

HISTORICAL DATA ON THE MUSIC OF ARMENIANS IN TRANSYLVANIA

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SUMMARY. This paper aims to present the Armenian music - especially the Armenian liturgical music - from Transylvania, based on the scant research conducted so far and also starting from the research carried out by the author, based on some recently discovered musical materials. The troubled history of the Armenian people largely defines the way the arts developed, and moreover how the vast and rich culture that characterizes the Armenian people spread throughout the world. The article briefly presents the historical process of migration and the settling of Armenians on the Transylvanian lands, the founding of cities, and the construction of Armenian churches, followed by the assimilation of this large ethnic group into the Hungarian population, the gradual transformation of religious worship, and the almost forced transition of Armenians to the Catholic rite. The paper also presents the local traditions and the influence of the Hungarian people, with whom the Armenians came into contact, the reciprocal receptive attitude, the cultural interpenetration that contributed to the change of the musical art. References are made to folk music, and afterward a large part of the article is dedicated to information related to Armenian religious music in Transylvania. The article - as mentioned above - presents only briefly this little researched topic, a quite intriguing one, while the in-depth study of the issue and the analysis of the manuscripts discovered will be carried out as part of the doctoral studies of the author.

Keywords: Armenian, Transylvania, Armenian Church, liturgical music, religious folk song

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Introduction

The Armenians arrived in several waves on the territory of Transylvania. Their first settlement took place during the Árpád dynasty, but this colony spread throughout the country and was assimilated into the Hungarian population.

A second wave of migration took place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the Armenians previously settled on the territory of Moldova moved to Transylvania for various reasons, political and social. From that moment on the Armenians founded towns, schools and cultural institutions, thus carrying out a very significant activity not only in the field of trade, but also in the cultural-artistic and political field.

The third wave of migration and settlement on the Transylvanian territory was propelled by the Armenian Genocide; thus between the two World Wars the Armenians established associations and published journals in Transylvania, but nevertheless in the aftermath of the Second World War most of them chose to leave the country.

At the moment, the number of inhabitants of Armenian origin in Transylvania is relatively small, and the assimilation into the Hungarian ethnic population is almost complete.

The present study is intended to focus on a particular cultural aspect of Armenians, namely the music of the Armenian population in Transylvania. This domain of Transylvanian Armenian culture is still barely researched, as is the research of worldwide Armenian religious music, which also presents numerous areas that are still unexplored and many problems to unravel.

Before moving on to information about Armenian music in Transylvania, we need to briefly introduce Armenian music. To this end, however, we must first take into consideration some fundamental elements of the matter: the Armenian Church, the specificity of the Armenian Church in Transylvania, and the Armenian religious music.

1. The Armenian Church

The Armenian people are the first Christian nation in history: Armenia was the first country in the world which, at the beginning of the fourth century, adopted Christianity as the official religion.

The year 301 marks the introduction of Christianity in Armenia and its establishment as state religion. From this moment on, the Armenian people preserved their religion despite all the suffering they went through over the

centuries. The church was considered by the Armenians “the mother, guardian and protector of the Armenian nation.”² In 451 the Armenian national Christian church declared itself autocephalous, independent. It therefore did not recognize the authority of Rome nor of the Metropolitan of Caesarea in Cappadocia. Thus, Armenia was both the first state in the world to adopt Christianity as the official religion of the state, and the first state which, through its Church, broke off in its entirety from the universal Christian Church, subordinated to the Pope in Rome, declaring itself “national Armenian, autocephalic and independent.”³

2. The Armenian Church in Transylvania

Until 1672, the organized advancement of the Armenian religion in the Transylvanian territories was possible only in the localities where the number and the commercial power of the Armenian community allowed the construction of churches and the maintenance of the clergy necessary for the religious practice. Such a region was shaped in the area of Tălmăciu. There is no precise historical data on the reasons for the concentration of Armenians in this place. However, considering that the area was a communication centre, a compulsory crossing point, that is, a very favourable commercial “location” on the great Roman road linking Pannonia with Dacia and Moesia, one can understand the presence of Armenians in the area. Later on Tălmăciu became a powerful Armenian civic and religious centre, mentioned in the official Hungarian documents of the time under the name of *Terra Armenorum de Transilvaniae*. These Armenians brought with them from their mother country their ancient religion and were the first foreign nation who received the consent of the Hungarian rulers for the construction of their own churches and monasteries and for the practice of their own religion. Following the decrease in the number of Armenians in the area, in the fifteenth century, the Armenian bishopric in Tălmăciu ceased its activity.⁴ During the period in question, in the other areas of Transylvania the Armenian communities were still too small and at great distances from each other, so they did not have the opportunity to build churches. Thus, the practice of religion was possible only in the communities where an Armenian priest resided.

² Gazdovits, Nicolae: *Istoria armenilor din Transilvania (History of Armenians in Transylvania)*, Ed. Ararat, Bucharest, 1996, p. 247.

³ *Idem*, pag. 251.

⁴ Albinetz, Constantin: *Armenia și armenii din Transilvania (Armenia and Armenians from Transylvania)*, Ed. Ararat, Bucharest, 2012, p. 85.

After 1672 substantial transformations took place within the religious life of the Armenians in Transylvania. During this period, the country entered among the regions with great religious confrontations. The non-Catholic populations in Transylvania were subjected to a forced process of Catholicization initiated by the Pope in Rome and supported by the Emperor of Austria out of political reasons.

In this process an important role was played by the Armenian-Catholic missionary priest, from Botosani, Oxendio Virziresco, who arrived in 1684 in the Armenian community in Bistrita (Virziresco attended the seminary at the mission college of the Sacred Congregation de Propaganda Fide in Rome, beginning in 1678. The school records of the institution mention that he spoke Armenian, Turkish, Hungarian, Latin, Polish and the Romanian dialect of Moldova). At first, his attempts at Catholicization were countered by the strong opposition of the Armenian community, causing numerous scandals, when he barely managed to save his life.⁵

In spite of this opposition, Virziresco continued his activity, which - among the Armenians from the Sekler county - bore fruit relatively quickly: in 1689 the documents already note about 2000 Armenians who want to embrace the Roman-Catholic rite. Virziresco was named bishop of Armenians in Transylvania following the death of Bishop Minas Eudoxiensis Zilifdar. The latter initially opposed these attempts at Catholicization, then, in 1686 – despite the violent political and ecclesiastical conviction - he took an oath for the new faith, in Lemberg, in the presence of the apostolic nuncio. In the autumn of 1690, Pope Alexander VIII issued two breves, in which he named Oxendio Virziresco Archbishop and officially sent him to Transylvania. Following his appointment, he continued to work in Transylvania, but was faced with many difficulties. From a document in the Archive of the Nunciature in Vienna, we find out that Armenians accused Oxendio of acting like a tyrant, a despot with the Armenian community. The case was investigated by the officials in Rome and, as a result, Oxendio was negatively characterized, and accused for making the religious life of Armenians in Transylvania difficult.⁶ Despite all the hardships, a few years later Oxendio reported to Vatican officials that nearly 30,000 Armenians converted to the Catholic religion of Armenian rite.

It is very likely that this forced Catholicization was the reason for the return of some Armenian groups to Moldova at the end of the seventeenth century. For a brief period Oxendio tried to extend his activity to Moldova

⁵ Nagy Kornél: *Az erdélyi örmények katolizációja (1685-1715) (The Catholicization of Armenians in Transylvania)*, Editura MTA, Budapest, 2012, p. 95.

⁶ Gazdovits, Nicolae, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

and Wallachia, but without success, because the Armenians in Moldova opposed all his attempts.⁷

In 1696 he left for Vienna, taking steps to obtain the necessary funds for the establishment of cities and the construction of Armenian churches. As can be seen from the monograph of Szongott Kristóf, as a result of this trip the city of Gherla was founded in 1700.⁸

After the founding of the two Armenian cities, Gherla and Dumbrăveni, both the economic and cultural life and the religious activity of the Armenians in Transylvania reached a climax. The proof of this effervescent religious life is the construction of several churches in these cities:

- ten chapels and churches were built in Gherla, of which today we can admire the Solomon Church (1729) and the Armenian Cathedral (dedicated in 1804).
- In Dumbrăveni there were also built several places of worship, of which today remains only the great Cathedral, a monumental building, of European dimensions, consecrated in 1791.
- in Gheorgheni and in Frumoasa an Armenian church of special beauty was built, which is still in use today.⁹

Virziresco died in 1715, and after his death - more precisely, from 1735 - the religious leadership of the Armenians in Transylvania belonged to the bishop of Catholic rite.

Immediately after the death of Oxendio, missionaries from Erzurum arrived in Transylvania, but we also have data on the activity of Transylvanian Armenian-Catholic priests who went abroad. It appears from the ecclesiastical documents that there was an interregional spiritual connection between the different Armenian colonies in the world, and that the Armenians in Transylvania played an active role in supporting this network. Armenian priests and missionaries were, in fact, persons of Armenian identity, and they were meant to link the distant colonies. However, from the second half of the eighteenth century, there is an intense Latinization of the Armenian rite in Transylvania. The links between the Transylvanian Armenians and the Armenian communities in the world were gradually abolished, being limited to the relations between the Transylvanian colonies and the Mekhitarist congregation with their motherhouses in Vienna and Venice.

⁷ Nagy Kornél, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

⁸ Gazdovits, Nicolae, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

⁹ Albinetz, Constantin, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-93.

As for the monks of the Mekhitarist order, their role within the Armenian society in Transylvania is of major importance. The Mekhitarist priest-monk, Fogolyán Miklós, who activated in Gheorgheni in the second part of the twentieth century, researched their church and cultural activity in depth.¹⁰ From these investigations we find that their mission in Dumbrăveni began around 1719-1720, being invited by the city officials in order to lay the foundations of the school, and to organize the educational process on European models, but in the spirit of Armenian traditions. Their activity continued in the city until the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.¹¹

In the twentieth century, the see of the Catholic Armenian Ordinariate was established in Romania, which incorporated six areas: the four old Armenian-Catholic parishes, and the territories beyond the Carpathians: the region of Moldova and the regions of Oltenia, Muntenia, Basarabia, Dobrogea, seated in Bucharest. The Mekhitarist monk Sahag Khogian was appointed Ordinary. He wanted to save the Armenians in Transylvania from a definitive assimilation, so he started preaching in Armenian instead of Hungarian. Unfortunately, the parishioners of Armenian origin, who did not speak the language, were unable to understand him. The monk moved to Bucharest, and beginning in 1939 he permanently ceased his missionary work.¹²

Following the Second World War, the situation of the Armenians changed again. The Transylvanian Armenians declared themselves Roman-Catholics, not wanting the state power to incorporate them into the Orthodox Church or the Armenian-Apostolic Church seated in Bucharest. However, in 1951 the communist state abolished the Armenian-Catholic Ordinance, and - starting in 1953 - the Armenian parishes were placed under the jurisdiction of the Roman-Catholic Diocese of Alba Iulia.¹³

3. Armenian religious music

Armenian music represents a very little known and researched area in the history of music. As a consequence, the data available to us regarding the evolution of Armenian music is also scarce.

Regarding the religious music of the Armenians, we know, however, that it has developed - during the troubled history of the Armenian people - in close connection with the music of the people around the territories inhabited

¹⁰ <http://www.gyergyoiormenyek.ro/index.php/lelkipasztor/85-korabban-szolgalt-lelkipasztorok.html>

¹¹ Albinetz, Constantin, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

¹² Gazdovits, Nicolae, *op. cit.*, pp. 324-325.

¹³ Nagy Kornél, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

by the Armenians, but retaining its national specificity - as it appears from the researches performed by the great composer-musicologist, Komitas.

We also know that from the eighth century, the first attempts at musical notation also appeared with some specifically Armenian signs, called *khaz*. Regarding the emergence and formation of this musical notation we have encountered opinions: *"The first and only Armenian chronicler who makes special mention and gives us explanations about the old Armenian musical notes, is Kirakos of Gantzak (around 1250). He recalls that, at that time a great singer in Taron, the monk Khaciatur wandered all over Greater Armenia, teaching them and spreading the notes among the Armenians. Judging from here, the Armenian notation system probably emerged around the eleventh or twelfth century. This view is also reinforced by the fact that in the Armenian manuscripts prior to that date there is no trace of musical signs.*

However, experts believe that the Armenian scale system has an older origin. Thus, Professor Velesch from the University of Vienna, who is a specialist in Eastern scales, recently wrote that the Armenian notes are older than the Byzantine ones (Greek) and that the Armenian ones form the basis of the Byzantine scales. According to this theory, the Armenian notes must have existed before the eighth or seventh century. In fact, one of the old chroniclers, Lazarus of Pharp, seems to impart a somewhat confused indication, mentioning the use of "musical letters"¹⁴ - considers Father Gr. Hepoian in his 1941 writing.

In the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries the notation of songs with Armenian *khaz* began to be widespread, of which we have a considerable number left. However, given that their secret disappeared in the fourteenth century, there are only attempts to understand and unravel them. The most advanced research was done by Komitas, but his manuscripts disappeared during his deportation in 1915.

We know for sure, that until the nineteenth century, Armenian liturgical music was exclusively vocal, monodic. The liturgy had and has constant and changing parts - depending on the character of the service (wedding, funeral, etc.) or the current holiday (Easter, Christmas, etc.). The various parts were sung by the priest, others by the choir or soloists.

In the nineteenth century Armenian composers began to harmonize for 4 voices the constant parts of the liturgy, in Romantic style. It is worth mentioning here the activity and importance of the composer Kara-Murza (professor at the seminary in Echmiadzin, conductor, renowned scholar of the

¹⁴ Siruni Djololian, Hagop: *Ani, anuarul culturii armene (Ani. The Annual Journal of Armenian Culture)*, 1941, Bucharest, p. 206.

period), the first musician who introduced the writing for several voices in Armenian liturgical music.

The genres characteristic of religious music were: hymns - constant in the liturgy, the canon - consisting of 9 parts, songs with strophic structure (composed by well-known authors, or songs invented by the people, paraliturgical).

In order to note the Armenian songs, the Cultural Centre of Constantinople took the initiative to create its own system, a task that was left to the musicologist Hampartzum Limondjian. He succeeded in developing in 1815 a system that used both the principles of the Armenian *khaz* and the modern, European ones, expressing the tones and semitones of the diatonic scale. Although the system was imperfect, being adapted to monody and unable to meet the demands of symphonic music and polyphonic choral music, it had the great merit of saving many Armenian musical pieces and especially the liturgical, religious music and songs.

4. The Armenian music from Transylvania

Before presenting data on Armenian religious music in Transylvania, we must briefly review some features of the Armenian folk music as well.

Folk music

The term folk music generally refers to the music of the peasant strata of the society. Considering that, regarding the Armenians in Transylvania - for the historical reasons outlined above - this part of society was completely missing, we may consider that the Armenian folklore in Transylvania actually belongs entirely to the urban folklore. Despite this fact, it carries within the Armenian emotional substrate, probably based on the ancient musical roots, brought from the mother country and preserved despite centuries of wandering.

The much cited monograph by Szongott Kristof is currently the only written source from which we trace find some information on the secular music of Armenians in Transylvania. The Armenian historian mentions: "*Many researchers of the Armenian culture from Transylvania considered that any attempt to collect the Armenian folk songs would be in vain. However, after a long research - and to the delight of ethnographers - I managed to pick up a few folk songs, of which I also noted four.*"¹⁵

¹⁵ Szongott Kristóf: *Monografia oraşului liber regal, Gherla (Monograph of the Royal Free City Gherla)*, Aurora Press, Gherla, 1903, p. 368.

The song of merchants – about the burdensome life of merchants, Armenian traders. In the text composed of 35 stanzas we find details about the journeys of the Armenian traders, about the difficulties encountered on their occasion, about taxes and marriage. According to the quoted source, the interpretation of this song was *parlando-rubato*, resembling a lament.

E.g. 1

Kereskedők dala
Tenor vagy Bariton.

Lassan.

A - men ti-höz the or ná-juk,
As - chár-héz po - lor-man thá-i-théz :
Ná e - go or him - big le - széz
Bá - xér-gén-nun pá - né oxhá - viz.

Song on the politics of the world - formulates a critique of society and the politics of the time in 27 stanzas. As the text shows, the song originates from Bukovina. It presents the interethnic and social problems characteristic for Transylvania in the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries. The song presents similarities with the Hungarian folklore.

Song on the town - presents the ache of the Armenian who is preparing to leave his hometown, Gherla, and narrates all the problems, sufferings and reasons for leaving. The melody of this song dates from the nineteenth century, it has similarities with Hungarian folk music, *csárdás*:

Song on dalauzi¹⁶ - presents the *dalauzi*, the traditional New Year's sweet dish of Armenians from Transylvania. Although it is sweet and tasty, it cannot cure the pain of the soul.

¹⁶ *Dalauzi* = Armenian jam made from honey, nuts and poppy seeds.

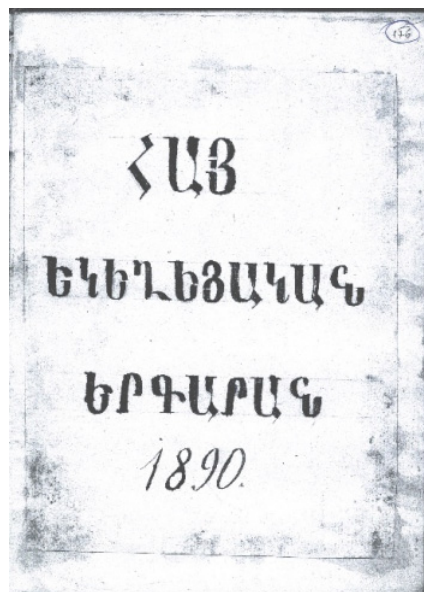
Religious music

Regarding Armenian religious music from Transylvania we have information from several sources:

Manuscript sources

The Manuscript from Frumoasa: a fragmentary manuscript comprising a collection of liturgical hymns, dated to the nineteenth century. It has 18 pages in quill pen writing. The following text can be read on the inner page of the title, with Armenian letters: “*Haj jegjeghecagan jerkaran,*” that is: “Collection of Armenian religious songs.” Below, in Arabic numerals is written the year to which the manuscript is dated: 1890.

E.g. 2



The author of the manuscript is unknown, we know for a fact only that at that time the Armenian priest of the Armenian community in Frumoasa was Fáraó Simon, originally from Gherla - but we have no precise data to confirm that he was the author of the book. We find the actual musical material from page no. 3 to 18. The collection contains 17 hymns, each with 1-4 stanzas.

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The special importance of this document lies in the fact that it contains not only the text, but also the melodies of the hymns, thus becoming the most important written source known today regarding the melodic of Armenian Church music in Transylvania.

Based on the analysis of the existing sources, we can certainly ascertain that in the Armenian liturgy in Transylvania the community church songs - and those noted in the Frumoasa Manuscript - had the following functions: *introitus*, *hymn during the burning of incense*, *gloria*, *hymn after the Gospel reading*, *offertorio*, *Sanctus*, *Eucharistic hymn*, *communion hymn*, *thanksgiving hymn*.

E.g. 3

Predikáció előtt.

1. Jeg szurp ha-k'i ch'a-gh'a-ghutyán, hájácx i mjéx
2. Jeg szurp ha-k'i szjéchi-zogh medicx, k'ho jérg ná in

1. vaghar mutyámp, ásá-vadzajin k'ho ok-mutyámp, jér
2. dsári-kaj thicx, másnágajéczo zsa-ghov szerdicx, verk

1. án-párje-li ke-thutyámp, jathen saar-ház barkje
2. ásá-kovémk der ámjénicx, varav djészczuk ez háx

1. vutyámp, ez szúrd-ész mjér licx mák-mutyámp.
2. b'ardicx, dsá-ná-észczuk ez mjécsz áchdicx.

The text of the hymns can be of several types:

- Old Armenian language with Transylvanian pronunciation;
- Old Armenian language with Armenian words from Transylvania, or
- mixed language.

The hymns are noted as follows:

Title-verse: Before each song we find a title-verse, which indicates either the *function* of the song (its place in the liturgy), or the *holiday* to which it is linked. The title-verse may even stand between certain stanzas because some of these Armenian church hymns “span” through their stanzas over several parts of the liturgy, like some Hungarian hymns.

Notation: The songs have a tonal-functional character, use the European notation system, characteristic of cultivated music. The treble clef is followed by the alteration, respectively the measure indication, which - in the case of 15 hymns out of 17 - is C (4/4). However, the anonymous “music writer” does not always use it consistently, so that there are songs in which the measure framing caused obvious difficulties to the author, but, however, we find the C sign at the beginning of the song. In general, it can be stated that determining the duration and noting the rhythm were not the strengths of the person who wrote the songs.

Melody: Some hymns seem to have features of the melodic characteristic of the Viennese classicism, others are borrowed from the repertoire of church songs from the Hungarian community.

Text: The text in Armenian appears according to the Armenian pronunciation in Transylvania, with Hungarian transcription. In some hymns, all the stanzas are placed immediately under the musical notes, and if the following stanzas are to be sung with another function, in the following moments of the liturgy, these stanzas or groups of stanzas receive separate titles.¹⁷

The legacy of the teacher-church singer Bálint Ákos (1893-1983).

This music treasure was accidentally discovered during the summer of 2019 and is to be processed by the author of the present paper. The find amounts to 7 volumes in manuscript, containing Hungarian and Armenian religious songs, the ordinary of the Armenian-Roman Catholic Mass etc.

Printed sources

“Directorium officii divini” (1842-Venice) - collection of songs, printed by the Mekhitarist order, in order to preserve the traditions in the Transylvanian diaspora. It contains liturgical songs in Old Armenian, as well as Latin hymns and translations of Hungarian religious songs.

¹⁷ https://www.sulinet.hu/oroksegtar/data/magyarorszag_i_nemzetisegek/ormenyek/ormeny_diaszpora_a_karpat_medenceben_II/pages/magyar/017_zsigmond_benedek.htm, accessed May 2, 2019.

Another collection, published at the centre of the Mekhitarists in Vienna in the nineteenth century, entitled “**Armenian Church Songs for the Use of Armenians in Transylvania,**” contains the text of Armenian songs from Transylvania, with Armenian letters and also phonetically written, according to the Armenian pronunciation in Transylvania.

Oral tradition

Currently there are still very few people who can sing fragments from the Armenian liturgy in Transylvania. With their help and through the choirs of the Armenian churches from Transylvania, the reimplementation of the songs in the Armenian language within the liturgy is being attempted.

Folklore of the diaspora, of other Armenian colonies in the world: according to the researcher Zsigmond Benedek, the results of ethnographers and musicologists from Armenia, carried out in other regions, or on the territory of Armenia can also provide us with information in this regard.¹⁸

The settling of Armenians in Transylvania and their affiliation with the Roman Catholic Church since the 1600s led to the emergence of new forms in the Armenian liturgy. The structure of the Armenian liturgy changed and a species which was previously practiced less often, the community church song, took over the primary role in the singing parts of the liturgy. Thus, some of the texts in the *ordarium missae* of the Armenian liturgy have been replaced by it, as well as - in part - the repertoire used in the *proprium missae* of the liturgy.

The language of the Armenian liturgy in Transylvania became the Old Armenian, spoken according to the rules of the Transylvanian Armenian language, which can be considered a natural phenomenon, because in other Armenian diaspora the old liturgical Armenian language is spoken according to the language spoken by local Armenians. The novelty consists in the fact that in Transylvania, through the new community church songs introduced in the religious practice, the language of the people gained place in the liturgy, thus being transformed into literary language.¹⁹

According to the research in the field, it is assumed that these songs, or much of them, were known and sung in several Armenian Catholic communities in Transylvania. This finding is supported by the following arguments:

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Nagy Kornél, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

- "Directorium officii divini" of 1824, published in Venice - containing several songs, certainly of Hungarian and / or Latin origin - was published for the use of all Armenian communities in Transylvania (this fact appears both in the subtitle and the preface);
- The Manuscript from Frumoasa, whose place of origin is not known, is preserved in the library of the Armenian-Catholic church in Frumoasa: it is assumed that either it was created there or it was taken there for the purpose of use (although in the case of a collection, of which only half was realized, the first assumption is probably more plausible);
- Among the collections gathered so far there are some songs, which are certainly translations of church songs of the Catholic Hungarian community and could be collected in three locations: Gherla, Gheorgheni, Frumoasa - where they were sung almost the same;
- Several of the songs appearing in the Manuscript from Frumoasa were also sung at Gherla with the same melody; they are community church songs translated from Hungarian.

It is therefore very likely that in all the Armenian Catholic communities in Transylvania the same practice of the use of community church songs was widespread, as can be seen from the musical material included in the 1824 Directorium.

Conclusions

According to the sources studied it can be stated that the Armenian-Catholic liturgical musical material used in the Armenian cultural centres on the territory of Transylvania was largely identical.

The appearance of songs in the style of Viennese classicism and their adaptation to Armenian texts is interesting and requires further study. In this case, we cannot be sure that the songs in question were performed everywhere with the melody that appears in the Frumoasa Manuscript.

Being in possession of these songs, it is imperative to find and ask the elders of Armenian nationality - very few in number - about the Armenian musical practice in Transylvania, thus receiving new information on the area of song dissemination, and at the same time on the authenticity of the written sources.

Translated by Dora Felicia Barta

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