

**THE EVOLUTION OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES
IN BESSARABIA'S KHOTYN COUNTY (1812-1868):
BETWEEN FREEDOM OF WORSHIP
AND THE TSARIST GOVERNMENT'S POLICY**

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Abstract. *The study examines how the Russian Empire annexation of Bessarabia province affected the confessional structure of its northern part, bordered by the Habsburg Empire (from 1867, Austria-Hungary) and the Land of Moldavia (since 1861, Romania). The author demonstrates how, under the impact of colonization and immigration, the quasi-exclusively Orthodox nature of the region alters in intensity to a certain extent. Thus, during the first half of Tsarist rule, significant elements of the confessional structure turned into the Mosaic community, the Roman Catholic one, and certain sects separated from the Orthodox Church. Even though the Russian authorities pursued the “divide et impera” approach nationally, the geopolitical uniqueness of Bessarabia, as well as the Orthodox population’s tolerance, ensured a non-conflicting cohabitation of Christian cults and Mosaic or Lipovans.*

Keywords: *religion, ethnic communities, Bessarabia, Khotyn, worship, Orthodox, Roman-Catholic, Mosaic, Lipovan.*

Rezumat. Evoluția comunităților religioase în ținutul Hotin al Basarabiei (1812-1868): între libertatea cultului și politica guvernului țarist. *Studiul prezintă felul în care anexarea Basarabiei de către Imperiul Rus a afectat structura confesională a părții de nord a provinciei, situată la granița cu Imperiul Habsburgic (din 1867, Austro-Ungaria) și Țara Moldovei (din 1862, România). Autoarea arată cum, sub impactul colonizărilor și imigrărilor, caracterul cvasi-exclusiv ortodox al regiunii își modifică într-o anumită măsură intensitatea. Astfel, în prima jumătate de stăpânire țaristă, elemente importante ale structurii confesionale au devenit comunitatea mozaică, cea romano-catolică, dar și unele secte desprinse din sânul Bisericii Ortodoxe. Chiar dacă, la nivel central, autoritățile ruse au practicat politica „divide et impera”, specificul geopolitic al Basarabiei, toleranța populației*

ortodoxe au determinat o conviețuire neconflictuală atât între cultele creștine, cât și între acestea și cel mozaic ori cel al lipovenilor.

INTRODUCTION

Regional history is inextricably linked to the study of unique socio-cultural processes in which the church and religious life play a vital role. The northern counties of Bessarabia, the province annexed by the Russian Empire in 1812, were notable for their multicultural and religious composition of different nationalities coexisting peacefully: Romanians, Rusyns, Jews, Poles, Armenians, Germans, Greeks, and others. At the same time, it should be noted that in 1715, the territory of Khotyn was seized from the Ruler of Moldavia's authority and transformed into a Turkish raya, along with the Fortress of Khotyn. This had both demographic and religious implications. Until 1757-1758, the Orthodox communities were administered by the diocese of Radauti, before being assigned to the diocese of Proilava (Brăila).¹ After the split from the Land of Moldavia, the Tsarist authorities established the Archdiocese of Chisinau and Khotyn, encompassing the entire territory between the Prut and the Dniester.²

Several different features determined the history of religious life in Bessarabia's northern region. Apart from the influence of Ottoman rule (1715-1806) on the economic and cultural development of the Khotyn district in this part of Moldavia, this region has had a significant Slavic presence since the Middle Ages. In addition, unlike the centre and particularly the south of Bessarabia, no colony was founded in the northern part of the province after 1812, resulting in a less diverse ethnic and religious structure of the population. The study examines the time frame between the annexation of Bessarabia to the tsarist empire and the introduction of the first religious reform measures (1867-1868), under the reign of Tsar Alexander II.

Several studies have been published on the history of the Bessarabian Orthodox Church, the first dating back to the 19th century. Contemporaries, describing the Bessarabian territories based on their observations and according

¹ Nicolae Popovschi, *Istoria Bisericii din Basarabia în veacul al XIX-lea sub ruși. Din negura trecutului: crâmpene de amintiri* [History of the Church in Bessarabia in the 19th century under the Russians. From the fog of the past: crumbs of memories], Ediție îngrijită de Iurie Colesnic, Chișinău, Museum, 2000, p. 25.

² Ștefan Purici, *Istoria Basarabiei. Note de curs* [History of Bessarabia. Course notes], București, Editura Semne, 2011, p. 67.

to local authorities, provided a lot of information about the counties of Bessarabia. In particular, the *Statistics of Bessarabia*³, prepared in 1817 on behalf of the military governor Bakhmetyev by Pavel Svinin, an officer of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, provides detailed information about this topic. The author presents some data on the number of church parishes in the northern Bessarabian territories. A. Afanasyev-Chuzhbinsky presents various aspects of the life of Russian Old Believers – Lipovans, who were known as dissenters in Bessarabia⁴. The author focused on describing the Old Believer communities of Khotyn County in his historical and journalistic essay, which illustrated the ethnonational features of the settlements of the north part of Bessarabia.

Interesting statistical information of the first years of the region's annexation by the Russian Empire can be found in the fundamental work of Alexis Nakko⁵. The researcher praises the measures taken by the new government in the occupied territories, emphasizing that they contributed to the rapid settlement of the Bessarabian counties by people of different religions who fled the Prut during recent wars. General Staff officer A. Zashchuk's descriptions of the Bessarabian region are essential for the study of the region's church and religious life.⁶ The author provides a quantitative description of the ethnic composition of the Bessarabian counties' urban and rural populations

³ [Pavel Svinin], *Statistika Bessarabii. Sostavil nadvornyy sovetnik Svin'in po porucheniyu voyennogo gubernatora Bakhmet'yeva* [rukopis'; Kishinev, 1817] [Statistics of Bessarabia. Compiled by the court councilor Svinin on behalf of the military governor Bakhmetyev [manuscript; Kishinev, 1817], in Instytut rukopysu Natsyonal'noyi biblioteky Ukrayiny imeni V. I. Vernads'koho [Manuscript Institute of the V. I. Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine], Fond 5, sprava № 667, 187 ark. [Fund 5, case 667, 187 sheets].

⁴ A. Afanas'yev-Chuzhbinskiy, *Poyezdka v Yuzhnyuyu Rossiyu [Trip to South Russia]*, Часть II, *Ocherki Dnestra* [Essays on the Dniester], Sankt-Peterburg, 1863.

⁵ Aleksei Nakko, *Bessarabskaya oblast'. So vremeni prisoyedineniya yeya k Rossii po Bukarestskomu miru 1812-go goda. V istoricheskom, ekonomicheskom i statisticheskom otnosheniyakh* [rukopis'; Kishinev, 1879] [Bessarabian region. From the time of its accession to Russia according to the Bucharest Peace Treaty of 1812. Historically, economically and statistically [manuscript; Kishinev, 1879]], in http://rarebook.onu.edu.ua:8081/bitstream/store/2173/2/78_3693.pdf (Accessed on 14.10.2020).

⁶ A. Zashchuk, *Materialy dlya geografii i statistiki Rossii, sobrannyye ofitserami General'nogo shtaba. Bessarabskaya oblast'*. Chasti I-II [Materials for geography and statistics of Russia, collected by officers of the General Staff. Bessarabian region. Parts I-II], Sankt Peterburg, 1862.

while also revealing statistical data on the state of the clergy, Orthodox prayer facilities, and religions in the region.

The Central Statistical Committee of the Ministry of Internal Affairs provides information about the religious denominations of the population in Vol. 3 "Bessarabian region," under the general editorship of A. Artemyev.⁷

Notes of the Bessarabian Regional Statistical Committee edited by A. Yegunov (Vol. 1)⁸ and *Notes of the Odessa Society of History and Antiquities* (Vol. 5, 6)⁹ are of great interest. In addition to statistics of population, these volumes contain a description of individual church communities in Bessarabia. *Proceedings of the Bessarabian Provincial Scientific Archival Commission* (Vol. 2, 3) edited by Ion Halippa, which contains solid statistical materials on the history of the region according to the first censuses, must be mentioned among the antebellum publications¹⁰. Arsenii Stadnitskii¹¹, Zamfir Arbore¹², Petre Cazacu¹³, Ștefan Ciobanu¹⁴, Alexandru Boldur¹⁵, Nicolae Popovschi¹⁶ and others have also studied church topics to some extent. The periodical press of the time provides extensive

⁷ A. Artemiev (red.), *Spiski naseleennykh mest Rossiyskoy imperii, sostavlennyye i izdavayemyye Tsentral'nyim statisticheskim komitetom Ministerstva vnutrennikh del. Tom 3, Bessarabskaya oblast'* [Lists of inhabited places of the Russian Empire, compiled and published by the Central Statistical Committee of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Vol. 3, Bessarabian region], Sankt-Peterburg, 1861.

⁸ A. N. Yegunov (red.), *Zapiski Bessarabskogo oblastnogo statisticheskogo komiteta*, Tom I [Notes of the Bessarabian Regional Statistical Committee, Volume I], Kishinev, 1864.

⁹ *Zapiski Odesskogo obshchestva istorii i drevnostey* [Notes of the Odessa Society of History and Antiquities], Odessa, Tom 5, 1863; Tom 6, 1867.

¹⁰ I. N. Halippa (red.), *Trudy Bessarabskoy gubernskoy uchenoy arkhivnoy komissii* [Proceedings of the Bessarabian Provincial Scientific Archive Commission], Kishinev, Tom 2, 1902; Tom 3, 1907.

¹¹ Arsenii, *Issledovaniia i monografii po istorii moldavskoi tserkvi* [Studies and monographs on the history of the Moldavian Church], St. Petersburg, Vaisberg i Gerivunin, 1904.

¹² Zamfir C. Arbure, *Basarabia în secolul al XIX-lea* [Bessarabia in the 19th century], București, 1898.

¹³ Petre Cazacu, *Moldova dintre Prut și Nistru, 1812-1918* [Moldova between the Prut and the Dniester, 1812-1918], Iași, Viața românească, 1924.

¹⁴ Ștefan Ciobanu, *Cultura românească în Basarabia sub stăpanirea rusă* [Romanian culture in Bessarabia under Russian rule], Chișinău, 1923.

¹⁵ Alexandru Boldur, *Autonomia Basarabiei sub stăpânire rusească în 1812-1828. Studiu* [Autonomy of Bessarabia under Russian rule in 1812-1828. Study], Chișinău, Tipografia Eparhială. Cartea Românească, 1929.

¹⁶ Nicolae Popovschi, *op. cit.*

information on Bessarabia's socio-cultural dynamics. The "Chisinau eparchial bulletin" is particularly noteworthy.¹⁷

It should be noted that some of the aforementioned authors' statistical data is contradictory, requiring verification with archival materials and other sources. However, these inaccuracies do not diminish their value as comprehensive resources on the history of the region.

The study of the region's church and religious life in Soviet historiography was done in the context of Bessarabia's socio-cultural development; hence, there are no unique scientific works on this topic. Moldovan soviet historians Yakim Grosul and Ion Budak,¹⁸ as well as Vladimir Kabuzan¹⁹ made brief references to the topic.

With the fall of communism, it became easier to look into Bessarabia's past without being constrained by the ideology of the party. Modern Moldovan and Romanian historians using innovative methodological approaches to investigate the socio-cultural processes in the Bessarabian counties, particularly Anton Moraru²⁰ and Boris Buzilă²¹, are worth mentioning. Many aspects of religious life in the research region are revealed in the volumes of Valentin Tomuleț, which investigate various parts of Bessarabia's history in the nineteenth century.²² The

¹⁷ "Kishinevskiye yeparkhial'nyye vedomosti" [Chisinau eparchial bulletin], Kishinev, 1867, 1880, 1899.

¹⁸ Ya. Grosul, I. Budak, *Ocherki istorii narodnogo khozyaystva Bessarabii (1812-1861 gg.)* [Essays on the history of the national economy of Bessarabia (1812-1861)], Kishinev, 1967.

¹⁹ V. M. Kabuzan, *Narodonaseleniye Bessarabskoy oblasti i levoberezhnikh rayonov Pridnestrov'ya (konets XVIII – pervaya polovina XIX v.)* [Population of the Bessarabian region and left-bank districts of Transnistria (late 18th - first half of the 19th century)], Kishinev, 1974.

²⁰ Anton Moraru, *Istoria românilor. Basarabia și Transnistria (1812-1993)* [The history of the Romanians. Bessarabia and Transnistria (1812-1993)], Chișinău, 1995.

²¹ Boris Buzilă, *Din istoria vieții bisericești din Basarabia (1812-1918; 1918-1944)* [From the history of church life in Bessarabia (1812-1918; 1918-1944)], Chișinău, Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1996.

²² Valentin Tomuleț, *Basarabia în epoca modernă (1812-1918) (Instituții, regulamente, termeni)*, vol. I-III [Bessarabia in the modern era (1812-1918) (Institutions, regulations, terms), Vol. I-III], Chișinău, 2011; Idem, *Ținutul Hotin în surse statistice rusești din prima jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea*, Ediția a II-a, prescurtată [Hotin County in Russian Statistical Sources from the First Half of the 19th Century. Second Edition, shortened], Chișinău, CEP USM, 2018.

works of Lucheria Repida²³ or Vasile Stati approach the Bessarabian topics through “Moldovanism” perspectives.²⁴

The collective work of the Romanian and Moldavian historians Ioan Scurtu, Dumitru Almaş, Armand Goşu, Ion Pavelescu, Gheorghe I. Ioniţă, Ion Şişcanu, Nicolae Enciu, and Gheorghe E. Cojocaru²⁵ substantiates the assessment of the political, social, and cultural effects of the Prut-Dniester interfluvium's accession to the Russian Empire for the region's inhabitants. The evolution of the Orthodox Church in the context of the cultural development of Bessarabia, the role of priests in promoting education among the masses, as well as the religious policy of the Tsarist administration are analysed in the study signed by Mircea Păcurariu²⁶. The studies published by Paul Cernovodeanu²⁷ or Ştefan Purici²⁸ demonstrate a specific interest in reflecting on the researched topic.

There is a growing interest in the history of the region under study in modern Ukrainian historiography. The collective work of Chernivtsi scholars *Bukovyna: A Historical Essay*²⁹, in particular, provides a general description of the faiths in the Khotyn region, part of one of the Bessarabia's former northern counties. One of the chapters of the volume *Khotyn Region*³⁰ briefly mentions the Russian Old Believers who lived in some settlements of Khotyn County.

However, the study of church and religious life in the northern Bessarabian region is impossible without the analytical use of archival and other relevant materials. The materials of the National Archives of the Republic of Moldova

²³ L. Repida, *Suverennaya Moldova: istoriya i sovremennost'*, [Sovereign Moldova: history and modernity], Kishinev, IPF Tsentral'naya tipografiya, 2008.

²⁴ Vasile Stati, *Istoria Moldovei* [History of Moldova], Chişinău, Vivar-Editor, 2002.

²⁵ Ioan Scurtu, Dumitru Almaş, Armand Goşu et al., *Istoria Basarabiei, de la începuturi până în 2003* [History of Bessarabia, from the beginning to 2003], Ediţia a 3-a, revăzută şi adăugită, Bucureşti, Editura Institutului Cultural Român, 2003.

²⁶ Mircea Păcurariu, *Basarabia. Aspecte din istoria Bisericii şi a neamului românesc* [Bessarabia. Aspects from the history of the Church and of the Romanian nation], Iaşi, Editura Mitropoliei Moldovei şi Bucovinei, 1993 (2012).

²⁷ Paul Cernovodeanu, *Basarabia: drama unei provincii istorice româneşti în context politic internaţional 1806-1920* [Bessarabia: the drama of a historical province in the international political context 1806-1920], Bucureşti: Editura Albatros, 1993.

²⁸ Ştefan Purici, *op. cit.*

²⁹ V. Botushansky (Ed.), *Bukovyna: istorychnyy narys* [Bukovina: A Historical Essay], Chernivtsi, 1998.

³⁰ Oleksandr Dobrzhans'kyy, Yuriy Makar, Oleksandr Masan, *Khotynshchyna: istorychnyy narys* [Khotyn Region: A Historical Essay], Chernivtsi, Molodyy bukovynets', 2002.

(NARM), the State Archives of the Odesa region (DAOO), and the State Archives of the Chernivtsi region (DACHO) are all important resources for this research.

PECULIARITIES OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC AND ETHNO-CONFESSIONAL SITUATION IN THE NORTHERN PART OF BESSARABIA

The Bucharest Peace Treaty of May 16, 1812, opened a new page in the history of Moldavian Principality. The lands between the Dniester and the Prut, including the former Khotyn *raya*, became the property of the Romanov Empire. The entire newly annexed territory, which during the Russo-Turkish War of 1806-1812 remained a part of Moldavia, "scattered" on the left bank of the Prut, was given the administrative name "Bessarabia", and its inhabitants - the status of subjects of the empire.³¹

The annexation of the Prut-Dniester region to the Romanov Empire contributed to the dynamic growth of the Bessarabian population. There were quite important conditions for this: the presence of a large array of vacant lands, the absence of serfdom in the Bessarabian territory and the religious tolerance of local authorities. Therefore, there was a significant number of refugees - serfs from other provinces of the Russian Empire³² among the numerous flows of migrants.

In contrast to the central part of Bessarabia (Soroca, Iași, Orhei, Chișinău) and the south of the region (Bender, Ismail, Akkerman counties), this area had exhibited some national features. The geographical proximity and the greater freedoms of the inhabitants of Moldavia facilitated the relocation of a significant number of Ukrainians from Habsburg Galicia and Tsarist Podolia to the county of Khotyn. According to demographic calculations, in 1774, about 31,335 people lived on this land in the northern part of Bessarabia, of which 59.9 per cent were Romanians, 35.7 per cent were Ruthenians, 3.6 per cent Jews and 0.8 per cent Roma.³³ Annexation to Russia generated a significant migratory phenomenon (there was no serfdom in Bessarabia, but serfdom reigned throughout the Tsarist Empire), and in 1818 the population of Khotyn County was 47.5 per cent Romanians and 42.6 per cent Ukrainians.³⁴ Russian statistics and official reports from the early 1960s show that in 1862, 163,136 people lived in the northernmost

³¹ National Archive Republic Moldova (NARM), Fond 1, List 1, File. 3995, p. 11-14.

³² Oleksandr Dobrzhans'kyy, Yuriy Makar, Oleksandr Masan, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

³³ Constantin Ungureanu, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

³⁴ V. Kabuzan, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

district of Bessarabia, of which 78,951 (48.4%) were Ukrainians, 54,413 (33.3%) Romanians, 23,572 (14.4%) Jews, 2,912 (1.8%) Russians, 1,707 (1.0%) Poles, 928 (0.6%) Roma, 537 (0.3%) Germans, 71 Armenians, 39 Greeks and 6 Belarusians.³⁵

Data on the evolution of the population regarding religious denominations are very scarce and sometimes inaccurate. Thus, in the middle of the 19th century, out of the total 932,511 inhabitants of Bessarabia³⁶, according to the estimates of the historian Ion Gumenâi, 23,073 Lutherans, 8,000 Catholics, 42,380 Mosaics, 6,389 Lipovans, 2,353 Armenians, 435 Molokans*,³⁷ lived in the province. That is, in the years 1850-1852, the largest community was the Orthodox, which included 852,276 people (91.4%), and 80,235 Bessarabians (8.6%) belonged to other cults and denominations. In Khotyn county, in the 1960s, Orthodox made up about 84 per cent of the total population, while other denominations about 16 per cent, most of whom were Mosaics (14.45%) and Roman Catholics (1, 05%).³⁸

Given the historical past of the region, the new imperial government sought to turn the newly connected lands into a rich province, where there would be a fatherly and generous rule based on Moldavian rights and customs. All reorganization changes were carried out carefully to avoid the negative impact of the neighbouring Ottoman Empire on the diverse population. By allowing the use of Moldovan alongside Russian as the official language of government, the Temporary Government of Bessarabia pursued the goal of convincing the united and neighbouring peoples that the entire internal life of the region was built according to "its own rules."³⁹

It should be emphasized that Bessarabia's border position required Russian tsarism to pursue a balanced policy in the newly connected territory as a basis for

³⁵ Constantin Ungureanu, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

* Sect detached from the Russian Orthodox Church. Due to the fact that during the Orthodox fast the members of the community accepted the consumption of milk, the sect was called the Molocans (moloko - milk).

³⁷ Ion Gumenâi, *Raporturile dintre populația autohtonă a Basarabiei și minoritățile confessionale în prima jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea* [The relations between the native population of Bessarabia and the confessional minorities in the first half of the 19th century], in George Enache, Arthur Tuluș, Cristian-Dragoș Căldăraru, Eugen Drăgoi (Eds.), *La frontierele civilizațiilor. Basarabia în context geopolitic, economic, cultural și religios* [At the frontiers of civilizations. Bessarabia in a geopolitical, economic, cultural and religious context], Galați, Editura Partener and Galati University Press, 2011, p. 48-49.

³⁸ See Constantin Ungureanu, *op. cit.*, p. 287-288.

³⁹ A. Nakko, *op. cit.*, pp. 2, 6.

further imperial domestic policy.

IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIFIED PRINCIPLES OF IMPERIAL AUTHORITY

Simultaneously with the beginning of administrative changes in the region, according to the order of Emperor Alexander I, the Chişinău-Khotyn diocese was founded in 1813 under the management of Exarch-Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni (1813-1821). Accordingly, the diocese was divided into ten deaneries, which spread among the population of the region the belief in "favourable changes" under the rule of all-Russian monarchs.⁴⁰ Metropolitan Gavriil proceeded to integrate elements of organization and cult practices borrowed from the Russian Church into the "Moldavian" Church. Teachers from Russia were brought in to teach future clergymen in Bessarabia. Priests were required to mention the Russian imperial family during divine service.⁴¹

Archbishop Dmitry Sulima (1821-1844) urged the boyars-landlords to be friendly to courtiers, tsars and ointments who settled on their lands so that they might see the positive changes in their destinies under the sceptre of the all-Russian monarch and become closer to the Russians.⁴² In addition, the Bessarabian clergy had to spread among the inhabitants of the region, especially among Muslims, that the Orthodox faith was better.⁴³

During the first year after the annexation of Bessarabia to the Russian Empire, the social and legal position of all clergy and their widows changed accordingly. It should be noted that the Bessarabian clergy was divided into 'white' (priests, archpriests, archpriests, presbyters, priests, anti-deacons, deacons, as well as deacons-novices, monks, psalmists and others) and 'black' (metropolitans, archbishops, abbots, abbots-novices).⁴⁴ From August 1813, they were exempted from paying state taxes and public duties. The "Statute of the Bessarabian Region" (1818) referred to the Orthodox clergy as a privileged class. Its representatives received the same rights as the Russian clergy and were exempted not only from paying all taxes and duties but also from military service.

⁴⁰ *Ocherk grazhdanskogo ustroystva Bessarabskoy oblasti v 1812-1828 gg.* [Essay of the civil structure of the Bessarabian region in 1812-1828] in *Записки Одесского имперского общества истории и древностей*, Одесса, 1900, Т. XXII, с. 13; "Кишиневские епархиальные ведомости" [Chisinau eparchial bulletin], 1867, № 3, с. 99.

⁴¹ Boris Buzilă, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁴² "Kishinevskiye yeparkhial'nyye vedomosti" [Chisinau eparchial bulletin], 1867, № 3, p. 95.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, № 8, p. 283-284.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

At the same time, the clergy must supervise the condition of bridges, lanterns, etc. It should be also noted that local duties were paid only by Old Believer monks who had no right to own real estate.⁴⁵

The other cults and denominations, on the other hand, experienced a reasonably favourable development until the middle of the 19th century. Unlike the rest of the empire, Bessarabia established a policy of tolerance towards the unorthodox, even allowing them some privileges. Interested, for example, in the colonization of Bessarabia by the Germans, the Tsarist authorities granted various privileges to members of this community, including the freedom to establish Protestant churches, to hire clerics, to practice their own religion without constraint and to establish confessional schools.⁴⁶ Bulgarians and Gagauz, especially in southern Bessarabia, were also guaranteed freedom of worship.⁴⁷ The Mosaics, which in 1856 formed a population of 78,751 people, enjoyed for several decades the fact that Russian anti-Jewish legislation was not applied in Bessarabia and managed to build the great synagogue in Chisinau and set up a confessional school.⁴⁸ The Mosaic community of Bessarabia already had 37 synagogues with 25 rabbis and 89 confessional schools with 235 professors in 1836, according to official data, for a population of 46,287 people.⁴⁹

FORMATION OF POLY-CONFESSIONAL NORTHERN COUNTIES OF BESSARABIA

The first statistical data on the number of churches and clergy in the northern counties of Bessarabia after the region entered the Russian Empire dates back to 1813. In particular, according to archival data at that time in Khotyn, there were 3 churches, 3 priests, and in Khotyn County - 153 churches and 243 clergymen.⁵⁰ According to the statistical data for 1817 published by Ion Halippa,

⁴⁵ *Svod zakonov Rossiyskoy imperii* [Code of laws of the Russian Empire], Sankt Peterburg, 1867, T. 9, c. 59.

⁴⁶ Luminița Fassel, *Das deutsche Schulwesen in Bessarabien (1812-1940)*, München, Verlag Südostdeutsches Kulturwerk, 2000, S. 20.

⁴⁷ Ștefan Purici, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁴⁹ Ion Gumenâi, *Evoluția demografică a minorităților confesionale din Basarabia. Statistici din al doilea sfert al secolului XIX* [The demographic evolution of the confessional minorities in Bessarabia. Statistics from the second quarter of the 19th century], in "Archiva Moldaviae", V, 2013, p. 174.

⁵⁰ NARM, Fond 5, List 2, File 398, p. 15-16.

in Khotyn county there were 240 priests and 46 widows of the clergy, 201 deacons, 157 sacristans.⁵¹ Somewhat different statistics are given for the same year by Pavel Svin'in, who claimed that this northern county had 226 priests, 3 archpriests, and 292 sacristans.⁵² At the same time, according to archival data, 419 representatives of the clergy were recorded in the neighbouring Iasi district, and 635 priests in the Soroca district.⁵³ It should be noted that not all Bessarabia settlements had church wards, therefore there are no data on clergymen. In 1818, for example, only 29 villages out of 58 rural communities in Khotyn County had churches.⁵⁴

The growth of the region's population certainly influenced the dynamics of the number of clergies in each county of Bessarabia. For example, in 1828 in Balti County there were 999 representatives of this social group, including 849 'white' and 133 'black' clergymen, 17 deacons, which was 0.9 per cent of the county's population. Respectively, there were 582 'white' and 39 'black' clergy and 17 deacons in Khotyn County, which was 0.5 per cent of the county's population.⁵⁵ In general, in the two northern Bessarabian counties, according to archival sources, the clergy accounted for 0.7 per cent of the region's population.

It should be emphasized that the vast majority of the population in the northern Bessarabian lands were parishioners of the Eastern Orthodox Church. During the first year of the Russian administration, there were 3 churches in Khotyn and 153 churches in Khotyn County. Accordingly, there are 2 churches in Soroca and 139 churches in Soroca County. At the end of the 1820s, there were 2,100 Orthodox parishioners in Khotyn, 110,230 in Khotyn County, 2,024 in Balti, and 97,308 in Iasi County, 211,662 people in the region. The above-mentioned number of parishioners during this period attended 224 churches in Iasi County, one church in Balti, 186 churches in Khotyn County, and two churches in Khotyn. The 410 church parishes in these three counties accounted for 50.3 per cent of all 815 Bessarabian churches.⁵⁶

The fast growth of the human population following immigration and colonization has resulted in a significant increase in the number of parishioners. According to a *catagraph* made by the Tsarist authorities in 1830, there were 11

⁵¹ I. N. Halippa (red.), *Trudy Bessarabskoy...*, T. III, p. 91-92.

⁵² [Svinin Pavel], *Statistika Bessarabii...*, p.135.

⁵³ Derzhavnyy arkhiv Odes'koyi oblasti [State Archive of Odessa Oblast], Fond 1, List 2, File 2, p. 90.

⁵⁴ NARM, Fond 5, List 3, File 554, p. 46.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Fond 2, List 2, File 1199, p. 67.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

stone churches, 171 wooden, one monastery and three Lipovan churches in the county of Khotyn, which had a population of 122,208 people.⁵⁷ However, according to the report submitted by the *ispravnik* of Khotyn County in 1835, there were 175 Orthodox churches, two churches of other Christian denominations and three synagogues in the rural area of this administrative district, served by 1,210 Orthodox priests and three rabbis.⁵⁸ And an official document drawn up in 1836 shows that there were two Orthodox churches, two non-Orthodox Christian churches and one synagogue in the city of Khotyn.⁵⁹

The Orthodox parishioners of the North Bessarabian churches were representatives of various social classes and layers of the population of the region. For example, there were 299 families of Orthodox parishioners in 1820 in the county town of Khotyn where 2028 people lived, including 39 nobles, 168 officials, 130 retired people, 17 state peasants and burghers. And 290 yards of Orthodox parishioners were recorded in the Klishkoutsi, the county' largest village, where 2268 state peasants (free peasants, who lived on their own or landed estates) and 3 nobles lived.⁶⁰

Archival sources at the time noted that irreligious people were absent from Orthodox parishes. At the same time, they emphasized that in the vast majority of churches the parishioners were poor people who could not donate according to the needs of the church. Honorary parishioners included large landowners-landlords, some of whom built churches on their estates and others have constantly supported the parish churches on their own.⁶¹

The Russian government did its utmost to promote and support the Orthodox faith among the inhabitants of the newly incorporated lands. The attitude of the authorities to the beliefs of the local population was quite liberal, as it was allowed to hold services in the Romanian language.⁶² At the same time, appropriate measures were introduced to promote active church attendance by the local population. Thus, for example, by the middle of the 19th century in the Bessarabia lands, local police were required to ensure that shops were not opened

⁵⁷ Ion Gumenâi, *Evoluția demografică...*, p. 167.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁶⁰ Derzhavnyy arkhiv Chernivets'koyi oblasti [State Archives of Chernivtsi Oblast – DACHO], Fond 605, List 1, File. 26, p. 11.

⁶¹ "Kishinevskiye yeparkhial'nyye vedomosti" [Chisinau eparchial bulletin], 1868, № 9, p. 61; № 10, p. 62.

⁶² Nicolae Popovschi, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

on Sundays and other holidays until the end of the liturgy in the parish churches.⁶³

At the same time, believers of other denominations were registered among the population of the region. In particular, Roman Catholics, of whom 1226 persons lived in the northern counties in 1828, accounting for 66.3 per cent of all Bessarabian Roman Catholics. Their largest representation is recorded in Khotyn - 569 people and Khotyn County - 484 people (for comparison: in Iasi County - 103 Roman Catholics, in Balti - 70 people).⁶⁴ It should be added that Poles, a small ethnic group in the northern Bessarabian lands, were among the representatives of the Roman Catholic religion. Their small groups settled in Nelipautsi, Markoutsy, Byrnova, Volchinetsy, and Lomachintsi of Khotyn district. In 1835, there were already 108 Poles in Khotyn who were members of the Roman Catholic Church, and 292 people in the county (for comparison: in Soroca County - 45 people, Balti - 96). The trend of dynamic growth of Roman Catholics among the inhabitants of the northern counties was observed throughout the first half of the 19th century. Poles lived mainly in Khotyn county villages in the 1850s, and in addition to the above-mentioned settlements, there were up to 800 people of both sexes in Bulboki, Romankivtsi, and Mykhailivka. For the most part, more than half of them belonged to the Roman Catholic faith.⁶⁵

The Mosaic was ranked second among religious communities in terms of quantity. The peculiarities of Tsarist policy in Bessarabia made the province an attractive region for Jews within Russia and even from neighbouring countries. The proportion of adherents of the Old Testament, the religion of the ancient Jews, increased in ascending order. Thus, 9,115 Jews were already registered in 1827 in 173 settlements of Khotyn County, while 1168 Jews were registered in Khotyn town in 1830, out of 1855 families.⁶⁶ Thus, in the northern part of Bessarabia, the cities of Bălți, Khotyn and the towns of Novoselitsa, Lipcani were inhabited mainly by Jews. By the early 1860s, there were 49,502 Jews in the north part of Bessarabia, representing 12.2 per cent of the area's population. This ethnic group remained the largest in Khotyn County - 20,307 people (for comparison: Soroca County - 13,824 Jews, Iași - 9,816).⁶⁷

⁶³ "Kishinevskiye yeparkhial'nyye vedomosti" [Chisinau eparchial bulletin], 1867, № 12, p. 127; № 13, p. 129.

⁶⁴ NARM, Fond 2, List 1, File 1199, p. 67.

⁶⁵ A. Zashchuk, *op. cit.*, Chasti I, p. 157.

⁶⁶ Ion Gumenâi, *Evoluția demografică...*, p. 169.

⁶⁷ A. N. Yegunov (red.), *Zapiski Bessarabskogo oblastnogo statisticheskogo komiteta*, Tom I, p. 91; *Zapiski Odesskogo obshchestva istorii i drevnostey* [Notes of the Odessa Society of History and Antiquities], Tom V, Odessa, 1863, p. 526, 528.

However, there were isolated cases of conversion of residents from one faith to another. This was especially the case for the Jews who were baptized in the Orthodox faith. This can be confirmed by one of the messages to the Chisinau Spiritual Consistory and the Bessarabian regional administration from the charitable 1st district of Iași county of the priest Pidhursky from December 1, 1862, which stated that Srul Pletner, the Atachi burgher from Khotyn County, was baptized and he was given the name Dmitry.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, the statistics of the time did not provide a generalized accurate fixation of all Jews.

Armenians - Austrian subjects who rented the estates of landlords and engaged in various trades more actively than the indigenous population made up a relatively modest percentage of the population of North Bessarabia during this era. After accepting Russian citizenship, Armenians received civil status, as did other residents of the region. Furthermore, before the region became a part of the Russian empire, there were only 16 Armenian families in the Khotyn town. In 1817, 170 people (34 families) already lived in the county, and in the 50s of the 19th century, there were 255 people. A smaller number of Armenians was recorded in Bălți and Soroca counties - 32 families. In general, in Bălți, Soroca and Khotyn they accounted for 0.9 per cent of the total population of Bessarabia's northern part.⁶⁹ The Armenians had their own community and church in Khotyn, which was subordinated to the patriarch of all the Armenians. Armenian Catholics settled in Khotyn and its district, as well as in Balti.⁷⁰

Along with the tolerant attitude towards non-orthodox peoples in Bessarabia, not only Old Believers but also representatives of various sects, who were mostly Russians, moved there. They were continuously in the line of sight of the official statistics of that time since they differed from the majority of Eastern Orthodox representatives in terms of religion. As a result, the most numerous in the region were the Old Believers-Popovtsi, or "Lipovans", who lived in the villages of Hrubna, Helishevca and Vitrianka of Khotyn County. They even had a convent in the latter. Old Believers-Lipovans lived separately and did not influence their Romanian or Ukrainian neighbours. In 1835, there were 264 Old Believers in Hrubna, 33 in Helishevca, 5 in Novoselitsa, and 17 schismatics who professed religion but did not recognize the priesthood. According to A. Afanasyev-Chuzhbynsky, the north-Bessarabian dissenters were a closed community, living apart from other inhabitants of the county. However, they

⁶⁸ NARM, Fond 5, List 10, File 321, p. 28.

⁶⁹ DACHO, Fond 40, List 1, File 36, p. 27; NARM, Fond 5, List 2, File 441, p. 52.

⁷⁰ A. Zashchuk, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

maintained fairly close ties with their sects, many of which were located in the Kherson and Tavriya provinces.⁷¹

At the same time, seven monasteries were recorded in the study area. It should be noted that the monastic lands of the northern counties were the property of Moldavian and Jerusalem foreign Orthodox monasteries as well as a small part of the Bessarabian ones. It is worth noting that there is no reliable information on the number of these lands, as their managers - proxies, mostly monks - were not accountable to the local Russian authorities and tried to falsify statistics about their estates. However, it is estimated that they amounted to at least 185,000 hectares, i.e. almost 58.5 per cent of all Bessarabian monastic lands. The largest number of monastic estates was in Soroca County, which occupied 17 per cent of the county area (for comparison: in Balti - 14%, Khotyn - 5%).⁷²

During the first part of the nineteenth century, the number of Lutherans in the northern counties of Bessarabia was the lowest when compared to the number of believers of other religions. According to A. Zashchuk, there were 266 individuals in three counties in the middle of this century, accounting for 1.18 per cent of all Bessarabian parishioners of this religion. Soroca County had the largest representation of them, with 173 people, Iasi County had 74 people, and Khotyn County had 19 people.⁷³ However, there are no members of this faith in the Khotyn district at the beginning of the 1860s.

The main activity of the Bessarabian priests was church service. However, the level of education remained quite low, as mentioned in numerous archival sources of the time. From the very first years of the region's annexation to the Russian Empire, the Metropolitan of Chisinau and Khotyn issued an instruction of March 3, 1815, on the compulsory education of children of priests and clergy, many of whom remained illiterate at the age of ten. Under such circumstances, they could not acquire the rank of deacon and enter the only Chisinau Theological Seminary in Bessarabia at that time. The church authorities required the representatives of all clergy (priests, deacons, deacon-boys, and sacristans) to take care of the education of their own children so that in the future they would be useful to the church and the fatherland. First, the parents-priests had to immediately teach their children to read at home before enrolling them in church schools. If the instructions were disregarded, priests were subjected to a variety

⁷¹ A. Afanas'yev-Chuzhbinskiy, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

⁷² A. N. Yegunov (red.), *Zapiski...*, p. 36-37.

⁷³ A. Zashchuk, *op. cit.*, p. 387.

of punishments, and their children, who did not study to read and to write until the age of 15, were stripped of their spiritual rank and given peasant status.⁷⁴

At the same time, local priests acted as teachers in church schools. The periodicals of that period concluded that the level of teaching and learning in these educational institutions remained quite low. After all, the training took place according to the "Hourglass" and the "Psalter" and it was reduced to the mechanical memorization of book phrases. A striking example of the methodological approach to teaching children literacy at that time was one of the best students of the Stavchany school of Khotyn district. During the year, the student "read" fairly well, but after inserting a previously torn sheet into the "Psalter", according to which the children learned to read, he appeared to have totally forgotten the letters.⁷⁵

Local clergy also supervised two-year parish schools in the region, where, in addition to lessons in Romanian and Russian reading and writing, arithmetic, church singing and catechism were taught. From the second half of the 40s of the 19th century, the northern Bessarabian villages began to be actively organized by priests at churches or deacons of the school of letters. However, they usually existed only on paper, and their students, peasant children, studied in the apartments of psalmist priests or church watchtowers.⁷⁶

The so-called *cheders* were taught in the Jewish classical religious schools, through the study of the Torah (Old Testament) and the Talmud (an explanation of the Torah of the Jewish sages), which were mostly memorized. Because such Jewish educators' institutions were officially prohibited, teachers (*melamed*) formed *cheders* in their own homes.⁷⁷

Thus, the local clergy of the northern counties of Bessarabia during the pre-reform period remained authorized not only to perform sacred religious rites but also to attempt to provide basic education to peasant children. However, everything was carried out at a fairly low level.

⁷⁴ DACHO, Fond 605, List 1, File. 228, p. 1-1v.

⁷⁵ "Kishinevskiye yeparkhial'nyye vedomosti" [Chisinau eparchial bulletin], 1874, № 3, p. 162; № 10, p. 196.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 1881, № 7, p. 207-218.

⁷⁷ See the Jewish educational statistic in A. Zashchuk, *Materialy...* Chasti I, p. 425-428.

CONCLUSIONS

The north part of Bessarabia, annexed to the multinational Russian Empire under the Bucharest Peace Treaty, was a multi-ethnic region. Local authorities' religious tolerance was practised in the area of the northern counties of Balti (Iasi), Soroca, and Khotyn. The introduction of unified policy principles in the region contributed to changes in the socio-legal status of clergy and Orthodox monasteries, an increase in the number of Orthodox churches and a dynamic increase in adherents of the Eastern Orthodox faith and other religions. If the numerical expansion of religious groups occurred during the first two decades of tsarist administration because of large immigration and colonization measures, the subsequent era experienced primarily natural growth. Because the Russian Empire was primarily an Orthodox state, the Orthodox community's numerical superiority was preserved throughout the period studied, both in Bessarabia and in Khotyn County. The increase in the number of followers of the Roman Catholic Church or the Mosaic cult was too insignificant to change the ethnoreligious composition of the province, as well as Khotyn County's population. Religious and multilingual compatriots were generally tolerant of each other, so no serious conflicts on national and religious grounds were recorded in the region.

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