
REQUISITIONS OF GOODS AND ECCLESIASTIC PATRIMONY UNDER EVACUATION IN THE ORTHODOX DEANERY OF ALBA IULIA IN WWII

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Abstract

The study deals with the ecclesiastic cultural heritage of some Christian Orthodox parishes in Transylvania during World War II, illustrating unedited aspects, reconstituted according to certain unpublished archive documents.

The first part refers to the plans for protecting the artistic and cultural patrimony against aerial attacks, more precisely, for evacuating archives and valuable objects. The patrimony lists and options of some parishes near Alba Iulia are interesting in respect to the emergency storage places: basement, church, school, private house, sheds or secret places in the woods. Some parishes even drew topographic sketches. Some valuable objects are: an incenser from the Alba Iulia Central Parish dating from 1762, the wooden and glass icons in Ighiel, dating from 1781, one antimens from Meteş dating from 1752, a bell from Ampoiţa dating before 1848, and 12 icons of the great feasts from Blandiana dating from 1825.

The second part of my study analyses the requisition of goods operated by the Russian soldiers engaged in plundering expeditions. In the Deanery of Alba Iulia there were six such cases, rather important damage having taken place in Alba Iulia Partoş, where several document files were confiscated, and in Meteş, where they confiscated registry books and destroyed books from the library. The most dramatic scenes occurred in Sărăcsău, where three Russian officers and a few soldiers behaved brutally, shooting two people (one was mortally wounded) and beating others severely. Another case was that of the 'Saint John the Baptist' monastery in Alba Iulia, which was devastated in September 1944 by a division of Russian soldiers who confiscated all the liturgical and household objects.

Keywords: Transylvania, WWII, patrimony, Russian soldiers, requisitions

1. Preliminaries

In a time of national distress and social suffering, engaged in a war of defense and restoration of borders carved up after the Vienna Diktat (August 30th, 1940), many Romanians in Transylvania were subject to the experience of atrocities committed by the Hungarians, which generated an exodus of the

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Romanian population from Northern Transylvania to the free territory administered by Romanian authorities. Unfortunately, the end of World War II chronicled a new dramatic episode, that of the requisitions made by the Soviet Army, some of them without any formality or legality, amounting in fact to sheer plundering by Soviet soldiers, resulting in confiscations/distruction of goods and losses of human lives. This is also illustrated by the case of the Alba Iulia Orthodox Deanery, a case documented by a wider archive research, which revealed aspects never uncovered before concerning that topic.

Complementary to this topic is the inventory of the Church heritage objects which were to be stored in safe shelters in case of emergency, an inventory reconstituted by us based on several documents, and whose reconstruction recovers an important moment in the evolution of the artistic and cultural ecclesiastic patrimony in the Alba Iulia Deanery.

2. The patrimony to be evacuated and sheltered

In April 1941, the Romanian Ministry of Cults ordered every parish to draw, in agreement with the 'Recruitment Circles', precise plans for the evacuation of archives and valuable objects, to be implemented in case necessity [the Archives of the Archdiocese in Cluj (in this document marked as AAC), *Romanian Orthodox Vicarage of Alba Iulia* Fund (in this document marked as ROVAI), doc. no. 1513/24 April 1941]. On May 8th, 1942, the General Headquarters ordered the entire artistic and cultural patrimony to be sheltered against air-raids. Each institution had the obligation to draw a table with its heritage assets, also specifying the location where they were to be stored in case of emergency [AAC, Fund ROVAI, doc. no. 2186/30 May 1942]. In June 1942, the Archpriest Alexandru Baba of Alba Iulia communicated these orders to the parishes in his Deanery, asking the priests to be prompt, which they readily did, for on June 27th, 1942 the consolidated report for the district was already submitted to the Vicarial Council [AAC, Fund ROVAI, doc. no. 2488/19 June 1942; no. 2547/30 June 1942].

Most parishes were choosing to shelter the valuable objects in the basement/cellar of the parish office (i.e. Acmariu, Alba Iulia I, Alba Iulia II, Bucurdea Vînoasă I, Bucurdea Vînoasă II, Poiana Ampoiului, Răcățău, Tibru, Țelna; in Vurpăr – in the cellar of the priest's home; in Ighiu – in the cellar under the building in the churchyard). In all other cases, the shelter was indicated inside the church, school, private home, barn, or secret places in the woods (in the altar, in the church wall, under the Table of oblation – Alba Iulia III Partoș; "in the old place, where they were sheltered in the year 1848", but without specifying the exact place [probably this place was the cave called the 'Bells Cave', where in 1848 the bell of the church was hidden by the believers; AAC, Fund ROVAI, *Individual Fiche* (Sabin Răcățău), 20 December 1940, unregistered] – Ampoița; in a hole, in the middle of the barn – Blandiana; in the cellar under the elementary school – Craiva; in the village forest, at a distance of 8 km – Cricău; in a 2-metre hole dug in a hill, between two water troughs, marked with two large stones – Inuri; at a 10 km-distance from the national

highway – Meteș; in a cave in the village forest – Pâclișă; in the home of the churchwarden Giura Samoilă, 500 m away from the church – Tăuți).

Five parishes were also attaching topographic sketches, and seven of them – tables with an inventory of the objects [AAC, Fund ROVAI, doc. no. 2547/30 June 1942]. Thus, the patrimony objects to be sheltered in case of danger were the following:

- in *Acmariu*: a *pallium* (or antimens), the box with the Holy Species, two chalices (one in silver), two Disks, two Spears, one Epitaph, three oil lamps, two incensories, two crosses, one chandelier, 18 icons painted on wood, four garments, four *vexilla* (church banners), three tablecloths, 38 books of worship (12 *Menaia* [*Menologia*]), two Evangelions (Books of Gospels), two Apostles, five books of sermons, two Lenten Triodions, two Pentecostaria, three Euchologions, two Horologions, four Octoechos, two Psalters, two Liturgikons) and 120 books from the parish library;
- in *Cricău*: one antimens, a set of liturgical vessels, one incensory, a metal cross, a metal candlestick, vestments, service books, registry books;
- in *Ighiel*: one antimens, a set of liturgical vessels, a silver incensory and cross, silver candlesticks and oil lamps (one with a 4 metre-chain), a bronze chandelier, vestments, an icon of the Lord's Lamentations, *vexilla* (church banners), liturgical books (Book of Gospels, Octoechos, Pentecostaria, Triodions, 12 *Menaia* (*Menologia*), Apostle, Psalter). In the *Individual Fiche* of the priest Aurel Velea, dated December 14th, 1940, under the entry "old art objects" extant in the church patrimony were recorded icons on wood and glass from 1781 [AAC, Fund ROVAI, *Individual Fiche* (Aurel Velea), 14 December 1940, unregistered];
- in *Inuri*: antimens, a set of liturgical vessels, a metal cross, incensories, two metal candlesticks, four metal oil lamps, two icons painted on wood, vestments, service books, registry books;
- in *Metes*: one antimens from 1752 (!), one silvered chalice and the rest of copper liturgical vessels, three bells, three sets of garments, 16 ritual books, registry books, the parish house contract, minutes of proceedings for the investiture of the parish assets in Vingard and the double-entry ledger;
- in *Pâclișă*: a silver cross, a set of liturgical vessels, a copper candlestick, one Seraph, two chandeliers, 8 large icons, two bells, 21 ritual books, 3 sets of garments, 589 books in the parish library and the parish archive;
- in *Răcățiu*: one silver cross, the icon of Saint Demetrius of Thessaloniki painted in oil, two sets of garments and one Euchologion [AAC, Fund ROVAI, doc. no. 2547/30 June 1942].

In the *Individual Fiche* of archpriest Alexandru Baba of the Alba Iulia I Centre parish we find recorded, under the entry 'old art objects', one epitaph embroidered with golden thread, one silver chalice, oil lamps and an incensory from 1762, eight sets of garments, two of which are very old, two inlaid crosses [AAC, Fund ROVAI, *Individual Fiche* (Alexandru Baba), unregistered].

In the *Individual Fiche* of the priest Sabin Răcățău at Ampoița were recorded two old ‚Sovereign’ icons, two crosses, one chandelier, three copper candlesticks and two bells with no inscription (one of them, according to the accounts given in 1940 by the elder inhabitants, existed before 1848, when it was hidden by the believers in a cavern, which is still called the ‘Bells Cave’). A third bell, which bore an inscription, had been brought into requisition by the Hungarian authorities in 1916 [AAC, Fund *ROVAI*, *Individual Fiche* (Sabin Răcățău), 20 December 1940, unregistered].

In the *Individual Fiche* of the priest Ernest Ionescu of Blandiana we find recorded 12 icons of the Great Feasts of the year 1825 [AAC, Fund *ROVAI*, *Individual Fiche* (Ernest Ionescu), 17 December 1940, unregistered].

Far from being a mere inventory – which, anyway, does not exist in this final form, since it has been recast by us after several categories of documents –, the above list recaptures an important moment in the evolution of the artistic and cultural Church patrimony in the Alba Iulia Deanery, providing information about certain rare pieces, valuable from a material and historical point of view, but also about the storage locations in case of danger, some of them highly unusual.

3. Requisitions of goods

Within the Romanian Orthodox Vicarage in Alba Iulia, the greatest war damage were recorded in the Luduș and Turda Deaneries (The Alba Iulia Vicarage functioned during WWII as a temporary body for the administration of parishes in the southern half of the eparchy in Cluj, left without a hierarch after the Vienna Diktat, which practically split Transylvania in two, and, as a result, the eparchy of Cluj. This new administrative body, led by the archpriest of Alba Iulia, Alexandru Baba, lasted for 4 years and 7 months, from September 6th 1940 until April 1st 1945 [1-3; see also AAC, Fund *ROVAI*, doc. no. 1878/8 May 1942]). In November 1944 the Vicarial Council ordered tables with all war damage suffered after August 23rd, 1944, to be drawn [AAC, Fund *ROVAI*, doc. no. 4296/3 November 1944]. The damage caused by *force majeure* (‘war actions’) had to be reported within three days from their occurrence, and ascertained by the Archpriest or a delegat of the hierarchical authority [AAC, Fund *ROVAI*, doc. no. 4722/16 December 1944]. In the Alba Iulia Deanery there was no indication of any war damage caused by the belligerent armies, but requisitions on behalf of the army were recorded: the Soviet Army had set up a mobile army hospital in two rooms of the Parish house of the Alba Iulia II Maieri Parish between September 1st and 20th, 1944, and one room in the Cricău Parish house was occupied with objects belonging to the București University [AAC, Fund *ROVAI*, doc. no. 4516/25 November 1944].

However, apart from these requisitions on behalf of the Army, other abusive ‘requisitions’ were recorded, made without any formality, operated by soldiers whose identity could never be subsequently established, set forth on robbery expeditions from their military units.

In the autumn of the year 1944, the central and regional authorities were requesting statistics with the goods requisitioned by the foreign armies from the Romanian institutions to be set up. Thus, a circular letter on September 13th, 1944 [*The circular letter* of Ministry of Culture, no. 133060/13 September 1944, kept in AAC, Fund ROVAI, no. 4320/9 November 1944], referred to the goods put in requisition by the Allied armies, while the letter of the Prefecture of the Alba County of October 16th, 1944, concerned the material goods delivered to the Soviet Army units with acknowledgement of receipt, or confiscated without any formality [AAC, Fund ROVAI, doc. no. 4143/17 October 1944]. Consequently, the Vicarial Council required the archpriests to draw such tables, but, in all confidentiality, as well as records of the losses suffered by the parishes during the armed confrontations with the Hungarians and the Germans.

In reply to the Order No. 4143 of October 19th, 1944, whereby the Vicarial Council was requesting information regarding the goods delivered to the Soviet Army, the archpriest Alexandru Baba was reporting the requisitioning of goods from five parishes within the Alba Iulia Deanery: Alba Iulia III Partoș, Bucerdea Vinoasă, Ighiu, Meteș and Sărăcsău [AAC, Fund ROVAI, *Evidența bunurilor rechiziționate de Armata Sovietică din parohiile protopopiatului Alba Iulia (septembrie – octombrie 1944)*, no. 4515/25 November 1944]. Today we can add the Mereteu case, recovered from the accounts of those inhabitants who were children in 1944 and recall the terror spread by the Russian soldiers who made a lot of material damage, also confiscating alcohol and animals [The Archive of the Mereteu Parish Office, *Istoricul bisericii din parohia Mereteu*, printed manuscript (Father Ioan Cârdea)].

The requisitions took place during the September–October 1944 period, the goods being seized by force, in all cases, with no formality whatsoever, by the Soviet soldiers whose identity and military unit could not be ascertained. In some cases the church wardens, and even local authorities representatives (the mayor, the local police), were helplessly watching. Such was the case in Ighiu. The damage was quite significant, amounting to over 30,000 Lei for each parish, the highest losses being recorded in Bucerdea Vinoasă (110,000 Lei). However, the most important damage, more serious than the actual material value of the goods as such, were those suffered by Alba Iulia III Partoș, where, beside the other spoils, were seized document dossiers, and in Meteș, where registry books and registrar's rolls were confiscated, and books of the library were destroyed. A detail which is far from insignificant is the case of three Parishes (Bucerdea, Ighiu and Sărăcsău), where the exclusive loot were the wine barrels!

The most dramatic scenes occurred in the Sărăcsău Parish, where acts of brutality of three Russian officers and soldiers 'straying from their units' were recorded. They mortally shot, and threw into the Mureș river, the inhabitant Popa Axente, who died half a day later, shot Piștințan Avram in the shoulder and savagely beat Rusu Avram, Drăgan Ioan, Drăgan Ieronim, Lazăr Ieronim and Drăgan Sabin. The other villagers, filled with panic, ran away into the forest with their children and animals. The report gives no additional details, but it is possible that the events may have occurred in the context of a fight between the

Soviet soldiers and the locals who protested against the claims and behaviour of the former. That hypothesis is suggested by the interesting specification of almost 169 litres of spilt wine – the only prejudice claimed by the Parish in its report.

The Sărăcsău picture is not the only one containing such dramatic notes, but there are others too, a fact which may qualify the respective actions as plundering. That character is confirmed by the general behaviour of Soviet soldiers in situations of this kind, which had nothing to do with natural requisitions: devastation of parish houses and confiscation of any objects, as may be observed by the diverse inventory in the attached table (Table 1). Although they are not included in the geographical area discussed in this paper, we mention the cases of defilement of churches by Russian soldiers within the Aiud Deanery, in the neighbourhood of Alba Iulia, where they destroyed the ceremonial objects and left feces in the Holy Chalice and on the Holy Table, which illustrates even more their barbarity [AAC, ROVAI Fund, *Records of Goods Requisitioned by the Soviet Army from the Parishes of the Alba Iulia Deanery (September–October 1944)*, No. 4515/25 November 1944].

Apart from the goods taken from parishes, there were also personal goods pillaged from the priests, whose total value was very high. Thus, on the night of October 11/12th, 1944, the soldiers robbed the priest Nicolae Puia, in Alba Iulia III Partoș, of goods amounting to 225,300 Lei (one radio set, clothes, tableware, food, farm animals, fodder, etc. However, Soviet soldiers were not content with the requisition of goods strictly necessary for themselves, but also took things they had no need of, such as a pair of boots for women or a leather brief case), and the priest Ștefan Jurca in Tibru, on September 16th, 1944, of goods amounting to 160,000 Lei (a silver watch, a bovine and a wine barrel), as also witnessed by the mayor of the commune, Gheorghe Rusan, as well as Emil Rusan "son of Nicolae."

In December 1944 the abuses of the Soviet military were reported to the Romanian Commission for implementing the Armistice. The Commission requested that detailed reports on such subjects be submitted in the future, in order to be able to intervene by the Allied Control Commission [AAC, Fund ROVAI, doc. no. 4876/30 December 1944]. In January 1945 orders were issued for payment of the requisitioned goods [AAC, Fund ROVAI, doc. no. 297/31 January 1945] and measures were taken for Soviet military units not to be allowed to request any assets without any endorsements and formalities [AAC, Fund ROVAI, doc. no. 865/8 March 1945].

To the six Parishes of the Alba Iulia Deanery, which suffered damage inflicted by Soviet soldiers, is added the case of the 'Saint John the Baptist' Monastery in Alba Iulia, which was devastated on September 24-26th, 1944, by a division of Russian soldiers, settled on the territory of the monastery with approx. 300 horses. The soldiers robbed the monastery and its vinyard, causing significant damage, broke the door of the chapel and "took away everything they found to be valuable" therein, and took clothes and food from the two cells, depriving the Hieromonk Iuliu Ilea and the monk Gheorghe Giurgiu even of the garments they were wearing. The animals of the monastery (sheep and poultry)

were killed, and the beehives destroyed. The news about this brutality was brought to the archpriest Alexandru Baba by the monk Gheorghe Giurgiu, who in the evening of September 24th, 1944, came to the archpriest barefoot and almost naked. The archpriest, in his turn, made this incident known to the Vicarial Council, the City hall, the County Prefecture, the Romanian-Soviet General Headquarters and the Agricultural Chamber, requesting the vandalism to stop (a similar action, but aimed at requisitions in general, was initiated by the 'Podgoria Albei' Winegrowing Trade Union, which submitted to the Russian Military Headquarters, The Gendarmerie Inspectorate and the Alba County Prefecture a Memo, signed by Dr. Ioan Pop, President of the Union, which, among other things, was complaining against the forced requisitions by Soviet soldiers, "as individuals and stray gangs, doubtlessly without the knowledge of their commanders". It even proposed measures in order to remedy this situation, which caused damage not just to the owners, but also to the State [4]). Although he was promised a patrol, it was never sent, therefore the groups of soldiers continued the devastations up to September 26th, 1944. On October 7th, 1944 a delegation from the Alba Iulia Vicarage, led by the councillor Teodor Ciuruş, ascertained the damage produced to the assets of the monastery by the Russian troops quartered at the monastery or in passing, amounting to 6 cartloads of hay, the entire fruit crop (plums, nuts), 80% of the crop of grapes gathered from approximately three hectares of vinyard, 20 kilograms of honey, two beehives and 72,000 Lei, confiscated from the Hieromonk Iuliu Ilea, a total damage estimated at approx. 1,800,000 Lei [AAC, Fund ROVAI, doc. no. 4732/18 December 1944; no. 4054/25 September 1944]. In 1945 the vinyard of the monastery was devastated by soldiers once more, which determined the archpriest Alexandru Baba to make to the commander the request to set up a fixed guarding post at the vinyard, while the Deanery undertook the responsibility for the lodging and food for the guarding soldier [AAC, Fund ROVAI, doc. no. 1718/13 August 1945].

4. Conclusions

By uncovering novel aspects in the central region of Transylvania, more precisely around the city of Alba Iulia, regarding the requisitions of assets by the Soviet Army in the autumn of the year 1944, this paper, we believe, makes a contribution to the completion of the picture of Romanian life in this land during the dramatic years of the second world conflagration. Likewise, the recovery of information regarding the cultural and artistic ecclesiastic heritage within the Alba Iulia Deanery, in the form it had during the years of World War II, may provide researchers with the opportunity to reassess this topic, by using an inventory untapped before, which may possibly contain pieces previously unmentioned or, on the contrary, indicate the disappearance of certain items.

Table 1. Records of goods requisitioned by the Soviet Army from the parishes of the Alba Iulia Deanery (September–October 1944)

[AAC, Fund ROVAI, doc. no. 4515/25 Nov. 1944]

No.	Parish	Goods	Quantity		Value (in Lei)		Date of confiscation (1944)	Officials who witnessed the confiscation	Soviet military unit which took the goods	Observations
			Litres/kg	pieces	Per unit	Total				
1.	Alba Iulia III Partos	Registry of items	-	1	1800	1800	Sept. 27 th	Church warden Hategan Gheorghe	unknown	The goods were confiscated by force
		Dossier of documents registered in 1944	-	1	-	-	Sept. 27 th			
		Wax candles	3	-	2100	6300	Sept. 27 th			
		Oats	420	-	35	14700	Sept. 27 th			
		Kitchen door and 5 windows were broken	-	-	-	10000	October 11 st			
2.	Bucerdea Vinosaă II	Wine and two barrels	780	2	-	110000	October 13 th	Church warden	unknown	Barrels of 50 and 170 litres
3.	Ighiu	Wine	330	-	160	52800	October 3 rd	Mayor, local policeman, members of the Parish Council	unknown	Three Soviet soldiers came in a truck to take wine for their wounded at Oradea Mare, and confiscated by force one 330-litre-barrel without any formality
4.	Meies	File cabinet of the Archive	-	1	5000	5000	October 3 rd		unknown	
		Cash Journal Registry	-	1	1500	1500	October 3 rd			
		Registry of Minutes	-	1	500	500	October 3 rd			
		Registrar's Matriculation Records	-	-	1500	1500	October 3 rd			
		Burnt and torn books from the library	-	-	5000	5000	October 3 rd			
		Kitchen stove	-	1	3000	3000	October 3 rd			
5.	Sărăcsău	Damaged walls of the house	-	-	-	15000	October 3 rd			
		Copper Seal for wax	-	-	1000	1000	October 3 rd			
		Wine	169	-	200	33800	October 3 rd			
Total			-	-	-	261900	-			

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