THE TEACHER’S IMAGE IN THE RURAL WORLD OF CRIȘANA REGION IN THE 19TH CENTURY

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ОБРАЗЪТ НА УЧИТЕЛЯ В СЕЛСКИЯ СВЯТ НА РЕГИОН КРИЗАНА ПРЕЗ XIX ВЕК

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ABSTRACT: The schoolteacher belongs to the small intelligentsia from a rural world, mostly illiterate, since the 19th century. He manages to gather respect of the villagers among he was living in conditions in which to read and write were privileges. So, he has a great responsibility to educate the children by transmitting knowledge, but also inspiring them with faith in God and monarch. The schoolmaster has to deal with education issues, for conducting public semester examinations in front of the inspectors of the school direction and parents. He has to be a model for the other community members. But, the problem is that he does not always match the standards required by the authorities and the community. Often he is accused of lack of vocation, inappropriate behavior (mainly due to alcoholism), insufficient training. It often happens that there is no cooperation between the school and the local church representatives, creating thus strained relations between teacher and priest (it can not still deny the important role the church as institution has in the primary school).

The schoolmaster is usually recruited from the young people with a minimum of schooling in that village. After multiplying the number of training schools, the specialized schoolteachers are more and more numerous. In case the teacher was missing, his place could be taken by the priest or local cantor. His remuneration was dependent on the community, generally, as the school funds were insufficient and could not assure the payment of all schoolmasters. Thus, in order to ensure a living for him and his family he enterprises other secondary occupations such as farm work, cantor’s activities (often, he own the function of cantor), or he was a bank or notarial official.

Besides the inadequate salary, schoolmaster shortages faced with other material problems, such as lack of school buildings and their condition inappropriate, lack of supplies and textbooks. Despite of all these decreases of the educational system, the primary education records significant progresses, as general.

Key Words: schoolteacher, small Romanian intelligentsia, vocation, inappropriate behavior, educational system, elementary education

In the old, traditional society, education and the handing down of knowledge do not coincide with institutional schooling, especially not among those social strata whose culture is still largely oral. The "socialization" of children, in the course of which they become accustomed to work and the use of tools, and the handing down of knowledge is done primarily within the family, the basic economic and social unit. This is to say that education is closely bound to the sphere of practical life and not so much to special educational institutions. It is only in the course of a long historical process that schools gradually began to replace the traditional methods both of education and of the dissemination of knowledge. For a long time neither the administration nor the Estates were deeply involved with educational issues.

Space that we consider is to be found in the intersection of two spheres of interest. In this region, came under the authority of the Austrian Empire in the late 17th century, is promoted in the 19th century by an “upgrading recovery policy”[1]. In this action, the state includes also the ecclesiastical institutions and school, which wanted to support and enforce the imperial policy, becoming thus, instruments of governance[2]. At the same time it is wanted a “thorough Christianization of villages”[3] in an attempt to eradicate “superstition” and by imposing a more internalized belief. In the circumstances of the “Metternich regime”, the cultural, scholar, ecclesiastic or local areas are regarded as “safety valves for the accumulation of tensions that constantly were building up”[4]. Moreover, the Austrian state actively involves in the Roma-
nian education and reserves the right to oversee the curriculum and textbooks (and hence to control), not only the secular education, but also the seminars.

The Habsburg Empire needs a larger, more professional and more efficient State apparatus – together with prompt, reliable officials and experts in finance, economics and public health. Also engineers proficient in mining, road building and in waterworks are required. Better teachers and better schools are wanted as well, along with more skilful artisans and peasants who are literate, more productive and easier to deal with. The Government therefore wishes to make education a State duty and, accordingly, tries to remove it from the Churches' sphere of authority and to place it under secular State control [5].

From the administrative point of view, Crisana (as part of the territory known as Partium) belonged to the kingdom of Hungary, a situation which had also positive aspects, because there they could apply a series of reforms which in Transylvania were not enacted or their application was made with great difficulty and delay[6]. From the Hungarian side, throughout the entire 19th century, we can notice a strong policy of Hugarization. For example, the attempt to impose the Hungarian language leads to the decreased number of books printed in Romanian language (from 5 to 1, after some researches) [7]. In 1830, Count Széchenyi managed to convince the Hungarian Emperor Francis I that the Hungarian language must be the official language and that spoken in parliament, and not Latin (this is one of the few reforms that Count Széchenyi managed to implement, because he has always struck Metternich’s conservatism [8]). After 1836, the Hungarian became the official language in all of Hungary and began to be taught in schools more efficiently and more rigorously than before. This linguistic triumph encouraged the nationalist cause because the nationalist teachers began to reveal the Hungarian history or classics of the Hungarian literature and to convey to students the sense of pride towards the past of Hungary and its potential increase in future [9]. The fact is that this trend of “Hungarianization” caused the deep alienation of the other ethnic groups living in the Easter area of the Hungarian Empire [10].

The most important step in educational reform in Hungary is the edict from 1777, which is issued as the Ratio Educationis. In this way, Hungary receives her own independent educational system within the Habsburg Empire.

Elementary education takes place in several types of institutions. The first is the primary school (schola vernácula) established especially for this purpose, or, as the more recent specialist literature calls it, the "lower school". Amongst these institutions, there are simple, rural schools (scholae paganae), with one class and one schoolmaster and more refined town schools (scholae oppidanae) with two classes and two teachers. In every village, the lower school has close links with the Church. The school’s principal task is to teach catechism, biblical stories, hymns and, in connection with all these, reading and writing skills, instruction in arithmetic. Everywhere, the language of tuition was the mother tongue of the local inhabitants, that is, Hungarian, German, Slovak, Croatian, Romanian etc.

In an illiterate area, those who centralize power are the privileged people who can read and write [11], so to exchange information and otherwise than by words. Literacy has a great social value in the traditional rural world, even if the number of schools and those who attend schools has increased spectacularly since the second half of the 18th century. The knowledge of writing and reading allowed overcoming the condition of “blockhead”, by the possibility of acceding to administration or to the professions of priest and school-teacher, thus, changing the social status of the holder of the “mystery” [12].

On the edge of the pages of a Prayer Book, Popovici Ioan of Duşeşti (Bihor County) writes, being aware of the benefits the literacy provides: “the wise son will be schooled, and the unschooled his servant will be” [13]. In 1863, the priest of Adoni (Bihor County) expresses his conviction that by attending school, children “with time, better would know the way how to live their life” [14].

Based on the records of Greco-Catholic and Orthodox Church, a portrait of school-masters as a social group and as individuality too in 19th century in Crisana region can be pieced together. When comparing the qualifications of the Greco-Catholic and Orthodox teachers, their images are not totally similar. A large part of Orthodox schoolmaster has no adequate qualification, beside Greco-Catholics ones, who more and more of them finish a normal school. Although there always have been good and bad teachers, the magnitude of differences among the group during this period was conceivable only before the advent of regular teacher training.

In the first part of the 19th century, school education is still in the hands of the Church and
depends on the power relation of the various denominations – especially Orthodox and Greco-Catholic in Crișana region, but also Catholic or Protestant. But within their own competence the ecclesiastical hierarchies have considerable freedom of action. Their aim was primarily to educate godly people and, to some extent to ensure the education of their own Church intelligentsia, that is of their own priests and teachers [15]. The schools belonging to Orthodox Church have the greatest need to catch up and raise faster in number.

In 1849, at the school of Beiuș, Professor Filimon is replaced from his position, as “only an ecclesiastic person could apply for the [function] of professor”. The cantor of the Greek Catholic church of Beiuș is brought temporarily into his place, because it somehow “the teaching of the young not to get something” obtaining all the obligations and rights of an ordinary professor [16].

The school-teacher had to deal with the education issues, conducting the semester public examinations in front of the inspectors from the direction of school and of the parents. Also, he submits at term and in the structure recommended by directorates the half statistics regarding the students’ frequency and the final examination results. The school-master must know “his detailed responsibilities” and to carry them out “with all force zeal” it is said in the Foreword to the book entitled Carte trebuincioasă pentru dascălui școlelor de jos românești ne-unite. In chiedaro-craștile fări de moștenire [17]. Thus, a good school-master is required to have “fear of God” and to look after the children for who he has the duty to “teach them, very fatherly. [...] A school-master must have certain awakening and to be live in spirit [...] and to do the high dignity of this kind, as children find him clever and free of other thoughts” [18]. The same book highlights the role of the school-teacher in shaping the character of young people: “For anyone can understand the burden of school high dignity it must calculate that the babies or the children in schools together with their schoolmasters would become wise useful members of the state, schooled people, regenerate Christians, in one word to be partakers of the temporal happiness and of the eternal one” [19]. As the school-masters, as they say in the paper Pedagoghia și methodica, could “make more augmentation than the missionary priests, because they are working with people of that age when they do not listen to them” while the school-teachers are “working with the young babies who are educable, not bad yet and who easily can be brought to obedience and attention” [20]. And the school-master has also the duty to “deracinate with full force”, the crowd of superstitions, “idols” “from the babies, and that you can not otherwise do it, without the separation of mind” [21]. School-masters were requested pedagogical tact that should combine with qualities of good psychology, morality, faith, good householder and, the last but not the least, with those of a good dab at the social realities.

The Romanian elementary education in this period is facing some problems. In order to make education more attractive and bring it at least to the standards of the time, school district conferences are held, where they discuss these issues, for example, “where the Romanians ignorance for school is coming from?, And which would be the spiritual non-diligent means to exhilarate the Romanian for school? “, “How the school-teacher will make school more pleasant for young and babies? “or methodological problems [22]. In all these discussions, the central figure is the school-teacher of elementary schools in villages. Also, for retraining the school-teachers there were held in Oradea in the years 1859, 1860, 1863, 1864 refresher courses that have addressed methodological issues, child psychology, all in order to make “school more pleasant for the young people” [23]. Although, for many times the school and the education system was more than a problem in itself, the political and confessional being often involved, the school conferences highlight the great interest of the school-teachers for education and methodic and less for the political and historical purpose of the teaching approach [24].

Usually, hiring school-teachers should be done on the basis of a contract completed by the district school director and the village representatives, stating that the villagers would provide the repair of the school building and purchase of items necessary for the proper conduct of educational activities (table, chairs, tables etc.). The salary varies from location to location, the peasants pay in money and goods (wheat, barley, oats, corn, vegetables, salt, candles, meat, hay, wood) [25]. There are not rare cases when the community not provides the school-master what was in the contract, no money or natural products (especially when the inclement weather compromised natural crops). So, in order to maintain, themselves and their families, the school-teachers are forced to, outside of the classroom, have
other concerns, particularly agriculture. The Greco-Catholic Bishop of Oradea, in theory, can support the school-teachers’ income in the Romanian elementary schools, of the Religion Fund; however, it is not a rule to be applied to all the Greek Catholic communities, not to mention the elementary schools which are found under the guardianship of the Orthodox Church, leading to unequal income.

In places such as Girişul Negru (Bihor County), Tăut, Prunisore (Arad County) in the 1825-1826 school year, Tăut, Hidiştelul de Sus, Olcea (Bihor County) in the 1834-1835 school year was not a school-teacher, because he could not be “provided materially” or because of the “small donation” [26]. But usually, the community was supporting the school-teacher’s pay, as Iosif Papp Silagiy said, when he was director of the Romanian schools in Hungary, during 1848-1849: “legislation in vigor establishes [that payment] to be supported by the residents of that village”. The pay of a school-teacher of Beiuş (Bihor County) is in cash, grain and wood, but they are insufficient to live from these and they turn to all community members, who themselves live under the poverty line [27]. Hence results the reason of high absenteeism of children in school, because if parents do not send them to school, they do not pay the school-teacher for them. Other schoolmasters are better paid by receiving money, a chariot of wood for fire from each house of the village, the community forcing itself to help him with the agricultural work. In other cases, the contract provides also that the villagers should take care that the school building to have everything necessary for the proper conduct of lessons [28]. That the teacher depends on the community in which he is living is not in his favor, because there is the possibility that people to banish him if he does not comply with their expectations: “the people assumes its supremacy over the school-teacher, gives and takes payment, or invites the babies to go to school and have books, threatens with the dismissal of the village, does not send the children to school and invents accusation against him and, if parents so admonish the teacher’s image, how the children will honor him” – the Bishop Iosif Papp Silagiy notes in 1868 [29].

The non-payment in time or lack of the school-teacher’s salary led to his involvement in certain occupations out of school which were not the most compatible with the status of school-teacher, such as the field work and breeding. The schoolmaster’s duties were primarily those of a cantor rather than of a teacher. But sometimes, even that the school-master was also cantor couldn’t be any longer regarded favorable, as for the performance of the second function there was necessary much time, especially when the school curriculum became more extensive [30]. A happy situation, we say, is that of the cantor of Beiuş where there was a larger school, Simeon Milian, got to hold the function of interim professor in 1849. Before being hired he was conditioned that if, during the classes, it would happen to have some church services, as he couldn’t miss any part of any of the other, Simeon Milian had to have an agreement with another school-teacher, Ioan Bolkas to replace him for those classes. Of course, Ioan Bolkas would be paid by Simeon Milian of his cantor income [31].

In desperate situations, the teacher-cantor can become a thief. This has happened with the school-master of Şuncuiuş who was accused and investigated in December 1849 for stealing two horses and three pigs. He and his family had a small field, not to have another source of income. For 12 years he fulfilled the obligations for his position without any wrongdoing until the villagers have complained him directly to the Greek Catholic bishop, during visiting the diocese, by the theft of the two horses that could not be proven. But the teacher relapses in 1849, when together with his son acquires unfairly three pigs, which eventually gives back to the rightful owner. The priest of Şuncuiuş hesitates to give a verdict in that case, whilst letting the Bishop to judge whether the two are guilty or not, and until the final trial they are detained in the prison of Oradea [32].

The teachers often work-out as cantors, sacristans or bell-ringers. Some even work as notaries, making their living primarily from this, and pursued teaching more or less as a side-line activity. The schoolmaster leads a rather modest life, the priests of the village Boghiş (Maramureş County) says: “the school-teacher is new and teaching training alumnus – hope that he will make enough” [33].

The Greek Catholic Bishop of Oradea, Vasile Erdeli, notifies the deanship of the diocese by a
circular of 10 March 1845, that the school-teachers must be a model for the other members of the community, “to honor themselves and so to behave more politely, for example to people, protecting them from habits that, higher states are impolite”. “That’s why - it is also said - the cantor-teachers, as us, in all stories, will defend their rights, so we will touch no one in church-serving, who by his behavior will show to that exemption privilege unworthy giving all the dean the power to miss them of the church serving those who would note themselves with some impolite facts” [34]. In 1855, the Bishop Erdelyi requires that the Greek-Catholic schools cannot employ any school-teacher “if he won’t be able to produce testimony about his qualification”.

That is also happening (too often unfortunately) is that the school-teacher is not reaching the height required by the authorities or the community. Ioan Püspöki, the director of the Orthodox schools in the district of Oradea (1810-1837), characterizes the school-teachers in his reports following the morality of the school-teacher, the teaching method, the languages he knows, the desire of training, the relations with the villagers, the care for school. Thus, in 1826, he gives details about the school-teacher of Almaș (Arad County), who was suspended from the post for misconduct. He does not forget to exemplify also many school-masters for their good behavior [35]. He characterizes also the work of the school-teachers, with qualifications, mostly good and very good [36].

The priests (who are intermediaries between the peasants and the ecclesiastical elites) confess not infrequently in the reports they are sending to the Greek Catholic Bishop of Oradea, Vasile Erdelyi in the years 1852-1867, that the school-teachers with a “modest” behavior influence negatively the educational process. The school-teacher “should behave with more moderate” and “his behavior should be exemplar” [37] because he serves as a model for children. Negative examples are plenty in this period. About the school-teacher of Sâliș (Bihor County) they note in 1852 that he is “very weak” and is not “desirous to learn, because he does not know anything” [38]. The Dean Ștefan Vâleanu characterizes, at the same, the school-teacher of Bușag (Maramureș County), who holds the function of cantor, as unable to teach the children, stating that he drinks is passion: “The Cantor would have to be also Teacher - but besides there is not school - is not able to teach - the Youth grows as the brier without any fruit – For catechism they learn by themselves what they can include with their minds” [39]. The same Dean also says about another school-teacher (of Arieșu de Câmpie - Maramureș County, 1852) that he has not the necessary qualities for this post, and those who suffer are of course the children of the locality: “The Cantor would have to be also Teacher – but he is not capable to fulfill this high dignity, is not endowed with the necessary qualities - the youth makes no prosperity” [40]. Other school-teachers are just carelessness in carrying out their tasks, such as that in the village Sârbii (Maramureș County, 1852): “The School-Teacher – who is also Cantor very carelessness in carrying out his duty, that’s why the Youth seems to make no prosperity” - as the same Dean, Ștefan Vâleanu says [41]. The conclusion is that a school-teacher “in-tempted and un-capable” “much less can help the state and parents”, because his duty is to put “useful foundation on which to keep the uses of the human life and all our works” [42].

But we must not ignore any positive cases when the school-master gives his best interest to educate the children and has a minimum qualification to do so. If the school-teacher is diligent and the youth go to school, then the results can be as expected and to advance successfully teaching, as in Aciu in 1852 (Maramureș County) [43]. Otherwise, the children may remain without literate. The elementary education situation is very complex, because when the school-master is well prepared and has the desire to bring his students into the mysteries of science and culture, is facing other problems: high absenteeism of children in school (they were engaged by their parents in the seasonal agricultural work) or lack of school buildings. And such examples are numerous: in Sămacea (Maramureș County, 1852) – the school-teacher Daniel Volcan “has good behavior – babies not often go to school, of Parents’ indifference - as they have made little advancement” [44]; the school-teacher of Fărcâsia (Maramureș County, 1852) fulfills “his duty”, but school is in disrepair and young people can not make any progress in education, because parents do not look too interested in sending their children to school [45]. Proudly points to the priest Vasile Brankovan of the village Miniș (Arad County), in 1859, that teacher-cantor Horga Athanasie “has entirely example, moral behavior”, which is already a prerequisite for good performance in the terms of the tasks of a school-master position [46].
At a time when the Romanian normal education was not very well developed, they accepted for the position of a school-teacher, anyone who knew even to read and write. In 1856, the Greek Catholic priest in the village Negru (Bihor County) explains how the school-masters were recruited in this locality, where no building to serve as school was. With about 50 years before, if any of the parishioners “managed to train, reaching cantor, he was considered also school-teacher, receiving at his home the 1-2 school children who were attending sporadically, some classes, who in fact gave no result”. “But in later times, “no person has such training; even this kind of school no longer exists” [47].

Also, the school-teacher is required to be actively involved in increasing the school attendance of children by parents’ awareness of the benefits that teaching brings. The director of the Romanian schools in Hungary in the period 1848-1849, Iosif Papp Szilagyi sends a circular that suggests to the school-teachers ways to gain the parents’ trust and appreciation, and in this way, the school to be attended. “Go, therefore, from house to house and offer your services to parents, won the hearts of children so that they cannot be kept away from school”. For, “the school-teacher without pupils demonstrates that or, he does not to teach, or is not appropriate for this profession, being unable to attract the children to earn their love, to become worthy of parents’ trust”. In addition, they are not subordinate to the priests and the “School-Teachers who do not attract pupils to attend school and those who do not cooperate with the priests will be dismissed” [48].

The situation does not undergo essential changes in the second half of the 19th century, as is evidenced by the comments that the Bishop Iosif Papp Silagyi makes in a pastoral, on 12 May 1862, which recalls all the problems facing the elementary education: the schools are in a deplorable state, children do not go to school, teachers leave schools to deal with the field work (as an alternative to providing livelihood for himself and his family), many school-masters are poorly trained. He explains the school-masters their essential role in “raising the intelligence and morality of the Romanian people”, reason for which they are obliged and “duty to God and government, to submit with all powers, learning and scholastic growth of people, and where its authority will not be enough to remove the obstacles, seek assistance from political high dignity promised, which would deny you, you soon make me a relation, that I will help” [49]. The same bishop also noted in 1865 that “the greatest shortage of school-teachers, so that not only many parishes are without suitable cantors and teachers, but we are forced to tolerate also those who are not worthy of this high dignity, having no person who put in their place, this year only 3 graduators of the Teachers’ Training Schools”. Therefore, he suggests to the Greek Catholic parishioners to give a small contribution in money, which would support the education of the future school-teachers” [50].

The majority of rural residents still remains outside the wall of the schools in the 19th century, never acquiring reading and writing skills and continues to live in their world of oral communication.

References

2. Ibidem, p. 139
6. Barbu Ștefănescu, op. cit., p. 122
8. What was called the “Metternich’s system”, can be characterized by greater conservatism, this system Metternich tried restoring the old regime (Ancien Régime), because the chancellor was equivalent to any reform revolution
in the Middle of 19th Century. 1821-1867 (Romanian School from Arad Region), with-
out publishing, Arad, 1979 (further on: Vasile Popeangă, Școala românească din părțile...), p. 195-199

24. Valeria Sorostineanu, „Conferințele învățătoarești din arhiepiscopia ortodoxă a Transili-
vaniai (1901-1906)” (“Schoolmasters Conferences from Orthodox Archbishopric of Transyl-
vania”), in: Identitate și alteritate (Identity and Alterity). Vol. 4 Studii de istorie politică și cul-
turală (Studies of Political and Cultural History), Cluj-Napoca, Argonaut Press, 2007, p. 142

25. Vasile Popeangă, „Rețeaua școlară a districtului Oradea în anul 1825-1826” (“Scholar Net from Oradea District in 1825-1826”), (fur-


27. Blaga Mihoc, op. cit., p. 108


29. Ibidem, p. 130

30. Domokos Kosary, op. cit., p. 9

31. AN-DJ Bh, PGCB, dos. 13, f. 44

32. Ibidem, dos. 13, f. 33

33. AN-DJ Bh, EGCO, dos. 1368, f. 299

34. Blaga Mihoc, op. cit., p. 105

35. Vasile Popeangă, Rețeaua școlară a districtului..., p. 255-256

36. From a total of 144 teachers in 1826, 29 received the rating for teaching “very well”, 93 – “good”, 19 – “mediocre”, 3 – “weak” (Ibidem, p. 255). For the school year 1834-1835, the situa-
tion is as follows: “very good” - 27 teachers, “well” - 110, 8 – “mediocre”. Using these ratings
reflects the progress in the educational activities (Ibidem, p. 304).

37. AN-DJ Bh, EGCO, dos. 1368, f. 2

38. Ibidem, dos. 1368, f. 52

39. Ibidem, dos. 1368, f. 4

40. Ibidem, dos. 1368, f. 5

41. Ibidem, dos. 1368, f. 5

42. Carte trebuințoasă pentru dascăli ..., p. 97

43. AN-DJ Bh, EGCO, dos. 1368, f. 3

44. Ibidem, dos. 1368, f. 5

45. Ibidem, dos. 1368, f. 5

46. Ibidem, dos. 1368, f. 35

47. Blaga Mihoc, op. cit., p. 231


49. Ibidem, p. 126

50. Ibidem, p. 268-269

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