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CHRISTIAN ORTHODOX CHURCHES IN GAGAUZIAN VILLAGES IN SOUTH BESSARABIA AFTER SECOND WORLD WAR

Bessarabia is a historical area situated between two rivers: Dnester on the East and Prut and the lower part of Danube on the West. The Southern part of Bessarabia was called in the past as Budjak (*rum./mold.* Bugeac, *rus.* Буджак, *eng.* Budjak or Budzak — this name derives from Turkish language, in which «*bucak*» signifies 'triangle'). Sometimes also the name *Akkermanshchina* (Аккерманицина) had been used. The area situated directly on the Danube seldom was named as «*Podunave*». The Southern border of Bessarabia is created by the Black Sea, whereas the Northern border is not so simply to establish. Sometimes its area is constituted by the South — Western part of the Odessa region of Ukraine only (Одесская область). Nevertheless, as the part of Bessarabia can be treated also the Southern part of the Republic of Moldova — especially the autonomous territory of Gagauzia (*Gagauz Yeri*). Certainly, the less controversial name is the «Southern Bessarabia» and this name will be used in the following article.

The area of Southern Bessarabia is the territory of Bulgarian — Gagauzian settlement. The present inhabitants of this area are mainly the descendants of settlers who came from the region of Bulgaria starting with the end of 18th century up to the middle of the 19th century [Каранастас-Радова, 2001; Раковски, 2004; История..., 2006, с. 71–99]. The territory of Balkan Peninsula (and Bulgaria for instance) was at that time under the Turkish authority; from that territory migrated into the East representatives of many ethnical groups but the most of them were Gagauzians and Bulgarians (at that time Gagauzians were not treated as the separate ethnical group but were labeled as the Turkish speaking Bulgarians). We do not know the exact causes of that migration. Perhaps there were some religious problems or some bandits enterprises very common at that time on the Bulgarian territory [Папцова].

In the year of 1812 Bessarabia was joined into the Russia, with its Christian Orthodox faith. Moreover, the most of settlers who migrated from the other side of Danube were also of Christian Orthodox faith (Gagauzians, Bulgarians, Serbs). And so,

nothing strange that on the area of Bessarabia very quickly the separate eparchy in Kishinev (*rum./mold.* Chişinău) had been organized — already in 1813. Also the parrochial organization had been created and many Christian Orthodox Churches were built [Свињин, 1867, с. 208]. Quite often there were some temporary buildings at first but later on some churches made of stone were built, as wrote the well-known Russian scholar Valentin Moshkov [Мошков, 2004, с. 359–360]. At the same time the Christian Orthodox created its organizational structure on the territory of Bessarabia.

After the first world war (strictly speaking in years of 1918–1940) Bessarabia functioned as the part of Romania. In these years the Christian Orthodox churches functioned practically without any troubles. Nevertheless, the structure of Christian Orthodox was under the Bucharest not Moscow authority. However, we can not find any influence of that authority on the liberty of faith in Bessarabia. The Christian Orthodox churches were open and the liberty of faith was firmly established. For instance in Kishinev lived, worked and served as the Christian Orthodox Priest *protoproterej* Mihail Chakir — the person of special significance for the Gagauzians [Чакир, 2005]. The above-mentioned situation changed dramatically already in August of 1940 when (in result of Soviet ultimatum) Romania abandoned its rights to Bessarabia and the Red Army entered on this territory. The introduction of Soviet authority on the territory of Bessarabia resulted especially with some socio — economic changes, such as forced nationalisation of industry, introduction of governmental ownership in agriculture and in commerce, forced atheisation of population. Some Christian Orthodox churches had been closed — for instance in the village of Kirsovo on the territory of present Gagauzian Autonomy

(*Gagauz Yeri*) [Стойнов, 1990, с. 109]. The similar situation took place after the introduction of Bessarabia into the Soviet Union in 1944.

The main subject of this article is the general presentation of history of Christian Orthodox churches in Gagauzian settlements (towns and villages) on



the area of Southern Bessarabia during the post-war period (after the end of military operations up to the present time). The notion of «Gagauzian settlements» is not perfectly clear because on this area all the settlements are in fact multiethnic in its character. These towns and villages are inhabited not only by Bulgarians and Gagauzians but also by Ukrainians, Moldavians, Russians, Albanians and by some representatives of many other nationalities (there is also, not big, group of persons of Polish origin). As the Gagauzian we treat in the following article all the settlements situated on the territory of the Gagauzian Autonomy (*Gagauz Yeri*), without any respect of the percentage of Gagauzian in the given locality. We have also included in this article such the villages situated on the area of Odessa's region of Ukraine in which Gagauzians constitute more than half of the population. In a separate way there was treated the village of Chervenoarmeyskoe, where the Bulgarians form the greatest group of population but this village is so great that the number of Gagauzians living there is much greater than the inhabitants of many villages treated as Gagauzian (for instance Alexandrovka).

The post war period — starting with 1945 (or rather starting with the introduction of Bessarabia into Soviet Union in 1944) up to the present time can be divided into two periods. The first period, which lasted practically up to the dissolution of Soviet Union in 1991 can be characterized by fight with all elements of the religious cult (only in the period of the so-called 'glasnost' of Gorbachev this situation became little bit better). The second period, after the regaining of independence by Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova can be characterized by the gradual revival of faith and some forms of religious cult.

During the period of fight with all the religions the communist authorities tried to do its best to dissolve the population from Christian Orthodox faith and afterwards to introduce the atheisation. The Christian Orthodox churches were closed and parochials had been united and afterwards simply liquidated. On the territory of the Gagauzian Autonomy (*Gagauz Yeri*) during the communist times there were only two Christian Orthodox churches in existence: in

Kongaz (*церковь Святой Троицы*) and in Chok Maydan (*церковь Святого Вознесения Господня*). On the other hand on the territory of Odessa' region of Ukraine in these times there was only one church's building still in existence — namely the female monastery in the village of Alexandrovka. The communist authorities did not closed also the Christian Orthodox church (named «preobrazhenskiy») in the town of Bolgrade, the administrative center of Bolgrade region, with the greatest percentage of the

Bulgarian population (over 50% of the population). This Christian Orthodox church (both in the past and nowadays) forms the very important point on the map of Christian Orthodox faith in the Southern Bessarabia [Пушков, 2008]. In its administrative structure the Christian Orthodox in Bessarabia was under the supervision of Moscow.

The religious buildings belonging to the Christian Orthodox but closed under the communist rule were in different positions. Some of them were empty and did not fulfill any function but some of them functioned as storage, sport facilities or museums. As the museum functioned the Christian Orthodox church of Saint John in Komrat (*Собор Иоана Предтечи*), and also the Christian Orthodox churches in the village of Tomay (*Свято-Успенская церковь*) and Ferapontevka (*церковь Святого Иоанна Богослова*). All the above-mentioned religious buildings are situated now on the territory of *Gagauz Yeri* and fulfill the religious functions. But the great building of the Christian Orthodox church in the village of Dmitrovka (*церковь святого Димитрия*) situated in the Bolgrade region of Odessa area in Ukraine had been changed into the sport facility for the local school.

Unfortunately, some religious buildings were simply destroyed during the communist rule. For instance in 1962 in the village of Beshgyoz the Christian Orthodox church had been destroyed (*Архангело-Михайловская церковь*) and on this place the school was built [Gagauziya, 220]. Two years earlier (in 1960) in the process of building the street in the village of Cheshmekoy the Christian Orthodox church had been destroyed, which certainly was one of the finest building in that village. In the town of Komrat an old Christian Orthodox church (situated near the local cemetery) had been blown up (*церковь Успения Божьей Матери*) and on its place the great monument to the Red Army had been established. Already in 1972 the Christian Orthodox church in the town of Chadir Lunga (*церковь св. великомученика Димитрия*) had been blown up. On this place the house of culture and the Gagauzian theatre were built. The Christian Orthodox church in the village of Karbalia had been destroyed. The similar practices occurred also on Ukraine. In the village of Chervenoarmeyskoe in 1965–1966 the Christian Orthodox church had been destroyed (*церковь Успения Пресвятой Богородицы*). On this place, using the material from the destroyed religious building, the house of culture was built — near by the monument to Lenin and some other monuments to the communist heroes were created. In 1959 the Christian Orthodox church in the village of Alexandrovka had been destroyed. On its place the house of culture was not established, as we can



read in the literature [Георгиев, 2008, с. 78]. Only some fundaments were left, which are still visible. In the beginning of 60-ties of 20th century the Christian Orthodox church in the village of Vinogradovka had been destroyed. (*церковь Св. Георгия*).

In sum, taking into the consideration 32 settlements situated nowadays on the territory of the Gagauzian Autonomy (*Gagauz Yeri*) and in five localities treated in this article as Gagauzian (Alexandrovka, Chervenoarmeyskoe, Dmitrovka, Kotlovina and Vinogradovka) on Ukraine i. e. 37 towns and villages on the area of Gagauzian (or strictly speaking Gagauzian — Bulgarian) settlements in Southern Bessarabia functioned during the communist rule only two Christian Orthodox churches and one monastery. During the communist rule only one religious building was created, namely the winter Christian Orthodox church (*церковь честь Архистратига Михаила*) situated on the territory of female monastery in the village of Alexandrovka (*Рождество-Богородичный монастырь*). However, this religious building was placed inside the monastery complex and so no believers from outside were admitted. In 1960 there was even attempt to destroy the monastery. This monastery became the kind of *refugium* for many nuns coming from other monasteries that were destroyed or simply liquidated by the communist authorities. In 1961 the name of this monastery was changed into *Свято-Михайловски* but in 1990 the previous name had been established (*Рождество-Богородичный монастырь*).

The two period of most intensive fight with religion on the area of Southern Bessarabia took place in the end of 40-ties and in the beginning of 60-ties of the 20th century, when most of the religious buildings were closed or even destroyed [Монастырь..., 2008, с. 10].

The second period of existing the Christian Orthodox churches in Southern Bessarabia started with the democratic reforms initiated in the Soviet Union by Gorbachev and afterwards with the creation of two independent states such as the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Both these states already guaranteed the liberty of religious faith for their citizens [Despre Culte, Nr. 979-XII din 24.03.92 «Monitorul Parlamentului» nr. 3 from 30.03.1992]. And so, nothing strange that many religious building had been repaired and renovated and nowadays these buildings serve the local population. In the Republic of Moldova the government spend a lot of money in order to renovate some Christian Orthodox churches (for instance the heating). Besides, many new Christian Orthodox churches were built and many others are still in the process of building. For instance in the town of Chadir Lunga quite near the old Chris-

tian Orthodox church, which was blown up (*церковь св. великомученика Дмитрия*) its copy had been created. However, its name had been changed. The new Christian Orthodox church bears the name of the icon of Saint Mary of Kazan (*церковь Казанской иконы Божией Матери*). It is interesting that this Christian Orthodox church is situated on Lenin street, the main street in the town. On the other hand, on the outskirts of this town in 1989 the new parrochia was established (*Свято-Димитриевский приход*). The new marvelous. Christian Orthodox church and the female monastery were built. There is still in process of building the new Christian Orthodox church in another town of the Gagauzian Autonomy (*Gagauz Yeri*), in Valkanesh and also in some villages like: Verhniy Kongazchik, Budjak, Cheshmekoy. In the village of Beshgyoz, near the place where stood the old Christian Orthodox church the new Christian Orthodox church was built (*храм в честь апостолов Петра и Павла*). In 2007 in the village of Svetliy where never existed any Christian Orthodox church the great building had been created (*храм святого великомученика Дмитрия Солунского*) — thanks to the anonymous person. The new Christian Orthodox church (*церковь Покрова Божией Матери* — in the house changed into the Christian Orthodox church) was opened also in the village of Kongaz. The similar situation can be find also on the Ukraine. In 2006 in the village of Alexandrovka, near the ruins of an old Christian Orthodox church the new one had been created (*церковь св. ап. и ев. Иоанна Богослова*). Moreover, in the same village the new marvelous Christian Orthodox church was built inside the walls of female monastery (*свято-Троицкий собор*). In the village of Chervenoarmeyskoye (on the backside of house of culture) the small Christian Orthodox church was built, which preserve the name of an old Christian Orthodox church (*церковь Успения Пресвятой Богородицы*). In 2001 in the village of Vinogradovka (near Bolgrad), in the temporary building renewed its functioning Christian Orthodox church devoted to Saint George (*церковь Св. Георгия*).

In the end of this presentation of new and renewed Christian Orthodox churches on the area of Southern Bessarabia we can easily underline the fact that after many years of conflicts (or even fight) with religion and church, the religious faith is nowadays in process of renewal. The Christian Orthodox church regains its believers — however, this process is not too rapid. Thanks to the religious pluralism, such as nowadays in Southern Bessarabia, also other Christian churches (especially protestants) are gaining more and more believers. Some protestants came to the Southern Bessarabia even in the beginning of 20th



century. The protestant churches can be find practically in every town and in most villages presented in this article. On the other hand many persons living in Southern Bessarabia do not have any deep religious faith. They quite often even do not know notions connected with their religious faith and they do not attend the Holy Mess. Even many persons who do not believe in God also identify themselves as Christian Orthodox, because they treat the religious faith rather like the religion of their forefathers and also as the sign of their ethnical identification. On the other hand, the process of building new Christian Orthodox churches (and renewal of old ones) most probably will create the revival of Christian Orthodox faith as well. Moreover, some Christian Orthodox priests try to establish some contacts with members of the youth generation (for instance in Kopchak and Kongaz) in order to show them other values than money or drugs.

Undoubtedly, the area of Southern Bessarabia after the second world war passed the long path from «*family heritage to national shrines*». During the first period (practically total fight with all the religions and all signs of religious cult) the Orthodox Chris-

tians could not freely manifest their religious beliefs. And so, some persons of deep religious faith had to go to «under world» (such like on the Balkan Peninsula during the Turkish domination). In such the situation many forms of religious beliefs had to be practiced simply at home (prayers for instance). Nevertheless, in the next period (after 1991) when in Bessarabia (both in the Republic of Moldova and in Ukraine) introduced formal regulations in concordance with the democratic standards, many Christian Orthodox churches had been renovated and many new religious buildings are nowadays in process of building. On the other hand, the return to Christian Orthodox faith is not so overwhelming than it could be expected. We can name such the factors as first of all the long period of fight with religion, the general trends (practically in whole Europe) towards more laic state and society; also very significant is great expansion of protestant churches. Certainly, in Southern Bessarabia both the religious and social pluralism can now be observed — similar to other regions of modern Europe.

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ПРАВОСЛАВНЫЕ ХРАМЫ В ГАГАУЗСКИХ СЕЛАХ ЮЖНОЙ БЕССАРАБИИ ПОСЛЕ ВТОРОЙ МИРОВОЙ ВОЙНЫ

РЕЗЮМЕ

В 1812 г. Бессарабия была присоединена к России. С тех пор на этой территории была создана православная церковная администрация и начали строиться церкви. Сначала это были простые временные деревянные постройки, которые потом перестраивались в каменные храмы. Независимо от государственной принадлежности (сначала Россия, а потом Румыния) религиозная ситуация в регионе не менялась вплоть до 1940 г., когда в Бессарабию пришла коммунистическая власть. После Второй Мировой войны можно рассматривать два основных периода в изменении религиозной ситуации на территории Гагаузии. Первый из них (1950-е — 1960-е гг.) ознаменован борьбой атеистического режима с верой и верующими. Абсолютное большинство церквей были закрыты, а некоторые из них уничтожены.

Второй (с последнего десятилетия XX в.) наоборот — политикой, направленной в сторону церкви, обеспечивавшей свободу вероисповедания. Старые храмы были отреставрированы и отданы прихожанам. В местах компактного проживания гагаузов в южной Бессарабии, там где не было культовых построек, они были построены. Православие вернулось в этот регион, однако не в такой степени как в прошлом. В этом проявился эффект современного религиозного плюрализма. С этой точки зрения можно сказать, что южная Бессарабия является территорией, где в послевоенный период вера прошла дорогу от семейного наследия (когда церкви были закрыты) до национальных святынь (при существовании демократических условий).