

THE ROLE OF THE HUNGARIAN ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH COMMUNITY SONG IN THE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS OF THE ARMENIAN LITURGICAL REPERTOIRE IN TRANSYLVANIA

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SUMMARY. This article presents and briefly discusses the transformation process of the Armenian liturgical repertoire in Transylvania, through the prism of contemporary descriptions and manuscript sources dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As known, most of the Armenian population settled in the Transylvanian area in the seventeenth century. In time, there followed a gradual and definitive assimilation into the native Hungarian (Szekler) population, during which Transylvanian Armenians lost their mother tongue. Schools with Armenian as the language of instruction gradually closed, and the Armenian liturgy also underwent major changes following the adherence of Armenians to the Roman Catholic Church. Currently the Armenian language and culture are on the verge of extinction, most Armenian churches open only on pilgrimage days, once a year. The Armenian population retains only the language of the liturgy and some traditions (more of a gastronomic nature), which in fact represents the danger of the disappearance of everything that this ethnic group has built beneficially in the service of the community over the centuries.

Keywords: Armenian, Transylvania, liturgical music, religious folk songs, Frumoasa, Gheorgheni

Introduction

Armenians settled in Transylvania were members of the Armenian Apostolic Church. However, as early as the end of the seventeenth century, Catholic missions within the Armenian community began. The key figure of the Armenian Catholicization, Oxendius Virzireski arrived in Transylvania in

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1684, settling in Bistrita. His Catholicization efforts sparked several conflicts within the Armenian community. Nonetheless, he continued his activity, which was successful first among the Armenians on the territory inhabited by Szeklers (in Gheorgheni and Frumoasa), who lived in a community of Roman Catholic denomination. From the documents dating from 1689 we find 2000 Armenians who want to convert to the Roman Catholic rite. In 1690 Pope Alexander VIII issued two breves, in which 1. *he appointed Oxendius Archbishop* and 2. *officially sent him to Transylvania*. Oxendius continued to face many difficulties, but nevertheless a few years later he reported to the Vatican that about 30,000 Armenians from Transylvania had converted to Catholicism. As a consequence of his activity, most Armenians in the area joined the Roman Catholic Church by the end of the eighteenth century. (In Transylvania, the Armenians had significant churches in four localities: Gherla, Dumbrăveni, Gheorgheni, Frumoasa. These became centres of religious life and also of Armenian culture in the region.)

After their conversion to the Catholic Church, the Armenians were able to preserve their rite with the consent of the Pope in Rome, but they had to make some alterations. Starting from this period, the churches and the sacred spaces were built according to the Roman Catholic rite. Thus, some characteristics of the Armenian churches of the Apostolicrite are missing from the Armenian churches in Transylvania. The Armenian-Catholic churches in Transylvania from the eighteenth century were built in Baroque style and also have organs.

There also appeared minor changes in the text of the Armenian liturgy. The conception of the liturgy, however, underwent changes to some extent, it acquired a "Catholic" character (based on the Roman Catholic practice of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Transylvania). In fact, the Catholic thought was superimposed on the Armenian liturgy: an attempt was made to match the parts / elements of the Catholic rite to those of the Armenian liturgy.

1. The Armenian liturgical repertoire. Data on the origin of Armenian liturgical songs from Transylvania

As a result of our research, we may consider that the Armenian liturgical repertoire in Transylvania as known today is represented primarily by church community songs. There are several versions, opinions, and assumptions regarding their origin. Based on the findings of Zsigmond Benedek in his study on this subject, and based on his own research, we can list the following possible sources of the songs:

- *The Armenian liturgical song*: these songs / melodies are also found in the official Armenian liturgical collections;

- *Armenian folklore*: songs that belong to this category or are related to them to a certain extent, were collected in other Armenian linguistic spaces as well;

- *Latin hymns*: in the seventeenth and eighteenth the best-known Latin hymns were translated into Armenian. Some of them were also sung in the Armenian churches in Transylvania;

- *Church community songs*: in the collections discovered in the archives of Armenian churches in the area there are translations of Catholic, Hungarian church community songs, in relatively large numbers. There are also many songs with Armenian texts, whose melodies come from the Hungarian Catholic repertoire, but their texts are not a translation of the song whose melody was borrowed;

- *Of unknown origin*: there are some songs, related to the origin of which we do not have precise information. These - so far - have not been discovered in other written sources. We assume that these are Armenian translations of Hungarian Catholic church community songs that have since become obsolete, namely Armenian church community songs. Most of these songs with unidentified sources bear the imprint of the classical Viennese style. It is very likely that they were introduced to the Armenian repertoire in the eighteenth century, when the Hungarian Catholic liturgical repertoire underwent an intense Germanization - which we will talk about later;

- In addition to these categories, established and listed by Zsigmond Benedek, we managed to identify another category, namely the songs that are compositions of the cantors employed in the Armenian churches in Transylvania.³

Armenian religious songs from Transylvania therefore present in most cases the features of church community songs, their structure and content being similar to those of Hungarian church songs, often being a similar form translated into Armenian. According to research in the field we may certainly consider that these songs, or a large part of them were known and sung in several Armenian Catholic communities in Transylvania, and this is evidenced by the material analysed in the doctoral thesis of the author of the present paper.

³ Zsigmond, Benedek. "A csíkszépvízi kézirat os örmény énekeskönyv-töredék" (The fragment of a collection of songs in the manuscript from Frumoasa). *Örmény diaszpóra a Kárpát-medencében (Armenian Diaspora in the Carpathian Basin)*, PPKE, Piliscsaba, 2007, p. 263.

It should be emphasized here that the Armenian church community songs (with a structure and content different from the Hungarian ones) are few and not of major importance in the Armenian liturgy in the motherland. Such songs were introduced to a very limited extent into the official rite of the universal Armenian liturgy. *The church community song practically does not exist either in the Armenian Apostolic Church or in the Armenian Catholic Church in the other diasporas, so the culture of church community song characteristic of the Armenian communities in Transylvania represents a real curiosity.*

To better understand the relationships and transformations that took place in the Armenian liturgical music in Transylvania, we must present the genre of church community song characteristic of the area.

2. The church community song

The history of the Hungarian church community song is about the same age as the history of Hungarian Christianity. The decision of the synod of 1114 (Esztergom) which stated that “*nothing in the church should be read or sung unless approved by the synod,*”⁴ followed by its resumption and consolidation at the synod of 1279 in Buda, prove that the church song flourished among the Hungarian communities since the eleventh-twelfth centuries. The primary musical source of community church songs is certainly the Gregorian chant, and the medieval European Catholic church community song was altered and adapted to Ancient Hungarian folk music. The later development of the church community song was always influenced by these three factors: the Gregorian chant, the European community song, and the Hungarian folk music.

This specific genre survived and spread over the centuries (between the eleventh and the fifteenth centuries) orally. The text and melody of the songs were learned and transmitted by ear, the same as the Hungarian folk songs. It is not until the beginning of the sixteenth century that the first noted forms of them can be traced, but it is possible that there were written sources even before, which were destroyed in time. The lyrics of the oldest Hungarian church community songs is preserved in the *Winkler Codex* (1506), *Nádor Codex* (1508), *Pozsonyi Codex* (1520), *Peer Codex* (1526) and *Thewrewk Codex* (1531), and the melodies of two songs in the *Nádor Codex* were also preserved, respectively.

⁴ <https://papageno.hu/featured/2019/07/arezzoi-guido-nem-csak-a-zenei-izlest-de-europaszellemi-arculat-at-is-megvaltoztatta/>

Regarding the sixteenth century, in the first and second part of *Telegdi Miklós's* sermons (published in 1577 and 1578) can be found the first Hungarian community songs that were ever printed (six Christmas songs and two Easter songs). It is supposed that besides these eight songs, however, there were many more, known and sung among the people. The 1560 Synod of Nagyszombat allows the church performance only of those songs that were approved by the church 100 years earlier or which will be later approved. The Telegdi Episcopal Library in Pécs mentions two collections of songs from 1568, lost at present: *Psalterium Hungaricum* and *Cantiones Hungaricae*.

The seventeenth century: each of the prayer, meditation and psalter books frequently published in the 17th century, as well as the manuscripts from this period, contain to a different extent text of religious songs. The *Psalterium*, authored by *Szenczi-Molnár Albert*, dates from 1607, a collection that contains not only the lyrics, but also the melodies of the songs contained in it, thus representing a distinctive value. *Pázmány Péter* - who after years of study in Rome brought with him a deep respect for religious songs and a thorough religious musical preparation - at the synod of 1629 in Nagyszombat set out to solve the problem of the church community song. Consequently, the synod decided to publish a collection of songs. *Cantus Catholici* appeared in 1651, financed by the Bishop of Eger, *Kisdý Benedek* and written by the Jesuit priest *Szólósy Benedek*. This was in fact the first collection of songs printed with musical notation in the history of Hungarian music. The songs in this collection are of ancient origin, prestigious and even though many of them are of foreign origin, they were alive on the lips and in the hearts of the Hungarian people long before the Turkish domination and the Reformation.

Cantus Catholici opens the flowering period of the Hungarian church community song. The collection was published in five subsequent editions, slightly revised and altered. Of these, the second is famous, *Editio Szelepcséniana* (1675), published with the support of Bishop *Szelepcsényi György* of Eger. However, what Kodály Zoltán formulates is very important: the fact that these songs appear in several forms in various collections, even at the time of the publication of his volume entitled *Hungarian Folk Music (A Magyar népzene)*, in 1935.⁵ Archbishop Szegedi *Ferenc Lénárd* of Eger published another collection of songs in 1674, also entitled *Cantus Catholici (Szegedi Cantus Catholici)*. In addition to the two volumes of *Cantus Catholici* during this period there were other valuable collections of

⁵ Kodály, Zoltán. *A Magyar népzene (Hungarian Folklore)*. Musical Publishing House, 1989, p. 64.

religious songs, such as *Cantionale Catholicum* (1676) by *Kájoni János*, *Psalms and Funeral Songs* (1693) by the priest *Illyés István* of Esztergom, *Lyra coelestis* (1695) signed by priest *Náray György* of Esztergom. From this period remained in manuscript: the collection of church songs *Cantionale et passionale* from Túróc (Collection of religious songs of the Jesuit order from Túróc, ready for printing), *Hungarian Cationale* by an unknown author and *Kájoni János's* collection, *The Manuscript from Cioboteni*.

In the eighteenth century, the decline of religious music took place: on the one hand, the Hungarian religious song expelled from the public domain survived in secret, being copied, and spread by priests and cantors. At the same time, the influence of the Germanization policy in Vienna presses on the religious song of the community. A series of German songs, scores and religious songs entered the religious life, gradually replacing the old Hungarian songs or modifying them according to the German model. A telling example is the *Collection of Catholic Choral Songs* (1797) of the cantor *Bozóki Mihály* from Marót. Along with songs with pathetic melodies and lyrics, influenced by German culture, he is also inspired by the old Hungarian melodic treasure.

The nineteenth century is a new period of decadence. Through foreign musicians, Viennese, Czech-Moravian and Slavic melodies, and musical features completely replaced the Hungarian musical heritage, so that church music came to depend almost entirely on a foreign musical spirit and taste. This “decadence” is reflected in the *Collection of Catholic Religious Songs*, edited by *Tárkányi Béla* and *Ferenc Zsasskovszky* in 1855, which further on (until 1930) had several editions (the third edition of this collection played a key role in the research included in this paper). Its musical material consists of songs of predominantly foreign origin or transformed in the spirit of German music. However, in terms of the text of the songs, *Tárkányi's* poems bear special values. At the same time, it should be mentioned that this is the first collection of songs, which unlike those before, includes the organ accompaniment of songs. Unfortunately, however, the musical ornaments and their characteristic cadences rooted wrong tastes and habits among cantors.⁶

The first attempts at an adequate systematization, on a scientific and artistic basis, of church community songs took place at the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century. Bishop *Bogisich Mihály* in his 1888 work *The Piety of Our Ancestors* tried to bring back to life many of the forgotten old Hungarian songs, but his reading of ancient songs was not always accurate.

⁶ http://epa.oszk.hu/00900/00997/00021/pdf/EPA00997_Letunk-2012-2_095-103.pdf

Kodály Zoltán considers that the collection of songs circulating orally in the community could be very useful in defining the rules for producing variants. In the consciousness and repertoire of the people, secular and / or religious songs are present in close relation, and they are not clearly distinguished from each other. While among the intellectuals the religious song is closely connected with the church, in the life of the people it is also present outside the church: on work at home or agricultural work, or in a family circle on long winter evenings. Kodály states that this situation is not only characteristic of Transylvania: the church community song blends harmoniously with secular folk music and the culture of other peoples. From this relation it results that the melody of the songs is very often of secular nature and can have a foreign origin: in the Hungarian (and Armenian) Catholic repertoire from Transylvania there are songs of Czech, French, German and Spanish origin.⁷

3. The importance of manuscript song collections

Given the essential character of church community songs and the manuscripts of cantors of past centuries, it can be said with regret that much of the religious musical tradition in Transylvania has not been and is not researched musically even today, even though Kodály Zoltán himself defined and presented that layer of folk music - above the nations - which has common roots with Gregorian music even in a folk song from Joseni (Gheorgheni Depression).⁸

These manuscripts of the cantors represent a unique value, being situated between the oral tradition - of the people and the official one - of the liturgical musical publications. The collections of church songs, due to their manuscript character, obviously reflect the changes of the church repertoire in the region, by the fact that they contain fresher materials than the printed ones, signalling the new processes of changing the repertoire. Their indisputable significance regarding the research of church community songs and folk music is because in many cases it also denotes the paraliturgical musical tradition, located outside the official publications. In addition, through these collections, one can follow what the local community preserved from the community songs that were in the old official collections but did not appear in the new printed collections.

⁷ Kodály, Zoltán. *A magyarnépzene (Hungarian Folklore)*. Musical Publishing House, 1989, p. 64.

⁸ Folk song entitled „Szivárvány havasán”, collected in 1910 (Kodály, Z. op. cit., p. 35).

Knowledge of the tradition of religious songs of a region must be started by studying the most important collections previously used in that region. In Transylvania one of the first and most important printed collections is the *Cantionale Catholicum (Kájoni)* from 1676, mentioned in the previous subchapter. Kájoni's collection was republished in 1719, then in 1805. In 1787 (in other sources 1797) appeared *Bozóki Mihály's Collection of Catholic Choral Songs*, in the material of which there is a strong German-Baroque influence, and the collection of *Tárkányi-Zsasskovszky* songs, first published in 1855, already contain a mixed German-Hungarian-Latin material. Like Kájoni's collection, Simon Jukundián's 1869 collection was also born in Transylvania, more precisely in Șumuleu-Ciuc and already marks the intention to collect community songs from the nineteenth century. Jukundián noted those songs as "*partly old, partly new,*" which "*are much loved especially in Transylvania, but have not yet been edited by anyone*" and "*130 songs that have not yet been noted.*"⁹ *The collection of songs from the Diocese of Transylvania*, published in 1921 in Gheorgheni, was proposed as a fourth edition of Kájoni's collection, but it turned out to be a much more important work than a simple reissue. János Baka took much from both his predecessors and "from the lips of the cantors,"¹⁰ as the sources state in some songs. The series of collections is not complete, of course, but these are the editions whose influence can be found in the musical heritage of the cantors of the Armenian churches from Gheorgheni and Frumoasa - the most important being the Tárkányi-Zsasskovszky collection.

The legacy of religious songs of the Armenian communities was not included in the mentioned editions, considering that the collections aimed primarily at the Hungarian, Roman Catholic tradition. The Armenian community songs were thus preserved only in the form of manuscripts, both in Gheorgheni and in Frumoasa, but one can observe the increased influence of the Hungarian repertoire on them. The premise of making these collections in manuscript was that in the village there was a trained musician (cantor), but at least connoisseur of musical notes to write on paper the musical heritage, then there had to be a way and will to preserve the manuscript. In the researched region both were given: until the middle of the twentieth century the singing positions were occupied by teachers, then by teacher-cantors.

These books, collections compiled by Armenian-Hungarian singers, are considered to be valuable sources, their existence giving the possibility for future research of the religious musical past of the ethnic group in

⁹ http://real.mtak.hu/88110/2/14_V_Szucs_Imola.pdf

¹⁰ Idem.

question. From a musical point of view, we may talk about a comprehensive material, because in the mentioned volumes can be found all the stages of the history of the formation of Armenian-Catholic religious music, from songs of ancient origin, Armenian origin to songs that bear the imprint of Hungarian and German Romanticism.

Conclusions

In conclusion, we may assert that the musical material contained in the collections of manuscripts discovered is very rich, varied and brings many surprises in the process of researching the Armenian Catholic repertoire in Transylvania. Therefore, we consider that the discovery and analysis of manuscript collections can be the starting point of a more extensive research. Along with the research of these materials, to know the still viable heritage of songs from Frumoasa and Gheorgheni, it would also be indicated the participatory observation of the few Armenian religious holidays in the region.

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