

**RELIGION AND DENOMINATION  
IN LAPUS LAND – STRUCTURAL-EVOLUTIONARY  
CHARACTERISTICS AND SPECIFIC REGIONAL  
MANIFESTATIONS WITHIN THE HISTORIC-POLITICAL  
CONTEXT OF THE LAST 150 YEARS<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** The detailed analysis of the denominational aspects specific to Lapus Land points out a denominational structure much more varied than the national one and which is submitted during certain periods to some inherent variations of the rates related to each cultural group and sometimes submitted to some conflicting mutations. These determined, in an initial period (coinciding with the XVII<sup>th</sup> century and especially with the XVIII<sup>th</sup> and the XIX<sup>th</sup> centuries), the gradual increasing of the denominational disparity degree and of the parameter of religious differentiation, consequence of the unchanging actions in attracting the Romanians to the religious conversion to the Uniat religion after 1701 and in colonizing some inconstant population groups living in the kingdom area, which turned into an empire afterwards, undertaken by the Hungarian Crown and by the Wien Court. Yet, the purpose of all these actions was insignificantly reached without succeeding in taking into pieces the religions specific to the Romanian population, widely dominant at the Lapus area's scale during all this period. In return, after the absorption of the Uniat Church by the traditional Orthodox Church – produced after the juridical act in 1948 with the political contest of the ruling communist polity – we were witnesses to an adverse evolution, marked by an obvious tendency of homogenizing the denominational structures and reducing adequately the parameter of religious differentiation. In order to wonder the main tendencies which have configured the religious phenomenon's evolution in Lapus Land (marked by numerous variations in different historical periods), we expanded the analysis of the denominational aspects during 150 years (1850-2002). Practically all the registrations performed during this period, which have included the religious membership's problems too, have pointed out the relative denominational equilibrium of the Lapus Land's population conferred by the “end to end” evolutions of the main religions' rates specific to the Romanian population – Orthodox and Uniat – which represented more than 83% of the worshippers within the Lapus area even during the prime period of the Austro-Hungarian dualism. This relative equilibrium maintained until the starting of the denominational homogenization process generated by the juridical integration of the Uniat Church into the Orthodox one. Unlike the pronounced positive evolutions registered by the denominations specific to the Hungarian ethnic groups within the Transylvanian area, regarding the Lăpuș Land the rate values registered by the denominations specific to the Hungarian ethnic groups had particular evolutions, much more different related to those consigned in the entire Transylvanian area. In other situations, the evolutions have been even contrary, due to some particular social-economic conjunctures that marked the Lăpușului Land in the course of some analyzed intervals. Thus, the study had in view to

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spotlight the specific evolution of the confessional profile of the population during the last century and a half. On the whole and at the phase level, the main evolutionary specific traits have been highlighted, the territorial distribution, the specific regional manifestations and, not in the last turn, the impact and the implications induced by the historical-political and social-economic context which have marked the Transylvania and the Lăpuşului Land in the analyzed period.

**Keywords:** religion, religious structure, denominational homogeneity and disparity, simplifying the denominational pattern, denominational conversion-reconversion, interdenominational transfer, religious proselytise, group peculiarity, evolution, territorial distribution, specific regional manifestations

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Even if regarding the Transylvanian area's scale the tracking of a religious correspondence specific to each ethno-cultural community is broadly possible and close to reality<sup>2</sup>, the detailed analysis of the denominational aspects specific to Lapus Land points out – together with some existing exceptions to these analogies, mostly before 1918, truly discontinuous and unrepresentative for the Lapus area's scale<sup>3</sup> – a denominational structure much more varied than the national one and which is submitted during certain periods (within the empire of numerous social-political and religious deep mutations which took place within the Transylvanian area during the last two centuries) to some inherent variations of the rates related to each cultural group and sometimes submitted to some conflicting mutations.

These determined, in an initial period (coinciding with the XVII<sup>th</sup> century and especially with the XVIII<sup>th</sup> and the XIX<sup>th</sup> centuries), the gradual increasing of the denominational disparity degree and of the parameter of religious differentiation, consequence of the unchanging actions in attracting the Romanians to the religious conversion (finalized through the conversion of an important segment of the Orthodox population from the Lapus Land to the Uniat religion after 1701, at the Transylvanian area's scale the values being less relevant – see below) and in colonizing some inconstant population groups living in the kingdom area, which turned into an empire afterwards, undertaken by the Hungarian Crown and by the Wien Court. Yet, the purpose of all these actions was insignificantly (and transitory at any event) reached without succeeding in taking into pieces the religions specific to the Romanian population, widely dominant at the Lapus area's scale during all this period (although the proportion between them registered suggestive mutations and even reverse rates here and there – see below).

In return, after the absorption of the Uniat Church by the traditional Orthodox Church – produced after the juridical act in 1948 with the political contest of the ruling communist polity – we were witnesses to an adverse

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<sup>2</sup> In accordance with it most of the Romanians are Orthodox and Uniat Church, the Hungarians are – in different rates – Roman Catholics, Calvinists and Unitarians, the Germans embraced the Lutheran religion, the Armenians embraced the Roman Catholic religion, and the Jews the Mosaic religion; regarding the Gypsies, there usually functioned the sociological mechanism of religious identifying with the religion or the religions of the majority ethnic groups or of the politic-symbolically dominant groups within a community (within the meaning of the valorisation social mechanism of different ethnic groups, in whose virtue the Hungarian ethnic group, dominant from the political and economical point of view until 1918 in Transylvania, was, during this period, higher put forward in comparison with the Romanians – Sisestean, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> For example, a few Romanians and Germans (those who were settled down here for mining) embraced the Calvinist religion, Unitarian and even Roman-Catholic religion, some Hungarians acceded to the Evangelical praise and so on.

evolution, marked by an obvious tendency of homogenizing the denominational structures and reducing adequately the parameter of religious differentiation.

## **2. RELIGION AND DENOMINATION – EVOLUTIONARY CHARACTERISTICS, TERRITORIAL DISTRIBUTION AND SPECIFIC REGIONAL MANIFESTATIONS**

In order to wonder the main tendencies (synthetically conceived above) which have configured the religious phenomenon's evolution in Lapus Land (marked by numerous variations in different historical periods), we expanded the analysis of the denominational aspects during 150 years (1850-2002).

We may remark the fact that practically all the registrations performed during this period, which have included the religious membership's problems too (1850, 1880, 1890, 1900, 1910, 1930, 1992 și 2002), have pointed out the relative denominational equilibrium of the Lapus Land's population conferred by the "end to end" evolutions of the main religions' rates specific to the Romanian population – *Orthodox and Uniat* – which represented more than 83% of the worshippers within the Lapus area even during the prime period of the Austro-Hungarian dualism.

This relative equilibrium maintained until the starting of the denominational homogenization process generated by the juridical integration of the Uniat Church into the Orthodox one from which it had been detached two centuries and a half ago and finalized by placing the Orthodox religion into the posture of a widely dominant denomination on the Lapus religious scene, this posture being maintained and gradually reinforced until now (pointed out by the rates values of the Orthodox population indicated by the last two censuses: 83,8% in 1992 and 83,4% in 2002).

In the general note specific to the Maramures county's ensemble (where the rates values related to the Uniat population were representing 66.3% in 1850, 65.4% in 1880 and 64.3% in 1910 and 1930), the Lapus Land was one of those regions where the adherence of the inhabitants to the Uniat worship took place quickly after the religious union with Rome in 1701 and in substantial rates, although there were rates below the county average, but well above the average consigned in Transylvania area (41.6% in 1850, 39% in 1880, 40.5% in 1910 and 43.4% in 1930 for the Lapus Land in comparison with 32.2% in 1850, 24.6% in 1880 and 23.7% in 1910 for Transylvania).

Nevertheless, during the entire period for analysis, the Uniat population didn't exceed (but for the interwar census) the traditional religion of the Romanians – the Orthodox religion – dominant in Transylvania area, which, although it developed within proximate rate limits until the abolishment of the Uniat Church (in 1948), it maintained during all this period a facile advantage in relative value terms related to the conjoint worshippers (with values of approximately 3-4% for the censuses before 1948, when it detained the relative majority – 1<sup>st</sup> chart). And this happened in spite of the numerous denominational kneading – induced by some social-political parameters and, least but not the last, economical ones – registered within the Lapus communities during the entire period which followed the religious union, materialized in recurrences to the Orthodox tradition of some Lapus groups or communities<sup>4</sup> or in reconversions to the Uniat worship<sup>5</sup>. There haven't missed

<sup>4</sup> Mostly in the settlement Dobricu Lapus, Fantanele, Groape, Razoare, Cupseni, Libotin, Vima Mica, and in others too, but in a smaller scale (Salnita, Cufoaia, Rohia, Vima Mare and so on).

<sup>5</sup> Draghia, Coroieni, Baba, Valenii Lapusului, Ungureni, Suciul de Jos and so on, but with smaller rate values than in the case of transfers from the Orthodox denomination to the Uniat one.

any of the adherence actions of some worshippers belonging to both religions specific to the Romanian population to the Calvinist religion, declared in the Lapus area ever since the former part of the XVII<sup>th</sup> century (religion accepted by the absolute majority of the Hungarian ethnic groups in the Lapus Land, as well as a small number of Romanian population<sup>6</sup> and so on).

The moderate evolutions of the absolute values (easily upgrade) and rate values specific to the Orthodox disciples during the period before 1948 (with small variations, but maintained inside the limits of a margin of  $\pm 2\%$ ) were practically marked by the reduplication of the rate value (43% for the censuses in 1850 and 1910, 44% in 1880), as an effect of the absorption of the Uniat Church within the Orthodox one after the communist power's installing in Romania. The rate bounce realized during the post-war period had as a starting basis the rate value of 42.8% registered in 1930, after that it reached 83.8% in 1992).

In absolute terms, the margin of the increasing started from 13252 then reaching 30766 worshippers for the same years (1930, 1992 respectively), the rate of the Uniat worshippers being less than the relative value of 2.9% in 1992 and 3% in 2002 – in spite of the emancipation of this religion happened immediately after 1989.

Nevertheless, the numerical and rate evolution of the Orthodox worshippers was slower during the administration from Budapest (from 12047 worshippers in 1880 to 13713 in 1910, the rate values being even in recourse, from 44% to 43% during the same period) and even easily negative during the interwar period (from 13713 in 1910 to 13253 in 1930, respectively from 43% to 42.8%). In this moment the Uniat religion became (for the first and only time during the analysed period) the prevailing religion within the Lapus area (with 43.4% in comparison with 42.8% for the Orthodox inhabitants), on the background of their increasing from 12916 to 13443 between 1910 and 1930.

After the Second World War we are witnesses of a pronounced revival of the Orthodox religion in the Lapus area generated by the juridical act in 1948, the moment when it assumes the statute of a prevailing religion within the Lapus Land (case similar to the one registered in Maramures county and in the entire Transylvania).

Unlike the pronounced positive evolutions registered by the denominations specific to the Hungarian ethnic groups within the Transylvanian area (which registered increases of 80% for the Roman-Catholics, 76% for the Reformed and 47% for the Unitarians – Bodocan, 2001), regarding the Lapus Land the rate values registered by the denominations specific to the Hungarian ethnic groups had particular evolutions, much more different related to those consigned in the entire Transylvanian area.

So, in the case of the *Roman-Catholics* the rates values had a more winding way, easy increase registered between 1850 and 1880 from 6.2% to 7.9% (especially as a result of the colonization with mine workers brought here with a view to quicken the extracting and processing activities unrolled in the North-Eastern area of the Lapus Land and, severally, but insignificantly within the analysed territory, due to the conversion of a part of the inhabitants to

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<sup>6</sup> In the situations when the detachment of the Orthodox Romanians from the dependence and penury state during many centuries and their access to a social and economical statute able to allow the assertion of their own values (including the attainment of the nobility titles, domains, fees exemptions and so on), it was conditioned, among others (eg. the military drafts provided for the king), by the adherence to one of the religions considered as recent.

Catholicism mainly to overpass the social and economical limits imposed to the Romanian people and Orthodox people), being followed by their registration with a downward tendency during that period when in Transylvania the values consigned for each of them had known spectacular increases. This decrease was particularly the result of the mining activities' throwback unrolled in the North-Eastern area of the Lapus Land, this throwback was followed by the need of the largest number of the foreign settlers, brought here lately, to leave this territory, because of the economical motivation's lack.

In what concerns the evolution of the *Reformed worshippers*, one can notice their maintenance on a constant negative course during the entire period before the First World War (from 7.4% in 1850, to 5.9% in 1880, to 5.7% in 1900 and 5.5% in 1910), mostly as a result of the active Catholic proselyte broken out on a largest background of the initiated actions ever since the beginning of the counter-reformed period.

The numerical and rate decrease of the disciples of both religions practiced especially by the Hungarians, registered in the post-war period, is placed between the limits of this Lapus Land ethnic groups' evolution (from 4868 to 25723, respectively from 15.3 to 8.9 between 1910 and 1930), tendency similar to that which was registered both at the level of Transylvania area and Maramures county (from 67583 to 30106, respectively from 21.8% to 9.5%), as a result of the ethnical structure's changes after the Treaty from Trianon.

Between the numerical evolution of the *Mosaic religion* disciples (no matter how it was realized – by immigration, emigration, natural increase) and that of the Jew ethnical groups within the Lapus area one can observe an obvious correspondence, being marked by considerable increases in the first part of the analysed period (with approximately 300% between 1850 and 1910, respectively from an absolute value of 349 and a relative one of 1.5% to 1522, respectively 4.8%). A spectacular increase of the disciples of this religion was registered particularly in the centre of the Lapus Land (Targu Lapus), whose favourable position offered an environment propitious for the exertion of their specific occupations, especially the commercial ones (from 7.8% in 1850 to 20.2% in 1880 and 24.6% in 1910), a significant contingent being centred in Damacuseni too (their rate values increasing from 3.8% to 8.2% and 11.1% for the same reference years). The inter-war period points out the numerical and rate diminution of the Mosaic people within the Lapus area (3.8% is the equivalent of 1174 Mosaic worshippers in 1930), then, after the Second World War, their number had a pronounced decline, finalized with their extinction among the religions found within the denominational structure of the area (this was acknowledged by the census in 1992).

The contribution of the others religions found in the denominational chart of the Lapus Land before the Second World War is insignificant – only 65 persons in 1850, all of *Evangelical religion* (their presence was also due to the mentioned colonisations, the biggest part of them being situated in the mining centres of Strambu-Baiut, Baiut and Lapus). But their number gradually decreased for the next period in accordance with the descending evolutions registered by the corresponding ethnical groups, reaching just 22 persons in 1910 (15 Evangelical Augustans and 7 Unitarians).

Concerning *the territorial distribution of the main religions* one can notice a clear division of the area (Orthodox and Uniat), situation which broadly maintained until the communism installing and the winding up (by absorption) of the Uniat religion

(in 1948), the Centre-Western area being dominated by the Orthodox religion's disciples, and the Eastern and the South-Eastern one, by the Uniat religion.

The worships specific to the minority ethnical groups (widely dominated by the Hungarian ones) are grouped especially in the two mining centres from the North-Eastern subdivision of the Lapus Land (Roman-Catholics), respectively in Targu Lapus and Damacuseni (Reformed worship), furthermore these being the only settlements with Hungarian majority from the analysed area. During the administration from Budapest, there were found rates much more reduced of the religions specific to Hungarians within many settlements (mostly in Grosii Tiblesului, Razoare and Lapus), the Mosaic and Evangelical worshippers being grouped in mining centres and in the centre of the Lapus Land (Targu Lapus).

### **3. THE HABSBURG AND AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN PERIOD (1850-1918)**

With the four exceptions mentioned above (from the total of 36 settlements) in which the denominations specific to the Hungarians detained the relative majority (the mining centres Strambu-Baiut and Baiut dominated by the Roman-Catholic worship disciples, both having rates little over 50%, Targu Lapus and Damacuseni having Reformed inhabitants respectively, with rate values of 62%, respectively 95%), *the census made in 1850* points out a balanced "share" concerning the numerical distribution of the dominant Orthodox or Uniat religion communities: 18 settlements are of an Orthodox majority (in 7 of these the disciples of the Eastern denomination having a rate over 97%, and in one 100%) and 14 Uniat settlements (in 5 of these with a rate over 97% and 5 with 100%), and just one settlement (Rohia) one can find relatively equilibrated rates with the two denominations, with a little advantage for the Orthodox people (49.7%, 44.3% respectively).

The map of the territorial distribution of the denominational communities points out a mosaic like distribution of the worships specific to the Romanian inhabitants mostly in the Southern and South-Eastern subdivision (belonging to the present communes Coroieni and Vima Mica), so that in the Central-Northern subdivision of the Lapus Land (the villages Cupseni, Ungureni, Costeni, Libotin, Rogoz, Borcut, Dumbrava and Inau) to be loomed an area where the Orthodox worship prevails (with rates oscillating between 80 and 100%), and in the Eastern and East-South-Eastern subdivision (the villages Lapus, Poiana Botizii, Suciul de Jos, Suciul de Sus, Larga, Grosii Tiblesului, Boiereni) an area characterized by a religious structure widely dominated by the Uniat, which represent rates between 85 and 100%.

**The census of 1880** broadly maintains the denominational structure consecrated three decades ago, but with a slight rate increase of the Orthodox people (from 43% to 44%), of the Roman-Catholics (from 6.2% to 7.9%) and of the Mosaic worshippers (from 1.5% to 3.1%, this average being superior to that consigned in Transylvania of 2.8%, but inferior to that from Maramures county whose attendance reached 10.2%) in the expense of the Uniat (decreasing from 41.6% to 39%).

Regarding the territorial level it wasn't registered any spectacular rate evolution except the pronounced positive evolutions of the Mosaic people within settlements as Targu Lapus (from 7.8% to 20.2%, reaching to overpass even the rate of the Roman-Catholics, although they had known a significant revival during this period too, from 10.1% to 14.4%) and Damacuseni (from 3% to 8.2%), including some regrouping of the concerned communities within these settlements (which were offering a trading environment more propitious to the sequence of the

activities specific to the Jews ethnic groups, because of the cantered position within the region, along the main access route and because of the political-economical advantages conferred by the functions congregated for years), in parallel with their decrease in some settlements as Razoare and Fantanele.

In this period is also pointed out the appearance of some new communities belonging to the Mosaic ethnic groups or the strengthening of the already existing ones (e.g. Baba, Costeni, Cupseni, Vima Mare, Peteritea, Grosii Tiblesului, Suciu de Jos, Suciu de Sus and so on), respectively some inter-denominational transfers especially between the disciples of the religions specific to the Romanians (particularly from the Orthodox religion to the Uniat one, but also the reverse), as well as between the Romanians' religions and those specific to the Hungarian ethnic groups (but with a smaller rate).

The centers for political, commercial and economical support of the Hungarian authorities – mainly Targu Lapus and the mining centres Baiut and Strambu-Baiut, but also Damacuseni – have continued to maintain a denominational structure dominated by the adepts of the religions specific to the Hungarians, the few interpreters belonging to other worships within the Lapus Land area (others than the four worships with a more important rate – Evangelical, Unitarian and partly Mosaic respectively). Among these one can distinguish the Land's "centre" (Targu Lapus), characterized by the most diversified denominational spectrum related to the other settlements of Lapus Land (including the mining centres, more diversified from the religious point of view in comparison with the most of the Lapus villages, because of the reasons already mentioned), whose commercial function – gradually strengthened over the time – was the basis for this denominational differentiation, by attracting some variable population contingents belonging to the diverse ethnic and worship groups both within the Lapus Land area and mostly outside it.

If in what regards the religions' evolutions practiced by the minority ethnic groups there didn't take place significant changes during this period (the number of the settlements with most Roman-Catholics and Reformed adepts respectively didn't change), there were registered changes in what regards the rate of the two religions of the Romanian people, with advantageous evolutions for the Orthodox religion (which became dominant in another two settlements – Dobricu Lapusului and Salnita – thus their number reaching 20) and against the Uniat dominant ones (decreasing from 14 to 12 settlements, by losing the two settlements). These evolutions took place particularly based on the inter-denominational transfers, which were possible through a closer previous report between the adepts of both worships.

Some transfers including more significant contingents took place in other settlements of Lapus too, but with a significant differential rate which allowed them "the absorption" of a big number of worshippers, but without modifying the existing denominational majority (e.g. Vima Mica, Fantanele, Groape, Razoare, Cupseni, Libotin and so on).

As a result, except the two mentioned settlements, the territorial distribution of the settlements inhabited mostly by the adepts of one or the other worships preserved (the area of Orthodox people was dominant in the Centre-Northern subdivision and the Uniat people were dominants in the East-South-Eastern subdivision), the only settlements with a more equilibrated rate of the two dominant religions being Suciu de Jos (46.1% Orthodox people and 50.5% Uniat people), Salnita (54.4% and 45% respectively) and Rohia (58.3% and 40.4% respectively).

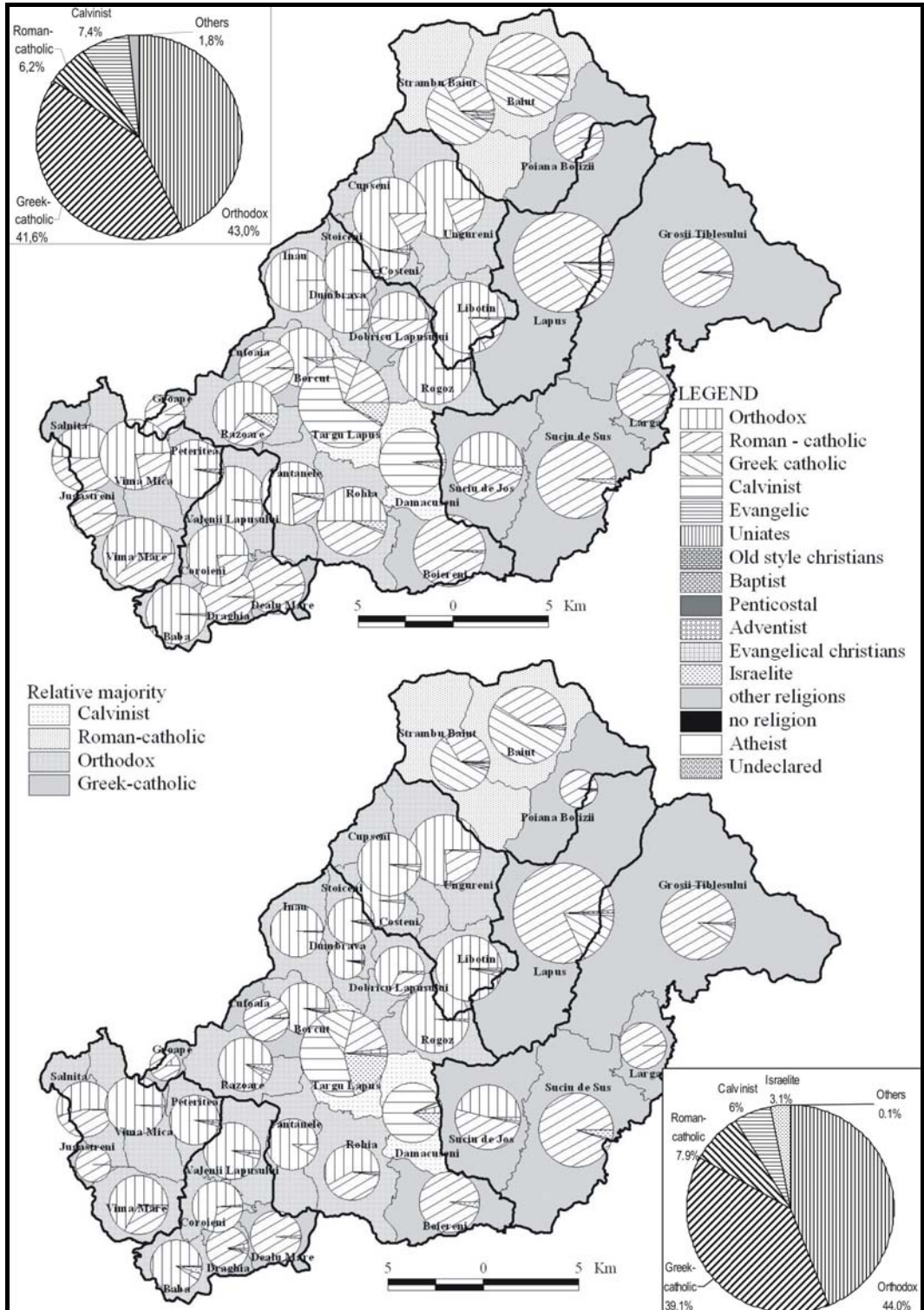


Fig. 1. Lăpușului Land. The structure and the confessional profile of the population in 1850 and 1880



The denominational structure stays the same also at the latter census unrolled under the Budapest authority (1910), its parameters didn't point out significant changes regarding the evolutions of the frequencies of the religions specific to the Lapus Land inhabitants in comparison with the evolutions consigned in the previous census. However one can notice the slight inversion of the tendency followed both by the two dominant religions (the decrease of the Orthodox people rate from 44% to 43% in comparison with 1880, and the increase of the Uniat people from 39% to 40.5% during the same period), and the two denominations specific to the Hungarians (Roman-Catholics and Reformed people, decreasing from 7.9% to 6.2%, respectively from 5.9% to 5.5%). Although the inter-denominational transfers existed also during this period, prevailingly from the Orthodox religion towards the Uniat one (e.g. Borcut, Dobricu Lapusului, Fantanele, Groape, Rogoz, Costeni, Vima Mica), but also the reverse (e.g. Boiereni, Cufoaia, Dealu Mare, Libotin), and between these and the religions specific to the Hungarians (but insignificant from the numerical point of view), the changes regarding the most religious people affected just one settlement (Suciu de Jos, which became of an Orthodox majority, favoured by the existence of a previous religious disparity more pronounced with a relative balanced rate between Orthodox people and Uniat people).

The Mosaic religion continued to register positive evolutions during the previous period, from 3.1% to 4.8% all over the region, the settlements with converged Mosaic groups being, as to the previous census, Targu Lapus, Damacuseni (in both settlements they represent the second religion as adepts number, after the Reformed ones), there are important Mosaic communities also in settlements as Baba (7.8% of the entire number of inhabitants), Suciu de Jos (6.8%) or Razoare (4.8%), and many other settlements registering rates below 4.5% (e.g. Peteritea 4.2%, Vima Mica 3.7%, Suciu de Jos and Dobricu Lapusului 3.3%, Ungureni 3.1%, Lapus 3% and so on). The other denominations had an insignificant contribution in shaping the religious profile of the Lapus Land (e.g. There are consigned only 22 inhabitants belonging to the Evangelical and Unitarian religions, with a number of 15 adepts, respectively 7 adepts).

#### **4. THE INTER-WAR PERIOD**

As well as in the ethnic group case, *the census of 1930* marks the beginning of an homogenizing process of the religious composition of the Lapus Land's inhabitants on the background of weakening the rates of the minority religions (from 6.1% to 5.2% for the Roman-Catholics, from 5.5% to 4.5% for the Reformed inhabitants and from 4.8% to 3.8% for the Mosaic inhabitants), although within the new denominational structure there "worked in" for the first time a chain of religions with no official census registration within the previous period (the Neo-protestant, Armenian-Catholic, Islam or the category of other religions, but with a insignificant numerical and rate contribution, all these totaling below 30 persons, respectively 0.1%).

This process was pronounced during the post-war period, when the interceded changes (especially produced by the political factor) simplified the denominational pattern of the Lapus Land, with a denominational spectrum however much "poorer" related to the variety of religions registered in Transylvania and with an insignificant numerical contribution within the region's population (excepting the Hungarians' religions which, although decreasing with approximately 3-4% related to 1930, cumulates approximately 10% on an average of the entire region's population).

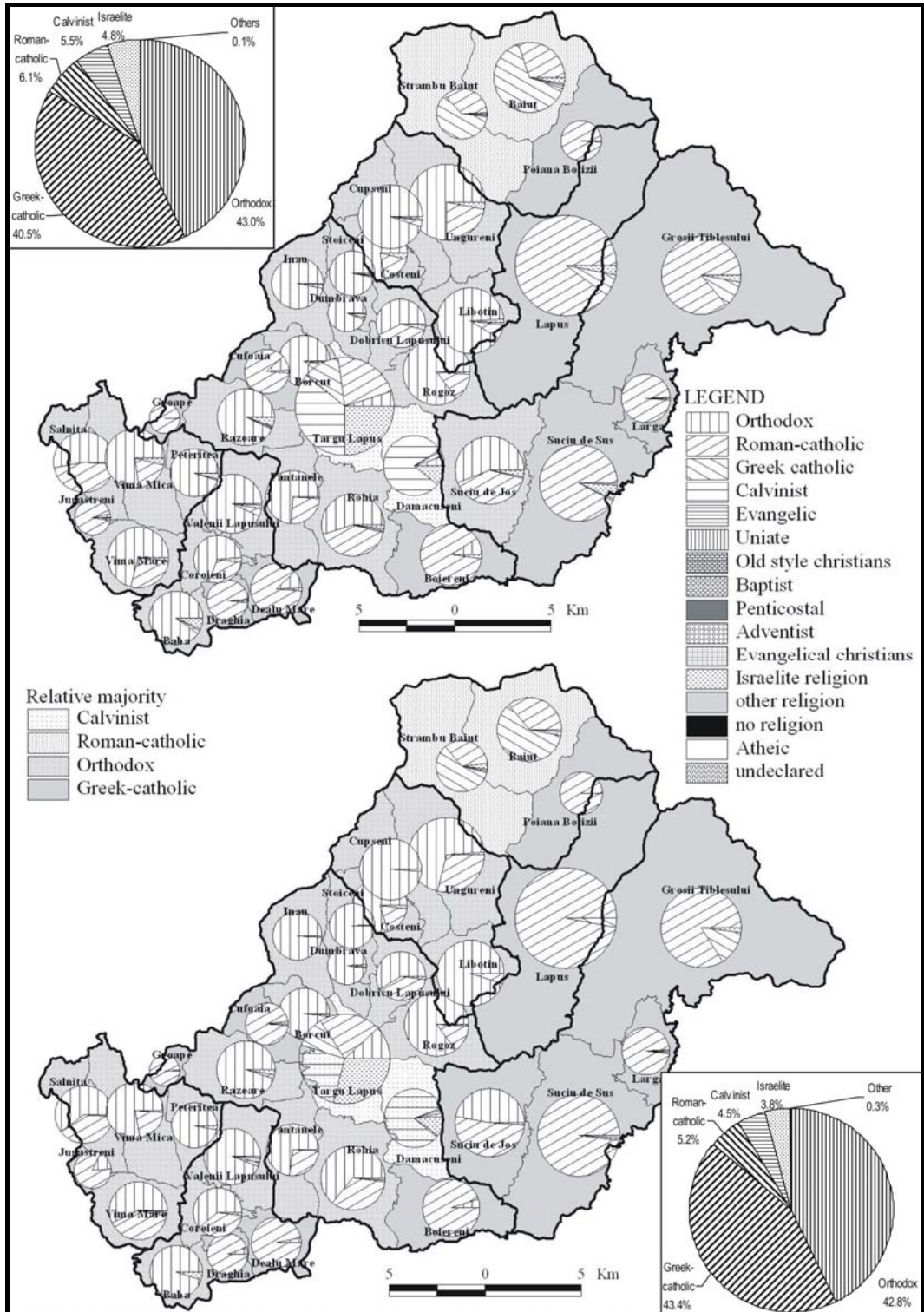


Fig. 2. Lăpușului Land. The structure and the confessional profile of the population in 1910 and 1930

In spite of the expectations (given that for more than two centuries the adherence of the Orthodox people to the Uniat religion was not only encouraged by the Austrian authorities, but it also conditioned the access to a superior economical and social statute), the rate rapport inclines for the first time towards the Uniat religion, whose frequency overpasses the Orthodox one within the Lapus Land (43.4% in comparison with 42.8% for the Orthodox religion), but without producing changes of the religious majority, in spite of some increases of the adepts' frequencies within most of the settlements (nevertheless moderated in comparison with the previous periods) as for example Borcut, Cufoaia, Baba, Dealu Mare, Cupseni, Jugastreni, Vima Mare, Salnita and so on.

Therefore, the dense areas of the Orthodox majority population, respectively Uniat population (mentioned above), didn't undergo territorial changes, except (again) the settlement Suciul de Jos, which becomes again an Uniat majority, thus proving to be the most "unsteady" settlement from this point of view (a part of the inhabitants who adhered to this religion being those who over two decades ago had embraced the Orthodox religion, this process being favoured by its position in contact with the area dominated by the Orthodox inhabitants, under the influence of whom the inter-denominational transfers may be realized easier).

Unlike other Transylvanian regions where the appearance of many *religions of the Neo-Protestant category* (Baptists, Adventists) took place even before the First World War (especially in Sibiu and Cluj) and during the immediate post-war period in some contingents better represented concerning the number and the structure (including the Maramures county, whose average represents 0.2% for both religions of the entire population in 1930), the parameters of this mentioned population's registration point out a very limited adherence to these of the Lapus area population during the first half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century.

Practically, the inter-war census registered the existence of only 5 Adventist persons (all these living in Damacuseni), this seemed to be the first religion that entered the Lapus Land and formed a space like individualized nucleus (the subsequent dispersion towards some other settlements was produced from here, and within these settlements there were formed small communities of 5-10 adepts). The Baptist religion's adepts were registered a little bit later within the Lapus area (although their appearance in Transylvania was registered ever since 1874, a larger dispersion took place after 1881 and mostly during the inter-war period), but they didn't form any significant religious communities from the numerical point of view.

## **5. THE POST-REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD**

The post-war period was characterized by the pronounced process of *simplifying the denominational pattern* of the Lapus Land as a result of the homogenizing process of the religious structure and of the inter-denominational relationships, this process being generated by the political evolutions successive to the communism's installing, under which we were witnesses to the spectacular increase of the existing Orthodox worshippers (practically the reduplication of their rate related to the analysed area, as a result of the Uniat Church absorption – see below), concomitantly with the slight but continuous decline of the rates of the religions specific to the Hungarian people (Roman-Catholic and Reformed) and the sudden decline of the other religions specific to

the minority ethnic groups, going to the complete or almost complete disappearance of their adepts within the Lapus area's landscape (Mosaic adepts, Armenian-Catholics, Evangelical Augustan or Synod-Presbyterian adepts, Unitarians and so on).

In return, the assertion of the Neo-protestant religions during the post-war period in almost all the Lapus area's villages (in spite of the greeted barriers of the communist period) had an important contribution to the "homogenising" weakening of the denominational structure and of the inter-denominational relationships promoted by the age's authorities, the cumulated rate of their adepts being, by our assessments, of about 2% of the entire region's population (taking into account the fact that the communist period's censuses didn't follow up officially the population's religious composition).

*The census of 1992* represents the first registration of the population which – after a break of over six decades – took into account the denominational structure too, surprising the start of a process contrary to the one which had characterized the previous period (the denominational homogenizing), respectively the looming of an asserting process of the cultural-demographic particularities (see also N. Popa, 1999, p. 277-278). This manifested through the allotment, on the religious scene, (after being officially approved) of the Uniat religion assimilated by the Orthodox Church in 1948 (although the re-conversion of the ex-worshippers of this religion or of their descendants registered, at least for now, an insignificant rate of the existing one at the moment of the absorption – only 2.9% in 1992 in comparison with 43.4% in 1930), respectively the expansion of the Neo-Protestant religions (mostly of the Pentecostal one, characterized by a significant numerical increase during the later decade, overpassing even the rate of the Uniat adepts and getting closer to the Reformed and Roman-Catholics ones – see below).

Therefore, the year 1992 points out a higher diversity of the denominational repartition within the Lapus Land, "enriched" by the appearance of some new religions or of the official registration of some members or individualized religious communities which were functioning also before 1989, but without representing the object of the official statistical registrations. Thus, in spite of the prohibition of Uniat religion's manifesting immediately after 1989 and of its integration within the officially approved religions, this succeeded in involving a rate of only 2.9% of the Lapus inhabitants (prevalingly of the old age category, "actors" of the reconversion to the Orthodox religion in 1948), better represented within the settlements Boiereni (16.1%), Suciul de Jos (10.1%), Lapus (6.7%), Coroieni (4.8%), Rogoz (4.1%), Baiut (3.8%), Targu Lapus (3.2%). Within this context, the presence of the Orthodox people continues to be by far the more consistent, dominating with 83.8% the religious structure of the analysed area (these percentages being obtained, as we already mentioned, by the absorption of the Uniat adepts, whose rate had reached 43.4% in 1930).

***The religions specific to the Hungarian population*** continued to be concentrated in the same four settlements, losing a great number of adepts within three of these (the Roman-Catholics in Baiut, where they represent 45.7% and Strambu-Baiut with 36.3%, the Reformed adepts in Targu Lapus with 3.3% and Damacuseni with 89.4%, the later being the only settlement with other majority than the Orthodox one within the Lapus Land area).

The enlargement of the religious proselytise of *some Neo-Protestant religions* after 1990 materialized by winning some important contingents of

adepts within many of the Lapus area settlements, especially within those placed on the main axes of regional traffic (which allowed a more pronounced territorial and social mobility), their number being of 1261 persons in 1992 (3.4% of the entire population), this process being favoured by the existence of a complex of factors (economical, social, psychological, cultural) and not least by the individual subconsciousness.

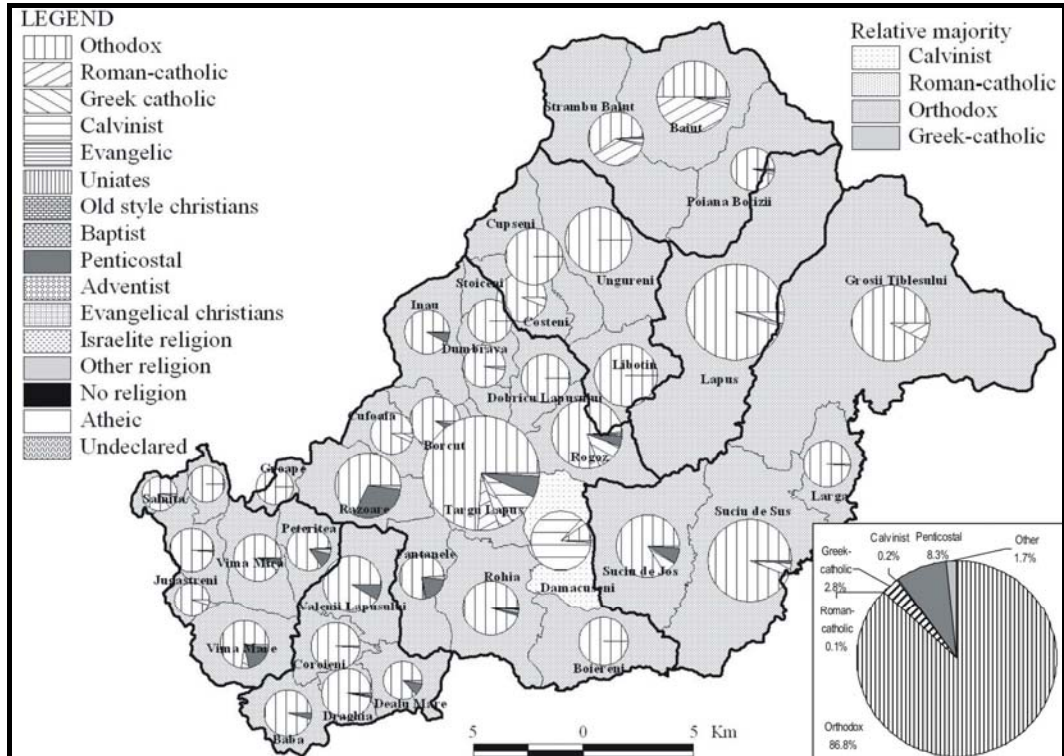


Fig. 3. Lăpușului Land. The structure and the confessional profile of the population in 2002

“The spiritual alcove” created as a result of the sudden decrease of the family nuclei’s economical power (successive to the collapse of the economical structures specific to the communist period, which affected the living standard of a more and more significant number of the Lapus inhabitants), corroborated with the functional and institutional rigidity and inaction of the Orthodox Church, being *“in defensive in front of the zeal with which the adepts of the new Christian religions testify their creed, in front of their devotion, manifested within the mutual aid actions, thus contrasting with the attitude of detachment, particularly specific to the Orthodox religion, which had largely lost the habit of social involvement”* (Popa, 1999, pages 278-279), and even the priests’ disappearance (the spiritual mentors of the rural world) within some small villages (as a result of the “rural desertification” process generated by the disappearance of the land’s individual proprietorship and by the secularization of the clerical domains), created a propitious background for the missionary activities intensely promoted by the Neo-Protestant religions.

The evolution of the confessional structure in Lăpuşului Land in the period 1850-2002

Table 1

Nr. crt.	Religion		1850	1880	1900	1910	1930	1992	2002
1	Total population Lăpuşului Land	no.	23056	27400	30770	31894	30927	36703	33848
		%	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
2	Orthodox	no.	9912	12047	12965	13713	13253	30766	28231
		%	42,99	43,97	42,14	43,00	42,85	83,82	83,41
3	Greek catholic	no.	9587	10698	12800	12916	13443	1070	1012
		%	41,58	39,04	41,60	40,50	43,47	2,92	2,99
4	Roman – catholic	no.	1430	2174	1904	1955	1617	1781	1575
		%	6,20	7,93	6,19	6,13	5,23	4,85	4,65
5	Reformed (Evangelic)	no.	1778	1637	1752	1781	1412	1599	1423
		%	7,71	5,97	5,69	5,58	4,57	4,36	4,20
6	Uniates	no.	0	1	4	7	1	1	2
		%	0,0	0,004	0,01	0,02	0,003	0,003	0,01
7	Israelite	no.	349	836	1345	1522	1174	0	1
		%	1,51	3,05	4,37	4,77	3,80	0,0	0,0
8	Penticostals	no.	0	0	0	0	0	1206	1365
		%	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	3,29	4,03
9	Adventists	no.	0	0	0	0	5	20	27
		%	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,02	0,05	0,08
10	Baptists	no.	0	0	0	0	0	11	20
		%	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,03	0,06
11	Old Style Orthodox Church	no.	0	0	0	0	0	46	0
		%	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,13	0,0
12	Mahommedans	no.	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
		%	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,003	0,0	0,0
13	Other religions	no.	0	7	0	0	2	187	176
		%	0,0	0,03	0,0	0,0	0,01	0,51	0,52
14	No religion	no.	0	0	0	0	4	8	9
		%	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,01	0,02	0,03
15	Atheists	no.	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
		%	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,01	0,01
16	Undeclared	no.	0	0	0	0	15	6	5
		%	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,05	0,02	0,01

The actions of attracting new adherents initiated by their adepts had an important impact mostly within the old age category – mainly because of the modest income - being positioned in the posture of some potential “victims”, for this reason the material incitement in various forms hadn’t miss within their arsenal (financial support, nourishment, clothing, consumer products and so on).

In spite of the curdling of a little nucleus ever since the inter-war period in Damacuseni, the Adventist religion registered a slow evolution during the post-war period (only 0.05% in 1992 and 0.08% in 2002, the only better individualized nucleus having 17 members in 1992, being positioned in Rogoz).

The *Pentecostal religion* is characterized by a more pronounced evolution (the first Pentecostal community within Transylvania being registered in 1922 at Paulis-Arad county, and officially approved only in 1950, for this reason the census of 1930 didn’t register their existence within the Lapus area), whose adepts represented 95.6% of the total of 1261 Neo-Protestant persons in 1992. The better represented communities from the numerical point of view are living in Razoare

(361 persons), Targu Lapus (329), Vima Mica (104), Suciul de Jos (92), Fantanele (67), Rogoz (66), Coroieni (51), Suciul de Sus (35), Peteritea and Dealu Mare (24).

The numerical contribution of the other Neo-Protestant religions is low: Baptists 11 persons (mostly from Targu Lapus and Baiut), 23 Christians by Gospel adepts – of which 21 persons in Vima Mare - (created in 1899 in Bucharest and approved as a Religious Association in 1933, and as a religion in 1946).

The denominational structure's mutations registered during the next period, pointed out by *the census of 2002*, are insignificant confirming the religious homogenizing tendencies pointed out by the registration of the previous population. All over the analyzed area one can notice a slight decrease of the Orthodox adepts' rate (from 83.8% to 83.4%) and of the Hungarians' specific religions (the Roman-Catholic one from 4.9% to 4.7% and the Reformed one from 4.4% to 4.2%), particularly due to the frequency's increase of the Pentecostal religion's adherents (from 3.3% to 4%), and in a small extent to the Uniat adherents (from 2.9% to 3%), unlike the other Neo-Protestant religions whose presence was better pointed out in 1992 (mainly the community of the Christians by Gospel in Vima Mare with 21 members in 1992, not found within the official statistics after 10 years).

The rate contribution of the other two Neo-Protestant religions which exist within the Lapus area – the Seventh-day Adventist religion and the Baptist one – is insignificant, although they registered slightly positive evolutions during the analysed period.

If in what concerns the Orthodox religion, the decreases particularly affected the rural environment, in the cases of the Neo-Protestant religions one can notice a reverse situation, the city Targu Lapus being the place where – in the virtue of a social environment less traditional, and also of a higher rate of the population affected by the communist industry's abolishment and thus easier “to undertake” through mutual aid actions promoted by them – they found a more propitious ground of manifestation (aspect pointed out by the rate increase from 5.1% in 1992 to 6.5% in 2002).

Within this context, one can notice that also within the Lapus Land area (similar to the situation within the Transylvanian area – see Bodocan, 2001, p. 67-68) the religious distribution emphasized by the censuses made during the period previous to the Second World War points out a more pronounced steadiness within the traditional living areas than the ethnical ones (e.g. the explanation of the rate increase of the Hungarian population during the last decades of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century is based on including the Hungarian speaking persons in the category of the Hungarian ethnic groups and less on the contribution of the natural increase).

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the territorial repartition, regarding the temporal profile, of the main religions existing in the Lapus area points out an outstanding steadiness, the majority of the Lapus area's settlements preserving their religious profile during the first eight decades of the analysed period, mostly in what concerns the religions specific to the Hungarian ethnic groups which maintained their religious profile along all this period within the four settlements where their numerical presence is significant (the Roman-Catholics in Baiut and Strambu-Baiut, and the Reformed in Damacuseni and Targu Lapus), but also regarding the 29 from the 32 Romanian settlements. The few territorial mutations occurred (due



mostly to the inter-denominational transfer) had as “actors” the adherents of the Orthodox and Uniat religions within the settlements placed in the contact area with those dominated by one of the two religions of the Romanian population (Suciu de Sus, Dobricu Lapusului and Salnita).

In its turn, the Mosaic religion was characterized by an evolutive territorial extension from the 13 settlements, where it was registered in 1850, practically to the scale of the whole region (regarding the immigration flow’s intensity registered within the Transylvanian area’s scale), its geographical area including 27 settlements in 1930, the higher frequencies corresponding to the more important settlements placed along the main access axes of the area (Targu Lapus, Damacuseni, Razoare, Lapus, Baiut, Strambu-Baiut, Baba, Grosii Tiblesului, Suciu de Sus, Suciu de Jos).

The years following the Second World War mark – after the absorption of the Uniat Church into the Orthodox one, respectively after the gradual emigration of the Jews consecutive to the State of Israel’s setting up – the most significant mutations of the denominational structure, the main registered tendency being the *homogenizing* one (this process being initiated ever since the inter-war period) materialized by the reduplication of the Orthodox worshippers’ rate, respectively the gradual and restricted weakening of the Hungarian ethnic group religion’s rate and practically the disappearance of the other religions belonging to different national minorities (according to the corresponding ethnic groups’ evolutions), mainly of the Mosaic religion. The Christians belonging to the other religions – Unitarian, Evangelical, Islam, Armenian-Catholic and so on – were living absolutely isolated within the Lapus Land area (of about some persons).

But after 1990 we are witnesses of a contrary trend to the one which characterized the communist period, respectively that of denominational diversification and of group particularities’ appearance, affirmed on the background of the institutional resuscitation of the Uniat religion (the rate of the population that returned or embraced this denomination being far from the one registered in 1948), respectively of activating the religious proselytise of some Neo-Protestant religions (especially the Pentecostal one).

In conclusion, if from the ethnical point of view the Lapus Land is included within the line characteristic to the other “lands” within “the biggest Land” (by preserving permanently the Romanian character), its denominational structure more promiscuous reflects its position of regional interference between the Orthodox population and the Uniat one, on one side, and the Roman-Catholic and Reformed one, on the other side, as a result of its position between Transylvania and the Romanian territories of the North-Western part of the ethnical Romanian area (the Crisana and the historical Maramures, included in the so-called Partium), being submitted to the Hungarian and Catholic administration for longer historical periods.

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