

The Eastern Orthodox Church in Bessarabia

Uniformization and Russification Processes in the First Half of the 19th Century

ION GUMENÂI

IN 1812, the Russian Empire annexed Bessarabia, a territory with an Eastern Orthodox majority population, and incorporated it into an empire with the same dominant religion,¹ a situation different from other examples in history, when a superior power annexes a territory with a religiously heterogeneous population.

But the Russian Orthodox Church—the main exponent of Orthodoxy in the Russian Empire—and Tsar Alexander I, by approving in 1813 the founding of the Archdiocese of Chişinău and Khotyn, headed by Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni, thus rendered null and void the customary and well-known canons of the Orthodox Church, which recognized the right of national Churches to self-organize on ethnic principles and to self-govern independently from another nation's Church. These canons mandated that

no bishop shall incorporate a different diocese which was not before and from the very beginning under its or his predecessors' authority. And if someone should incorporate a foreign diocese and forcefully place it under his authority, he should give it back, so as not to breach the canons of his forefathers, and not to allow the pride of the worldly power to take hold, under the guise of godly work.²

The imperial authorities, although they had brought under their rule a majority Orthodox population, in order to avoid surprises and to be sure of their firm control over the system, began a process of uniformization of the administration and of the management, mirroring that of the Russian Empire, and started with the Orthodox majority. Incorporation of all local ecclesiastical structures into the imperial ones, and the breaking of ties, if they existed, with the representatives of other religious entities from outside the empire, had been the main goal of the religious policy of the Russian Empire in Bessarabia, enacted immediately after the annexation of this territory into the empire.

Compared to the Russian Church, the presence of the dicastery (which nevertheless existed for only a short period), was the only difference in the administrative structure of the Orthodox Church in Bessarabia. On 18 May 1832, by imperial decree, the dicastery

was transformed into a spiritual consistory. As the document explains, the reason was the need to align the Church to the rest of the empire.³

Archbishop Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni (1746–1821), at the time of the creation of a new ecclesiastical structure, in order not to provoke too much resistance from the local population, wrote to the Holy Synod that he wanted to build a Metropolitan Church considering “the clergy’s and the people’s propensity to respect and trust more the Metropolitan See.”⁴

Archbishop Bănulescu-Bodoni also focused on the organization of the clergy. Following a number of visitations, he concluded that in many places, on holidays and Sundays, instead of performing the religious services the priests preferred to go to the fairs that were held during these days. This happened because there was a large number of priests in a parish, and it was customary among the clergy to engage in a sort of “vagrancy.” Usually, priests were wandering from one village to another, because many of them did not have their own parish. For these reasons, the archbishop proposed to the Holy Synod the establishment of a fixed number⁵ of two priests per church. In fact, in this case, Archbishop Bănulescu-Bodoni only made a hybrid of the parish distribution system implemented in the Principality of Moldavia with that of the Russian Empire, which strictly regulated the number of clergymen.

The financial situation of the clergy was not faring any better. The major source of income, during the time of Archbishop Bănulescu-Bodoni, was the fee collected from the laypeople for performing various religious services. For this reason, the hierarch had to systematize and establish a certain fee for the religious services provided by the priests. According to the new regulations, they charged the following amounts for “recitation of the Gospel verse”—20 bani; “reading from the Psalter”—1 leu; “big burial”—1 leu; “small burial”—20 bani; “wedding service for young people”—1 leu; “wedding service for widowers”—1 leu, 20 bani; “Mass”—10 bani; “small consecration”—10 bani; “Te-Deum” or bidding prayer—10 bani; “prayer on birth”—5 bani; “prayer on the 8th day from the birth”—3 bani; “baptism”—10 bani; and “prayer on the 40th day after birth”—6 bani.⁶

It should be also mentioned that Bănulescu-Bodoni was the one who pleaded for the raise of the intellectual profile of the local priests (according to the official version), and he invited in priests from Russian eparchies, with whom he replaced the Romanian priests. For instance, at Chişinău Cathedral in 1812, 16 out of 18 priests came from Russia.⁷

Apart from the administrative changes, quickly implemented, a series of ideological and propagandistic actions also occurred as a consequence of the founding of the Archdiocese of Chişinău and Khotyn. The goal was to replace the traditional and local religious beliefs with those of the Russian Orthodoxy. Here we refer to the countless number of Russian saints and martyrs, as well as the complicated Russian traditions and unfamiliar customs, little understood by most of the local population.

This situation had immediate repercussions and Archbishop Bănulescu-Bodoni, in an introduction to a book published at the Chişinău Eparchy Publishing House, wrote:

Last, we consider it necessary to announce to all our subjects loved by Christ in our Eparchy that by publishing this book, under the instructions we have received, following all the rules for the translation of prayer books published in Russia, we have added according to our duty

*all the saints which are honored by the Highest Orthodox Russian Empire . . . Now after the Merciful God has freed us by the hand of Emperor Alexander I from agrarian oppression and united us to other Orthodox lands of the Russian Empire under the protection of God, our Duty is, alongside other Orthodox peoples of Russia, to celebrate and pay homage to the Saints that served God in Russia.*⁸

From this perspective, placing the Tsar Alexander I in the front and equaling him to the saints created the premises for the development of a “cult of personality” around the tsar and his family, which is specific to the Russian-Slavic space. Moreover, in 1817, the following book had seen the light of print at the Eparchy Publishing House: *Rânduiala panichidei* (Panikhida’s ordinance), for the great lords, emperors, and empresses: for tsars and tsarinas of all of Russia and their High Family, translated into the Romanian language from Slavic for the use and facilitation of Moldovan priests of the Chişinău Eparchy, in 1817. Later, in 1818, the *Чин о поминовении царской семьи* (Rite of commemoration of the imperial family) was printed. The purpose of these books was to offer guidance to priests regarding the rituals which had to be performed in honor of the imperial family.⁹ So, the exarch, apart from the first attempts to transfer the pantheon of saints of the Russian Empire, went to considerable lengths to legitimize the cult of the tsar and his family.

The founding in Chişinău in 1817 of a branch of the Russian Biblical Society, through which the Romanian versions of the New Testament and the Bible were published in 1817 and 1819, respectively, served the same purpose. In order to rewrite a Romanian version of the Bible, Archbishop Bănulescu-Bodoni proposed a new translation based on older Greek and Slavonic versions done under the supervision of Archimandrite Varlaam Cuza, the abbot of Dobrovăţ monastery. Since this project was to take a long time to complete, and the Bible needed to be published as soon as possible, the text of the Romanian Blaj version of the Bible from 1795 was used, with some linguistic adjustments. This version of the Bible was widely distributed in Bessarabia, but also, at the request of archbishops Veniamin Costache and Grigorie Dascălul, copies were sent to the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia. A Romanian text published in Transylvania was used as a Romanian Bible in Bessarabia, which, later, was also sent to these principalities.¹⁰

Yet, due to the opening in May 1814 of the Eparchy Publishing House by Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni, an influx of books published in the Romanian language occurred, which helped preserve the tradition and Romanian as the language in which religious services were conducted in many churches in Bessarabia.¹¹

But the printed products were used to for the propaganda of the structure and ideology of Russian Orthodoxy, as I have noted above, and also to promote the image of the Russian autocrat and his family. This is best illustrated in the introduction to the Bible published in Saint Petersburg, which had the following message:

Unto the glory of the Holy Maker of all Living and Inseparable Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. By order of the true-believer and our only master the Lord Emperor Alexander Pavlovich of All Russia, and his righteous consort Empress Elizabeth Alexeievna and of his mother Empress Consort Maria Feodorovna and Tsarevich and Grand

*Duke Konstantin Pavlovich and his wife Grand Duchess Anna Feodorovna, and Grand Duke Nikolay Pavlovich and his wife Grand Duchess Alexandra Feodorovna, and Grand Duke Alexander Nikolaevich and Great Duke Michael Pavlovich and Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna and her husband, and of the Grand Duchess Anna Pavlovna and her husband and Madame Maria Nikolaevna with the blessing of the Holy Synod of All Russia.*¹²

We believe it necessary to draw attention to the form of address used in this text, namely: “By order of the true-believer and our only master the Lord Emperor,” in which we can identify a combination of older and newly published texts. We refer to the fact that Bănulescu-Bodoni used the form of address “true-believer and our only master the Great Emperor” instead of just using the title of emperor. Since this form of address was not yet familiar to the public, the publisher used the form “Lord Emperor” instead.

It not possible to overlook the educational activity conducted by the archbishop. Under his supervision, the Theological Seminary opened in Chişinău in 1813.¹³ A progressive action, this was the first such institution opened in Bessarabia, especially taking into account that later on this institution would have great authority and would be renowned not only on the territory between the Prut and the Dniester rivers but also throughout the whole southern part of the Russian Empire and in the Balkans.

Yet, the Chişinău Theological Seminary would carry out the Russification of the clergy. The same Archbishop Bănulescu-Bodoni requested on 31 January 1813, at the opening ceremony of the Chişinău Theological Seminary (where children of the clergy were to study), that among the mandatory study subjects there would be:

*With priority and mandatorily, the Russian language as the dominant language; the national language, Moldovan, also Latin (as the national language descended from it and it can enrich the national language), and Greek, since many teachings and dogmas of the Christian faith were written in it, the other could be chosen optionally.*¹⁴

It is noteworthy that Bănulescu-Bodoni did not ask for the Romanian language to be taught at the seminary, but limited his request to just “the national language, Moldovan” as a study subject, the Russian language being the official language of communication.

The extraordinary efforts of the exarch to open a seminary within the eparchy were praiseworthy, but we need to consider his undeniable self-interest. We are referring to the fact that the existence of a theological institution within the newly created bishops would have led to a much higher position and higher rank. The Orthodox churches between the Dniester and the Bug rivers were also brought under the authority of the Chişinău and Khotyn bishops, which allows us to qualify the exarch as the “unifier of Romanian Orthodox Churches” between the Prut and the Dniester rivers. In effect, his efforts would ultimately bear fruit after his death. On 3 July 1821, Tsar Alexander I approved the elevation of the bishops of Chişinău and Khotyn to the rank of 2nd category bishops.¹⁵

Also, at Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni’s initiative, schools under the Lancasterian system, for children from the lower strata of society, were opened in Bessarabia. The exarch also attempted to organize the missionary activity of the Orthodox Church, for which

purpose Pavel Karasev, a missionary whom Bănulescu-Bodoni knew from the time he had been archbishop of Kyiv, was invited to Bessarabia to carry the mission among the Lipovans, in the hope of bringing them back to Orthodoxy, or at least of making them adhere to the Omopist Church.¹⁶

We believe that this is too a case of adoption of some experiences from the Russian Empire, because the Lipovans from the Principality of Moldavia, attested since the second half of the 18th century, had faced no pressure from missionaries, as the archbishops from the Principality of Moldavia had been more tolerant to this religious ideology.¹⁷

The missionary activity was directed not only towards the Old Believers but also other religious faiths, such as Jews and other minorities. We believe that just as Russia saw Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni as a tool for promoting its policies in the Romanian space, the high clergyman thought that by supporting the Russian policies he might become the head of a Romanian Orthodox Church. The promotion of the Russian administrative-ecclesiastic form of organization and of monastic life was seen by Bănulescu-Bodoni as the only way to achieve concrete results, considering that often many aspects of ecclesiastic and administrative life in the principalities, throughout the 18th century and at beginning of the 19th century, were managed arbitrarily and abusively, by both ecclesiastic and state authorities.¹⁸

Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni's death created an additional problem, causing a battle for the archbishop see of Chişinău. Iov (Potyomkin), the archbishop of Ekaterinoslav and Tavrida, a relative of Count Potyomkin, pleaded ardently with the Holy Synod to grant him the Eparchy of Bessarabia. The members of the Holy Synod had a different plan, and on 11 June 1821 they appointed Dimitrie Sulima, a former aide and disciple of Archbishop Gavriil, to this position.¹⁹

His appointment largely came due to the support of the governor of Bessarabia, Ivan Inzov, and to the letter he addressed to Count I. A. Kapodistrias, detailing the arguments in favor of his appointment given the situation in the eparchy, and to the support he had from all social strata in Bessarabia.

Dimitrie Sulima²⁰ continued the direction inaugurated by his predecessor, which focused on finishing the organization and aligning the eparchy to the administrative and church model of the Russian Empire, and the continuation of the slow Russification of the entire Orthodox population of Bessarabia.

If we refer to the first element, a first change was made concurrently with the appointment of Sulima as the head of the Chişinău and Khotyn Eparchy, when the post of vicar was eliminated. In 1834, this issue was discussed again when the Holy Synod tasked the archbishop with finding a place of residence and financial means for a new vicar. The solving of this problem was postponed, and in 1837, the position of the bishop of Kherson was created, and the churches between the Dniester and the Bug rivers were taken away from the administration of the Chişinău and Khotyn Eparchy, being put under the authority of the newly created Church entity. The restoration of this function was removed from the agenda, considering the decreasing territorial and numerical trends in the eparchy.

In 1830, in the spirit of his predecessor, the new archbishop decided to organize the monastic life, by introducing the requirement of communal life for all monasteries. Two

years later, on 18 May, following the Decree issued by the Senate at the imperial request, the spiritual dicasteries of the Chişinău, Kyiv, and Chernigov eparchies were transformed into consistories. For a better functioning, in 1841 the Regulation of spiritual consistories was adopted, which, with minor amendments, became the principal law of this Church body, in 1883.²¹

Alongside the organization of the consistory's activities, religious life became more centralized and thoroughly controlled. All the decision-making authority in the eparchy was concentrated in the archbishop's hands. The role of the deans and blagochins (church administrators in a sub-district) also changed. Thus, by the instruction drawn up by Dimitrie Sulima at the Holy Synod's request, the low-rank or circuit blagochins had under their supervision 10–15 churches. They reported to a senior or district blagochin elected by the consistory from among the best deans or priests; the archbishop endorsed the religious appointments. This way, senior blagochins became the link between the priests and the eparchy leadership, and through them most issues concerning the eparchy and the parishes were solved.²²

Referring to the Orthodox Church officials, we find that the Russian model was copied and imposed here too. Starting with 1823 it was decided that the children of the deceased priests should take their places. If they were minors, the parishes were held on their behalf, and had the obligation to provide financially for the widows and the orphaned children of the priests (the same obligation applied to foreign priests too, if they were dispatched to parishes where there were widows and orphaned children of priests). But the archbishop advised the young men who wished to become priests to marry only women "from priest families."²³ This way the clergy became, as in the other parts of Russia, a distinct social class, which had certain privileges regarding every facet of social life. The foundation of this class were the privileges it had, not property or the economic activity. This segment of society included all the descendants of the clergy and deans, and even if they abandoned their theological activity, they continued to benefit from privileges granted to the clergy when applying for jobs and services.

Later on, the financial situation of the priests improved. In 1829, the authorities issued an order according to which all parishes across the Russian Empire which had a priest and a church singer were to grant them for personal use at least 33 desyatina of land (the equivalent of 2.7 acres). In Bessarabia, after this order, the churches in the villages located on state land were given 99, 120, or 240 desyatina. The situation was different, however, in the villages located on the boyars' estates.²⁴

The activity of Dimitrie Sulima in the educational field was as productive as that of his predecessor. He continued his efforts regarding the establishment of an educational model fashioned under the Lancasterian system, which he had begun while still holding the post of auxiliary bishop. Agreeing with the Minister of the Interior, Viktor Kochubey, he dispatched to Saint Petersburg three church officials from the eparchy (Ghinculov, Bobeico, and Cunitchii) to learn about the Lancasterian educational system, for whose allowance 1,675 rubles were spent.²⁵ The archimandrite supervised this form of education until 1836 when these schools were transferred under the administration of the curator of Odessa's educational district.

A specific situation was that of the Theological Seminary of Chişinău, which was reorganized after 1823 to comply with the Regulation of theological schools in Russia. Since many students were Romanian, the archbishop requested that, both at the seminary and in other schools, only teachers who could speak Romanian were to be appointed. At the same time, Sulima also requested that during lessons and the breaks, students should speak only Russian. Despite all Dimitrie Sulima's efforts, by the Regulation on the functioning of seminaries of 1840, which was implemented by him, Tsar Nicholas I dictated that all disciplines would be taught in Russian,²⁶ thus in effect nullifying all the progress made by the archbishop.

Beginning with 1839, due to the educational concept adopted across the Russian Empire, parish schools were founded and placed under the supervision of a dean or a church singer, becoming an essential aid to the imperial educational system. The eparchy of Chişinău and Khotyn was part of this process, Dimitrie Sulima continuing to hold the view that the "Moldovan" language should be used in these schools.²⁷

If we are to refer to the other facets of his cultural activity, he continued from where Bănulescu-Bodoni left off, having a fruitful book publishing activity. During his tenure as archbishop, he translated, printed, or guided the publication of books such as: *SerVICES*, *Teachings*, *Instructions*, *Grammar Book*, *Catechesis*, *Forms of Litany*, *Customs*, etc.²⁸

In contrast to his predecessor, Sulima took as a model the books printed in the Russian Empire, and published a series of works by Russian hierarchs, such as Georgije Koninski, Partenije Sopkovski, or Philaret Drozdov.

In 1823–1825 he was summoned to appear before the Holy Synod in Saint Petersburg, where, besides other functions, he was appointed as the head of the Biblical Society branch for Bessarabia. In this capacity, he received many copies of the Bible and the New Testament, in Romanian, Old Church Slavonic, Bulgarian, Armenian, French, Polish, and Turkish-Armenian, which were to be distributed in Bessarabia. The copies were given to the poor free of charge, and for the well-off the price was set at 2.85 rubles for a Bible and 85 copecks for the New Testament.²⁹

During Dimitrie Sulima's tenure, the works on the episcopal cathedral devoted to the Lord's Birth and the bell tower were finished, and thus another dream of his predecessor was fulfilled. The cathedral was built in the Byzantine style, according to the blueprints of the architect Abram Melnikov. The interior walls were painted by the Russian painter Kovsarov. Besides the building of the cathedral, the archbishop, as all his predecessors, took part in the reconstruction and construction of new churches, so 40 new stone churches were built during his tenure.

As to the missionary activity, on 12 November 1836 Dimitrie Sulima received from the Holy Synod an order regarding primary education in villages, which was to be applied throughout the empire. According to that order, this process had to be started first by attracting "Orthodox" children and then children from Old Believers families, who were to study together. Thus, all blagochins had to give information about the localities and parishes where Lipovans lived and to appoint church officials who were to be responsible for the management of such schools. For instance, the blagochins of Orhei and Baltaga reported that Lipovans lived in the villages of Sarcovca, Fuzovca, Teleneşti, and Orhei, but no church representatives wanted to take upon themselves such a mission.

The archbishop responded by issuing an order which requested the appointment of capable persons to open and manage the activity of primary education church schools or implied the relocation from the respective parishes. The following deans were appointed: Dimitrii Lushevici (Orhei), Ivan Muranevici (Sarcova), Zinovii Zaletchii (Fuzovca), and Andrei Timosevshii (Telenești). Of these, only the latter had graduated from the Theological Seminary from Chișinău, the rest were educated in village primary schools.³⁰

So, we see a verbatim transposition of the model adopted in the rest of the empire, with no regard to the particularities of the territory between the Prut and the Dniester, which generated opposition from the local clergy, who knew neither the new way of working nor the language in which they were to teach (the Lipovans were of Slavic ethnicity and speakers of Russian). This explains why the appointed priests seemed to be of Slavic descent and native speakers of Russian.

This way, according to Onisifor Ghibu, the Bessarabian Church continued naturally the Moldovan tradition during the tenure of Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni, a Romanian from Transylvania, and his successor, Dumitru Sulima who, although a Russian, had a good command of the “Moldovan” language and promoted it both in church and in schools. Even though the Romanian tradition continued, there was a latent but continuing process of involving the local Orthodox parishioners from the moral point of view, but especially of administrative alignment to the Russian Orthodox model.

AFTER DIMITRIE Sulima’s death, Irinarh Popov succeeded him as pastor of the Chișinău and Khotyn Eparchy.³¹ In Bessarabia, he was a typical representative of the centralism and bureaucracy of Russian church life, imposed by the High Commissioner N. A. Protasov (1836–1855).³² During his office, the organization of the Orthodox Church in Bessarabia according to the Russian model was completed. Under Irinarh, Chișinău Eparchy was more precisely organized, by reducing the duties of the deanery, the concentration of the decision-making power in the incumbent hierarch’s hands, and by the complete removal of the parishioners from church affairs. During his office, the religious service was conducted in Romanian, but the trend towards the Russification of the church prevailed over the cultivation of religious development. Many Moldovan deans and blagochins were replaced with Russian priests brought from other parts of the empire.

Because of the replacement of a part of the senior blagochins (replaced either for breach of the church law, bribery, or for not speaking Russian), between them and the priests brewed an obvious conflict. The tense situation existed because the blagochins viewed the priests as a mass of uncultured people, savages who needed to be brought under control and under complete dependence from the blagochins.

In effect, the blagochins split into two factions, one with a very hostile attitude towards the priests and church clerks, which wanted to begin a campaign of repressive actions towards the clergy, and the other, shedding light on the deplorable state of the clergy, which was the proponent of measures aimed at improving their station in life.

The main problem, which was highlighted in the reports submitted by the blagochins, and which made Archbishop Irinarh pay close attention, was that a large part of the clergy lacked any formal education. For instance, in the 4th district of Chişinău County, out of 128 priests and church clerks, only 2 had studied at a seminary, and in the 2nd district, only one out of 47 priests had graduated from the Theological Academy and only eight had primary theological education.

A similar situation could be seen among the children of priests and church clerks. Thus, in the 4th district, mentioned above, out of 140 boys, only 5 studied at theological schools, and in the 2nd district, 30 children of priests were left out of any educational process. Archbishop Irinarh noted that this situation led to an infringement of the law, since many children of the clergy were replaced with other children in ecclesiastical positions for which one had to prove knowledge of the required subjects. For these reasons, the archbishop tasked the blagochins with the supervision of the educational process and with drafting documents describing the profiles of candidates running for vacant posts.³³ However, Irinarh did not take into consideration and did not mention that the children of priests mostly avoided getting an education because the studies were conducted in Russian, which they did not speak at all.

Regarding the parishioners, apart from the fact that, according to Irinarh, they did not know any prayers, to a large extent they did not attend the church service, and their presence in churches was scarce. The churches, which were mainly made of wood, were criticized for being overcrowded and in poor condition.³⁴

We consider that this matter was mentioned on purpose by the archbishop of Chişinău and Khotyn, to stress the importance of the “civilizing Slavic” element for this territory, and he said nothing about the estrangement of the parishioners from the Church after bringing in Russian priests and about the fact that the religious services were conducted in the Russian language, which the locals did not understand.³⁵

Nonetheless, Irinarh continued the church-building activity begun by his predecessor. In 1858, at the end of his tenure, there were 865 churches in the eparchy, of which 314 were made of stone and 551 in wood, plus 38 chapels and 34 churches on the premises of the 21 monasteries of that time.³⁶

During Irinarh’s tenure, the following books saw the light of print: *Catechesis* (1844), *Litany* (1849), *Catechism* (1852), and *Pentecostarion* (1853). In the same year 1853, plans were made for the publication of a Gospel according to Romanian editions. Two years later, the *Gospel* (1855), was published in Chişinău, a copy of the *Gospel* published in Buda in 1812. The following books were published next: *Christian Catechesis in Detail* (1854), *Prayer Book* (1855), *Pastoral Letter* (1855), in 1856 the *Customs* was re-printed according to the 1816 edition printed at Iaşi, *Instructions to Church Starost’s* (1857), *Psalter* (1857), *The Blagochins’ Instructions* (1858), etc.

Irinarh had his residence mainly at Hârjauca monastery, where on 17 March 1858 he received the news of his transfer to the Kamenets-Podolsk eparchy, and from there to Ryazan, where he passed away on 25 September 1877. He was laid down to rest at Holy Trinity Monastery in Ryazan.³⁷

Major changes marked the 1860s for the Church in Bessarabia. Following the Crimean War (1853–1856) the south of Bessarabia returned to the Principality of Moldavia,

as dictated by the peace treaty signed in Paris (1856); this meant the removal of this territory from the jurisdiction of the Synod of the Russian Church and its inclusion under the jurisdiction of the Moldavian Metropolitan Church. From the point of view of the church organization, this territory was organized separately in a “spiritual consistory” with the see in the town of Izmăil. After the unification of the Romanian Principalities (on 24 January 1859), Prince Al. I. Cuza signed the decree for the establishment of the Lower Danube Bishopric on 17 November 1864. The new bishopric comprised the counties of Izmăil, Bolgrad, Covurlui (taken from the Huși Bishopric) and Brăila (taken from the Buzău Bishopric). Cahul County was made a part of the Huși Bishopric. The founding of this bishopric with counties from the three Romanian provinces strengthened the Romanian administrative and Church influence in the Lower Danube region. The see of the bishopric was granted to the erudite Bishop Melchisedec Ștefănescu (with the title of bishop until 10 May 1865). Several buildings were transferred to serve as headquarters for the bishopric and the administrative body, and a theological seminary was founded in Izmăil, where the teaching was conducted in the Romanian language.

After the Russian-Romanian-Turkish War of 1877–1878, as a result of the Peace Congress held in Berlin, the south of Bessarabia was again annexed by the Russian Empire. The political and administrative changes led to administrative and ecclesiastical changes. Cahul, Izmăil, and Bolgrad counties returned under the jurisdiction of the Chișinău Eparchy, and Archbishop Pavel Lebedev, in record time reinstated the Church leadership and administrative model implemented in the Bessarabian Governorate. The priests who studied at Izmăil, Huși, and Socola-Iași Seminaries could keep their parishes provided that they learned the Russian language in two years. The Izmăil Seminary was closed down, and graduates of the Russian Chișinău Eparchy schools were brought for the instruction of pupils in the parish schools.³⁸

IN CONCLUSION, we can affirm that the period of the three archbishops of the Chișinău and Khotyn Eparchy was a period of change for the Orthodox Church of Bessarabia, from a Romanian to a Romanian-Russian one. This can be seen even at the level of the hierarch at the helm of this eparchy, Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni who was Romanian by birth. Dimitrie Sulima was a Maloross, but a good connoisseur of local traditions, and, finally, Irinarh Popov was a Russian bishop of Riga, from where he was sent away due to the discontent of the local Latvians, because he attempted converting them to Orthodoxy.

From the point of view of faith and traditions, the parishioners remained loyal to their old beliefs, despite all the attempts made by the leadership of the eparchy, but from the point of view of the organization and functioning of the Church, it was homogenized and structured as an administrative and religious unit, as in the rest of the Russian Empire.

Irinarh Popov sought to complete the process of structural uniformization of the imperial institution, creating a hybrid body, a Romanian-Russian Church, i.e. on the one hand, Romanian parishioners, and, on the other, an administrative and religious makeup as in the rest of the Russian Empire.

Practically, this period can be considered as the time leading up to the activity of Anthony Shokotov (1858–1871) and Pavel Lebedev (1871–1882), when the Orthodox Church of Bessarabia was under tremendous pressure to Russify and transform into an obedient instrument implementing the political orders of the Tsarist administration. Regarding the Orthodox parishes in the south of Bessarabia, which returned for a brief period under the Romanian rule, they had a moment of respite and were sheltered from the pressure of forced Russification.



Notes

1. During the occupation of the Romanian Principalities by the Russians (1806–1812), Tsar Alexander I (1801–1825) issued an imperial decree in 1808 by which he ordered the founding of an Exarchate for the Metropolitan Church of Moldavia and Ungrovlachia. By placing this exarchate under the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church in Saint Petersburg, the goal was to break the canonic ties between the Romanian Churches and the Ecumenical Patriarch at Constantinople. The office of exarch was given to Archbishop Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni. Nicolae Chifăr, “Cultura românească din Basarabia sub ocupație țaristă,” *Analele științifice ale Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” Iași*, new ser., *Teologie* 5 (1999–2000): 143–158.
2. <http://nomocanon.com/canoanele-sinoadelor-ecumenice/>. Even the name of the newly created religious entity denoted its artificial character. It is a known fact that the founding of the Chișinău Bishopric was owed to its central geographical location, while that of Khotyn was added to its name to explain an older bishopric on this territory. And since such a center did not exist, and since Khotyn was for a time the seat of the Proilavia Metropolitan Church, they added this name to the title of the new eparchy. The breach was not only administrative, if such a thing was possible, but also in content and ideological. Such a lack of understanding for such a sensible and complicated aspect shows that the role played by the Orthodox Church for the Romanian Orthodox population was, even to this day, quite duplicitous. If we are to add to this the interpretation given by some historians of the spiritual life in Bessarabia only in black and white hues with no nuance or differentiation, we arrive at what we have at the moment, i.e. a series of research papers which denote the important role played by the Orthodox Church in safeguarding the national identity, and, paradoxically, studies that show the nefarious role of the Orthodox Church in the process of denationalization of the local Romanian population in Bessarabia, which is also true.
3. *Complete Collection of the Laws of the Russian Empire* (in Russian), 2nd edition, vol. 7 (Saint Petersburg: Printing house of the Second Branch of His Own Imperial Majesty’s Chancellery, 1832), 318. Thus, the new eparchy had the following administrative structure: Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni, holding the titles of exarch and archbishop, was at the head of the eparchy, aided by Dimitrie, bishop of Bender and Akkerman. On 30 September 1813, the activity of the newly established dicastery had to abide by the Church Regulation for All Russia, ukases of the Holy Synod, its dispositions, and resolutions. The consistory later replaced this institution (the difference is in name only). The Church Consistory supported the archbishop’s activity. The Consistory Chancellery had four office directors, a cashier, a registrar, an archivist, six chancellery clerks, and 26 copyists (their number varied). The district deans—the principal aides to the archpriests in the Church administration—selected the candidates

to become priests and deans; they investigated cases of abuse perpetrated by the members of the clergy, and represented the priests' interests before the laypersons. In every deanery, there was an eparchy auditor, and the deans had one or two assistants. See: Octavian Moșin, "Viața spirituală din Basarabia în perioada țaristă (1812–1918)," accessed 19 Nov. 2019, <http://documentar-ortodox.blogspot.com/2012/10/viata-spirituala-din-basarabia-in.html>.

4. Cf. *Journal of the Church Historical and Archaeological Society of Bessarabia* (in Russian) (Chișinău) 1 (1909). It is necessary to consider the fact that Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni wanted to elevate the newly created Church to the rank of metropolitan Church for reasons of personal ambition, since it was a known fact that he was the Archbishop of Poltava and Kyiv, a member of the Holy Synod, exarch of Principality of Moldavia and Principality of Wallachia.
5. Cf. Nicolae Popovschi, *Istoria Bisericii din Basarabia în veacul al XIX-lea subțarist* (Chișinău: Tipografia Eparhială "Cartea Românească," 1931). N. Popovschi considers the setting of a limit on the number of priests per parish as being a progressive measure carried out by Bodoni, in comparison with the lack of order and the chaos that existed before that.
6. Constantin N. Tomescu, "Diferite știri din arhiva Consiliului eparhial Chișinău," *Arhivele Basarabiei* (Chișinău) 9, 1–4 (1937): 19.
7. Grigore Costin, "Un reprezentant de frunte al clerului românesc basarabean: mitropolitul Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni (1746–1821)," accessed 5 March 2020, http://www.dacoromania-alba.ro/nr49/un_reprezentant.htm.
8. More so, insisting on the opening of an Eparchy Publishing House and on the printing of religious books in the "Moldovan" language, Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni had to petition the Holy Synod to print the religious books under the Moldavian customs. The major difference that the archbishop pointed out were the differences existing between the Romanian and the Russian Orthodox tradition, for which reason he requested the printing of church books, following the old canons of the land, presumably in order not to alienate and not to cause opposition among the locals. Unfortunately, these requests were met only during Bănulescu-Bodoni's life.
9. Igor Cereteu, "Contribuție la bibliografia românească veche: Rânduiala panhidei familiei împărățești, Chișinău, 1818," *Apulum* (Alba Iulia) 56 (2019): 177–182.
10. Chifăr.
11. The first religious book published in 1815 in Chișinău was the *Litourgikon* (The book of divine services for the priest and deacon), decorated with engravings and vignettes, after the model of old Romanian printings. Then *The Catechism* (1816) was published, a translation of the *Catechism* written by Archbishop Platon Levsin of Moscow, printed in 1775. Then came *The Book of Prayers* (1815, 1816), *The Horologion* (1817), *The Psalter* (1818), *Menaion* (1819), *The Prayer Book* (1820), etc. Total circulation for each book was 1,200 copies, except for *The Psalter*, of which 1,600 copies were printed. See: Ștefan Ciobanu, *Cultura românească în Basarabia sub stăpânirea rusă* (Chișinău: Editura "Asociației Uniunea Culturală Bisericească din Chișinău," 1923), 37–51.
12. <http://www.moldavica.bnrm.md/biblielmo?e=d-01000-00---off-0carti--00-1----0-10-0---0---0direct-10---4-----0-11--11-ro-50---20-about---00-3-1-00-0-0-11-1-0utfZz-8-00&a=d&ccl=CL1.2&d=JD4264.3>, accessed 10 May 2020.
13. Some historians support the idea that Archbishop Gavriil founded this school as early as 1812 when he was in Iași. As he was preparing to move to Chișinău, he had this idea because of the local seminary. By order of 20 September 1812, Archbishop Gavriil opened, for the time being, just 2 classrooms: preparatory and "grammatical" (see Chifăr).

14. Boris Buzilă, *Din istoria vieții bisericesti din Basarabia (1812–1918, 1918–1944)*, foreword by Antonie Plămădeală (Chișinău: Editura Fundației Culturale Române; Întreprinderea Editorial-Poligrafică Știința, 1996), 182.
15. Dinu Poștarenco, *O istorie a Basarabiei în date și documente (1812–1840)* (Chișinău: Cartier, 1998), 11.
16. Iosif Parhomovich, “A Brief Historical Sketch of the Anti-Raskolniks Mission in Chișinău from 1813 until 1910” (in Russian), in *Trudy Bessarabskogo tserkovnogo istoriko-arheologicheskogo obshchestva*, vol. 3 (Chișinău, 1910), 13. We cannot say anything about T. Karasev’s successes, except maybe for the passing in 1838 of all parishioners of the Church of the Holy Veil (Deposition of the Robe) from an Only faith Church to Orthodoxy, which was credited to him.
17. Cf. Ion Gumenăi, *Comunitățile romano-catolice, protestante și lipovenesti din Basarabia în secolul al XIX-lea* (Chișinău: Lexon Prim, 2016).
18. Teodor Candu, “Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni—unele aspecte ale politicii monahale în perioada 1806–1812,” in *Tradiții istorice românești și perspective europene: În onoare academician Ioan-Aurel Pop*, edited by Sorin Șipoș, Dan Octavian Ceprăga, and Ion Gumenăi (Oradea: Editura Universității din Oradea; Chișinău: Editura Universității de Stat din Moldova, 2015), 250–274.
19. <https://orasulmeuChișinău.wordpress.com/2011/03/09/mitropolitul-Dimitrie-Sulima/>.
20. Daniil Sulima was born in 1772, in Novaya Vodolga in Kharkov Governorate. His family was well known in Malorossiya (Little Russia) for bravery in the military campaigns of olden times. He studied in Kharkov at a college and at the theological seminary in Ekaterinoslav. In 1795 he graduated from the seminary and became professor at the seminary. In 1798 he was promoted to the position of prefect, and after a year he was ordained as a priest. In 1800, he was again promoted, this time to the rank of parish priest and transferred to the Boguslavsk cathedral, in the eparchy of Kyiv. Later, in 1806, he was transferred to the Admiralty Cathedral in Nikolayev, with his appointment as a professor at the Navigation School in the same town. During this period he was tasked with carrying out various missions in the Romanian Principalities, predominantly in Iași. By 1811 he was elected as a member of the consistory. After the death of his wife, in the same year, Daniil Sulima was nominated to become bishop of Bender and Akkerman, a vicariate of the Moldovan Metropolitan Church. On 17 April 1817, he received this nomination, and in May he was ordained into monkhood with the name of Dimitrie, on 13 June nominated, and on 16 June ordained/consecrated as bishop. He continued his activity in the eparchy founded by Archbishop Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni for the rest of his life. On 11 June he was elevated to the rank of archbishop and appointed to lead the Chișinău and Khotyn eparchy until he died in 1844. According to https://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enc_biography/20594/%D0%94%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%B8%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B9, accessed 20 May 2020.
21. Cf. *The Charter of the Spiritual Consistory* (in Russian) (Saint Petersburg: Synod Publishing House, 1843), 7.
22. Popovschi, 38–39.
23. Mircea Păcurariu, *Basarabia: Aspecte din istoria Bisericii și a neamului românesc* (Iași: Trinitas, Editura Mitropoliei Moldovei și Bucovinei, 1993), 67.
24. *Ibid.*, 66.
25. A. Silin, “Archbishop Dimitrie Sulima” (in Russian), *Kishinverskie Eparhial’nye Vedomosti* 20 (15 Apr. 1868): 454.

26. Chifăr.
27. Păcurariu, 64–65.
28. Paul Mihailovici, *Țipărituri românești în Basarabia de la 1812 până la 1918* (Bucharest: Monitorul Oficial și Imprimeriile Statului, Imprimeria Națională, 1940), 4.
29. Silin, 496–497.
30. Parhomovich, 15.
31. Irinarh Popov was born in 1790 in the village of Dolgoe, in Kursk County, in the family of a priest. In 1804 he began his studies at the Seminary in Kursk, and in 1814 was admitted to the Theological Academy of Saint Petersburg. On 1 July 1817 was ordained as a monk, and on 6 August of the same year was anointed as monk-deacon. The following year he was appointed as an inspector at the Theological Seminary in Orel and raised to the rank of magister in September of the same year. Between 1818 and 1831 carried out a series of missions to Italy. In 1831 he was summoned back and appointed as archimandrite of the Tolgsk monastery in Yaroslav. Two years later he was again sent abroad on a mission, this time to Greece. He returned in 1835 and was awarded the Order of St. Vladimir, Third Class. On 3 May 1836, was consecrated as bishop of the Vicariate of Staretsa of Tver Eparchy. On 15 September 1836 he became bishop of Riga and vicar of Pskov bishops. Here, he carried out an intense activity aimed at converting Old Believers to either the Orthodox Church or to the Omopist Church. At the same time, he carried out an active policy of converting the Latvians to the Christian Orthodox faith, which arose the dissatisfaction of the German landlords in the region. Because of the reports and complaints submitted by the latter, he was fired from his post and he had to leave Riga. On 7 October 1841 he was appointed as vicar bishop of Ostrogorsk in the Voronezh Eparchy, and the following year, he was appointed as bishop of Vologodsky Eparchy. On 12 November 1844, he was appointed as bishop of the Chișinău and Khotyn Eparchy, and on 15 April 1845, he was raised to the rank of archbishop. In 1858 he was transferred to the episcopal chair at Kamensk-Podolsk, and in 1863 to that of Ryazan. He passed away on 25 September 1877. <https://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/ruwiki/34432>, accessed 20 May 2020.
32. N. A. Protasov founded a series of new institutions and eliminated many of the roles played by the synod, which became just a simple body of the central state authority, a strictly bureaucratic body which dealt only with church administrative affairs and not with the spiritual life of the clergy and the laity. See Păcurariu, 68.
33. G. Evfimov, “Brief Biographical Information about His Holiness Irinarh Archbishop of Chișinău and the State of Affairs at Chișinău Eparchy during his Tenure” (in Russian), *Journal of the Church Historical and Archaeological Society of Bessarabia* 6 (1911): 14–16.
34. *Ibid.*, 23–24.
35. Ion Gumenăi, “Aspecte ale vieții religioase în Basarabia în secolul al XIX-lea,” in *Basarabia după 200 de ani: Lucrările Conferinței Internaționale “Basarabia după 200 de ani” Iași, 12 mai 2012*, edited by Mihail Baciu and Silvia Bocancea (Iași: Institutul European, 2012), 233–255.
36. Popovschi, 53–54.
37. Nicolae Fustei, “Arhiepiscopul Irinarh Popov,” *Curierul ortodox* (Chișinău) 8 (2013): 6.
38. Chifăr, 149.

Abstract**The Eastern Orthodox Church in Bessarabia: Uniformization and Russification Processes in the First Half of the 19th Century**

The topic, approached from a diachronic point of view, focuses on the pastorate of the diocese led by Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni, Dimitrie Sulima and Irinarh Popov. In this period, both the policy of the tsarist authorities and the actions of the diocesan leaders tried to completely transform the institution of the Orthodox Church in Bessarabia into an instrument similar to the Russian Orthodox Church, which was primarily intended to fulfill the function of Russification. The black-and-white treatment of the role of the Orthodox Church in the history of Bessarabia did not allow highlighting all the nuances related to the role of this institution and its leaders for the spiritual-cultural life in the region. For these reasons, we propose an analysis of the behavior of the three leaders of the ecclesiastical-administrative unit established in 1813, and their vacillation between the local Orthodox tradition and the requirements and pressures coming from the leadership of the Russian Empire. These eventually led to the establishment of a hybrid “body”—a Romanian-Russian Church (we refer to the existence in the Orthodox Church in Bessarabia of a majority of Romanian believers and of a Russian imperial Church and administrative leadership). A meticulous analysis of the actions undertaken by either Bodoni or Popov is quite necessary, both in terms of their sympathies with the Romanian parishioners and in terms of personal interests and the fulfillment of instructions received from the Holy Synod of St. Petersburg, as an exponent of the autocratic regime.

Keywords

Bessarabia, Orthodox Church, Gavriil Bădulescu-Bodoni, Dimitrie Sulima, Irinarh Popov