastern rite and to the same Romanian ethnicity and language. By contrast, those between Greek Catholics and Roman Catholics, respectively Reformed, were rarer. The explanation lies in the differences of a ritual nature that existed between these confessions, as well as between the languages these people spoke and between their political-cultural horizons. However, for this segment of the Romanian intelligentsia, knowledge of Hungarian and German, as instruments of access to the political-administrative state system, as well as the friendships these individuals formed with Hungarians and Germans from Transylvania during their studies, were as many bridges that led them to enter confessionally mixed marriages.

GRAPH 2. THE SPOUSES' RELIGIOUS DENOMINATION



All these examples indicate the existence of confessional permeability among the Romanian political elite, given that the boundaries between denominations could be overcome through marriage, especially when individuals came from the same social class. Whether they were Orthodox, Roman Catholic or Reformed mattered less if they belonged to the same social milieu, in which affinities, interests and ways of life outweighed the religious affiliation.

Whether mixed or mono-denominational, the matrimonial alliances identified in this study illustrate the determining role of the social environment for the advancement of the Romanian political elite in the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.

IV. Spouses, Ages and Children: A Collective Profile

BESIDES BELONGING to one socio-confessional group or another, or the reasons behind their marital options, each of these women had a personal trajectory, a life story, which most of the time was not recorded in documents. The only data, occasionally incomplete, are those related to the fundamental moments of their existence: birth, marriage, and death. Here and there we find some information about the number of children they had, or about their episodic presence in the lives of others. All this may help piece together a gender profile that is collective rather than individual.

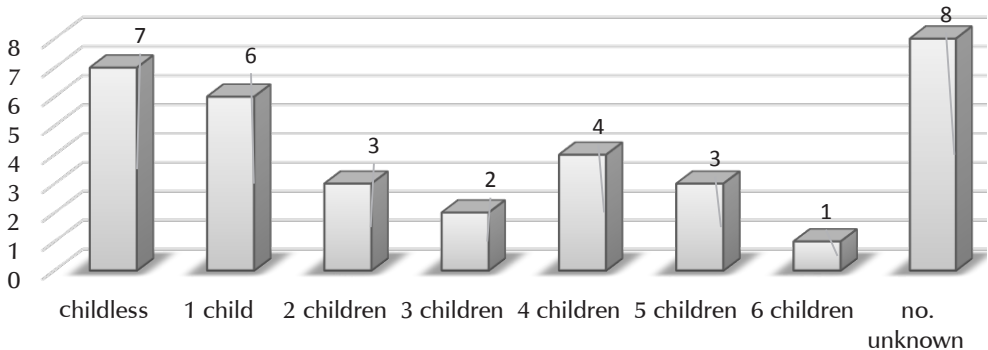
As regards marriage and the number of marriages registered in this sample, we find that 33 of the 34 women contracted a single marriage during their lifetime, while only one got married twice. In this case, the second marriage occurred after the death of the woman's first husband.³⁶ The resulting picture is that of a prevalently protogamous marital behavior, also found in other social milieus in Transylvania,³⁷ which shows that women were less willing to remarry than men. What made them reluctant to do so? First, the attitude of the churches to which they belonged, especially the Orthodox and Greek Catholic churches, for which remarriage was evidence of a human weakness, which could at best be tolerated rather than encouraged.³⁸ Second, their own families' reluctance to accept a new member, with whom they would have to cohabit.

On the other hand, a few of the women in this sample were not averse to marrying widowed men. This was the case of Wilhelmina Clococean (the second wife of Paul Dunca de Șieu),³⁹ of Eufrosina Blebea (the second wife of Ioan Axente Sever),⁴⁰ Julianna Csoma (the second wife of Alexandru Bohățiel),⁴¹ and Eleftera Porescu (the second wife of Teodor Mihali).⁴²

As for the age at marriage, it ranged between 17 and 49 years, which meant an average of 26.6 years in the investigated sample. The highest values were recorded for those who wed men who were on their second marriage. The exception was Eufrosina Blebea, who was only 18 years old at the time of her marriage to Ioan Axente Sever, while he was 41 years old. Despite the large age difference between them (23 years), their marriage lasted 46 years, until his death in 1906.

Life expectancy was another relevant indicator for the demographic profile of this female segment. However, as the existing data did not allow its reconstruction for the entire analyzed sample, we shall limit ourselves to stating the following: life expectancy was 55 years for 16 women out of the total of 34; the youngest of them, Iuliana Mureșian, the wife of Ioachim Mureșian, died at the age of 21,⁴³ and the oldest, Zinca Isacu, the wife of Simeon Balomiri, died at the age of 91.⁴⁴ In the case of Melania Dragoș, the wife of Canon and Deputy Ștefan Bîlțiu,⁴⁵ respectively of Ana Pop Lemeny, the first wife of Alexandru Bohățiel, the sources generically record their deaths at “very young” ages.⁴⁶ The main cause of these premature deaths was the so-called “puerperal fever,” an infection triggered shortly after the birth of a child, often leading to the death of the mother. Referring to the loss of his mother, Alexandru Vaida Voevod wrote the following in his memoirs: “And my mother died like her mother in childbirth, just like my father’s mother. How many, countless women have sacrificed themselves, giving their lives to give life.”⁴⁷

GRAPH 3. CHILDREN BORN IN THE FAMILIES OF ROMANIAN GREEK CATHOLIC DEPUTIES



Last but not least, the marital profile of these women may be rounded off by a reference to the children who were born to these couples and who reached the age of maturity. They represented their living heritage, through which both the nation and the material heritage of entire generations were perpetuated. We do not know, and perhaps we will never find out, how many children were born to these couples. But what we have been able to identify for a good part of them are the children who reached the age of maturity, and whom the documents of the time mention during various moments in the life of the family. For example, upon his death, in 1875, Vasile Ladislau Pop was survived by his wife Elena and their 5 children: Aurelia (married to Vasile Iurca), Elena, Aureliu, Iuliu, and Alexandrina. Emilia Nemeș also had five children from her marriage to Matei Nicola, and so did Maria Otdermath from her marriage to Mihai Bohățiel. For

the other 31 women in this sample, the number of children ranged from one to six, most of them having a single child. Deliberate or not, the option for one child, maximum two, was specific to the urban and pre-urban milieus of Transylvania in the modern era, as a measure meant to prevent the dispersal of wealth.⁴⁸ To what extent this pattern characterized the reproductive behavior of the Romanian political elite is still difficult to establish. It is up for future research to clarify this matter.

The data in the graph above indicates a variable number of children who reached the age of maturity, which makes it difficult to establish a family model with *n* children at the level of this socio-professional segment. Therefore, without being able to generalize the value of the data obtained, it would be safer to assume that this represents a cross-section of the reproductive behavior of the Romanian political intelligentsia in Transylvania in the second half of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the following century.

Conclusions

IN THIS study we have tried to answer a fundamental research question regarding the Romanian political elite in Transylvania in the nineteenth century: to what extent did the wives of politicians and the families from which they came contribute to the socio-political careers of their husbands?

The analysis of this sample of 34 wives of Greek Catholic Romanian politicians shows that their wives and families played a significant role in the rise and consolidation of their political trajectories. Descended from the upper and middle classes of Romanian society, with multiple connections in various economic, cultural, ecclesiastical and political circles, these women offered their husbands real opportunities to assert themselves in the socio-political life of Transylvania. That is why marrying the daughters of civil servants, priests, teachers, or merchants was a common strategy among young intellectuals who wanted a career in public life.

The matrimonial patterns resulting from this sampled analysis show their predilection for marriages with a socio-economic and cultural potential that could provide them with political opportunities. Their networks of kinship and the friendships they built over time also weighed heavily in this respect, because they turned out to be real laboratories to which almost the entire Romanian political elite belonged. Cultural associations, banks, newspaper editorial offices, and schools were as many forms of Romanian ethnic and civic solidarity, which the Romanian political elite helped shape. This was where so many plans were

discussed and where these intellectuals' initiatives and projects concerning the Romanians in Transylvania started.

In such an eminently masculine world, the wives of these politicians remained in the shadows, stoically assuming the mission for which they had been educated: that of raising their children, supporting their husbands and ensuring that the family remained as united as possible. The story of their lives remains mostly unwritten, known only to those close to them and very rarely to the outside world. Many of these women remained imprinted in the collective memory as "the wife of the judge," as people referred to Anastasia Matei, or "Baroness Pop," as Elena Oltean, the wife of Baron Vasile Ladislau Pop, was called. Behind these borrowed identities there were real faces and lives whose histories we will probably never know.



Notes

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7. Iuliu Moșil, "Ioan Florian Câmpianu 1829–1894," *Arhiva Someșană* (Năsăud) 21 (1937): 608–624.

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Abstract

How Much Did Wives Matter? The Role of Spouses and In-Laws in the Socio-Political Careers of Romanian Politicians in Transylvania (1861–1918)

This study analyzes to what extent the social status of the wives of Romanian politicians in Transylvania, their matrimonial alliances and religious denomination influenced the rise and political-cultural behavior of their spouses in the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. The analysis focuses on the wives of Romanian Greek Catholic deputies who served in the Diets of Transylvania (1863–1866) and, subsequently, in the Hungarian Parliament between 1861 and 1918. Starting from the latest European historiographic research on the impact of socio-economic and cultural factors on individual social mobility, we aim to achieve several objectives. First, we want to identify the socio-economic background of the Greek Catholic Romanian deputies' wives and to see whether this actually played a decisive role in their husbands' affirmation either as individuals or as members of various decision-making groups. Second, based on a few case studies, we aim to detect the family networks created through matrimonial alliances and the extent to which they contributed to the rise and consolidation of these politicians' careers. We will also try to understand the ways in which the religious denominations of the deputies' wives may have influenced the social, political and cultural conduct of their husbands. Last but not least, we aim to discuss a few aspects of these women's marital behavior, including their role in the couple.

Keywords

Transylvania, women, political elite, social mobility, matrimonial alliances