

<https://doi.org/10.26520/icoana.2020.12.6.71-75>

THE PRESENCE OF THE SAINT APOSTLE ANDREW IN SCYTHIA - A HISTORICAL REALITY OF THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

This article contradicts some historians, researchers or professors claim that there is no evidence to prove the presence of the Saint Apostle Andrew in Dobrudja. Researchers of history know that some sources are written, direct, and others unwritten. Undoubtedly, the origin of Romanian Orthodox Church is apostolic, due to the missionary activity of Saint Andrew the Apostle on the territory of Dobrudja district. The presence and sermon of the Saint Apostle Andrew in the Scythia Minor - today's Dobrudja - Romania, in the cities on the edge of Pontus Euxinus is clear, recorded by Eusebius of Caesarea in "Church History" and Romanian carols, folklore and place names.

Keywords: Saint Andrew the Apostle, Dobrudja; Scythia Minor; Romania.

INTRODUCTION

The Romanian Orthodox Church is of apostolic origin, being made after the sermon of St. Andrew the Apostle in Scythia, in the cities on the edge of Pontus Euxinus, as Eusebius of Caesarea shows us in his "Church History" and the carols, folklore and place names that attest to the presence Saint Andrew the Apostle on the territory of our country.

From a historical point of view, the ethnogenesis of the Romanian people is simultaneous with its Christianization. The Christian faith acted as a factor in the coagulation and perpetuation of the Romanian nation. Many centuries of Romanian culture were formed in monasteries and churches. Following the sermon of the Saint Apostle Andrew, the descendants of the Dacians, the worshipers of Zamolxis became disciples of Christ. *"The Geto-Dacians found salvation in the Gospel and at the same time felt the fulfilment of deep aspirations"*¹.

Christianity spread in the first centuries on the Romanian territory easily for the following reasons:

- The teaching of the Orthodox faith expresses the revealed truth, truly necessary for human existence.
- The representatives of both the Dacians and the Romans knew the Greek and Latin languages, which facilitated the preaching of the Gospel.

¹ Gheorghe Neagoe, *Aspecte ale continuității religiei geto-dacilor în Dacia romană*, în rev. Studii Teologice, Seria II, Anul XXX, Nr. 1-2, (1978), p. 141

- The colonists and the Christianized Roman military units brought to Dacia passed on the Christian teaching. Roman officials were evacuated along with the armies, as it results from the biography of Aurelian, from the Augustan History (*sublato exercitu et provincialibus*)², as well as the great landowners, merchants and the rich, to whom the Roman Empire could provide protection in the newly conquered provinces, which facilitated Christian preaching.

Christianity spread throughout the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic territory and not only in the southern part of the Danube. Thus we agree with the idea supported especially by the historian Vasile Pârvan, that the Romanian nation was formed not only in Dacia, but on a much larger space, which allowed it to inherit all the Eastern Romanity that developed in the Roman provinces of North and South of the Danube, in the extension of the Illyrian from the eastern Adriatic. The history of the Romanian people provides a clear example that highlights the Orthodox Church's concern for the nation.

1. SAINT ANDREW, THE APOSTLE OF THE GETO-DACIANS (SCYTHIANS)

The Saint Apostle Paul, since the apostolic age, stated in his Epistle to the Colossians that *"there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all"* (Colossians 3, 11).

Saint Apostle Andrew, the brother of St. Apostle Peter, sons of the fisherman Jonah, was originally from Bethsaida, a town located on the shores of Lake Gennesaret (Sea of Galilee), in the province of Galilee, in the north of the Saint Land. Briefly, the missionary activity of St. Andrew the Apostle targeted Bithynia and Pontus, then passed to Macedonia, Thrace, Moesia and from here to Scythia Minor (today's Dobrudja – Romania), where it is very probable to have stayed over the winter in the cave that until today bears his name. Passing through Thrace, he reached Byzantium, descending through Macedonia and Thessaly, then to the city of Patras in Achaia (Greece), near the Gulf of Lepanto, where he was martyred, crucified on an X-shaped cross.

The historian Eusebius of Caesarea († 339), taking over the information from Origen, and from Tradition, states that the Apostles and their disciples spread Christianity throughout the world, as it follows: Thomas at the parthians (Persia and India); Andrew in Scythia; John in Asia; Peter in Galicia, Bithynia, Cappadocia, and Proconsular Asia; Bartholomew in India (southern Arabia), according to an oriental tradition and in Armenia; Matthew among the Jews, then to other Heathens.³

Saint Andrew, Apostle of the Getae (Scythians). For us, Romanians, the activity of Saint Andrew is very important, because he is credited to have preached in the territory between the Danube and the Black Sea, later Dobrudja, known in ancient sources as "Scythia Minor".

Hippolytus the Roman († 235) recorded a tradition according to which the Saint Apostle *"Andrew preached [the Gospel] to the Scythians and Thracians. He was crucified at Patras in Achaia, tied to an olive tree, and buried there."*⁴

² Mihai Bărbulescu, *Istoria României*, Enciclopedică, București, 1998, p.107

³ Eusebiu de Cezareea, *Istoria bisericească*, III, 1, în „*Fontes historiae daco-romaniae pertinentes*”, II, București, 1967, p. 15 (III, 1,24; V, 10).

⁴ Hipolit Romanul, *Despre cei doisprezece Apostoli*, în „*Fontes historiae daco-romaniae pertinentes*”, I, București, 1964, p. 713.

The great patristic writer Origen († 254) recorded, in *Book III* of the *Commentaries on Genesis*, the preaching of the Saint Apostle Andrew to the Scythians. Historical sources call the inhabitants of the land between the Danube and the Black Sea Scythians, because this province of the Empire was called Scythia Minor, a memory of the ancient Scythians, being in fact the Daco-Romans in the Danubian-Pontic area. Therefore, most historians identify the Scythia mentioned by Eusebius of Caesarea with the territory between the Danube and the Sea, the future Roman province of Scythia Minor. This conclusion can also be deduced from the fact that the poet Ovidius (43 BC - 17 AD) complained in his work *Tristia* that he was exiled to Tomis (now Constanța, in Romania) among the Scythians. The Greek geographer Strabo (c. 58 BC – c. 21 AD) in his work *Geography*, understood by Scythia also today's Dobrudja or Scythia Minor. This name was also preferred in 297, by the Roman emperor Diocletian (284-305) who separated the province of Pontic Dacia from Lower Moesia, forming the province of Scythia Minor. Also, the life and martyrdom of St. Andrew the Apostle, recorded in the Synaxarion of the Constantinople Church, on November 30, states that St. Andrew the Apostle "*preached in Pontus, Thrace and Scythia.*"

In the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic lands, as evidenced by historical evidence, the Orthodox Church is organized in the first centuries after Christ, having its own hierarchy and administration, dependent on the Patriarchate of Constantinople, proven by the activity of the Diocese of Tomis, St. John Cassian or monks Scythians, by the Ulfila of the Goths, but also by the Tomitan hierarchs from the ranks of the local monks, participants in the ecumenical or local synods.

2. CERTIFICATION IN TIME OF THE PRESENCE OF THE SAINT APOSTLE ANDREA IN SCYTHIA MINOR

Christianity spread throughout the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic territory and not only in the southern part of the Danube. Thus, we disseminate the idea supported especially by the historians Vasile Pârvan and C. Giurăscu, according to which the Romanian nation was formed not only in Dacia, but on a much larger space, which allowed it to inherit all the oriental Romanity that developed in the Roman provinces. from the North and South of the Danube, in the extension of the Illyrian east of the Adriatic. The tradition of the preaching of the Saint Apostle Andrew in today's Dobrudja, recorded historically for centuries until now, is also affirmed in the old Romanian carols, folklore and toponyms, but also by some church books, for service. Thus, the carols and folklore works from Dobrudja or from the left bank of the Prut, as well as some toponyms (St. Andrew's cave, St. Andrew's brook) attest by the force of historical continuity its presence and preaching on these territories.

The tradition of the preaching of St. Andrew the Apostle in today's Dobrudja was resumed and recorded, in the eighth century, by the monk Epiphanius, and later, in the fourteenth century, by the Byzantine historian Nicephorus Callistus.⁵

The latter informs us that: *after the Apostle Andrew preached in the cities of the Left Pontus inhabited by Greeks, Romans and Dacians, passing through Thrace, he reached Byzantium, and from here, descending through Macedonia and Thessaly, he reached the city Patras, from Achaia (Greece), near the Gulf of Lepanto, where he was to die a martyr's*

⁵ Pr. Prof.Dr. Nicolae Șerbănescu, *1600 de ani de la prima mărturie documentară despre existența episcopiei Tomisului*, în rev. „*Biserica Ortodoxă Română*”, (anul LXXXVII), București, 1969, nr. 9 - 10, p. 979

death, being crucified on an X-shaped cross, which to this day is called the Cross of St. Andrew.⁶

Mentions about the preaching of the Saint Apostle Andrew in Scythia Minor (today's Dobrudja), we also find in some service books and lives of saints, printed in Romania.

In his manuscript, *"The Lives of the Saints" from 1760, Metropolitan Iacob Putneanul (1750 - 1760) made the following mention: Thrace and Macedonia and those up to the Danube ...*"⁷ Also, the *Synaxarium* for the month of November, printed in Râmnic, in 1778, reads as follows on the thirtieth day: and Thrace and Macedonia and those as far as the Danube, Thessaly, Hellas and parts of Achaia ..."⁸ The news about the sermon of Saint Andrew the Apostle in Romanian was also confirmed by a series of older researchers in the field of church history, among which we mention the bishop Filaret Scriban⁹ (1811 - 1873) and Bishop Ghenadie Enăceanu (1835 - 1898) of Râmnicu and the New Severin, who, analyzing what was reported by the priest Epiphanius regarding the preaching of Saint Andrew in Scythia, came to the conclusion that this land cannot be other than our Dobrudja, thesis also supported by J. Zeiller.¹⁰

Metropolitan Irenaeus of Moldavia and Suceava emphasized with conviction that: "What is entirely credible and above all doubt is that St. Andrew preached the Gospel through our Dobrudja"¹¹ Referring to the church writers of the IV-V centuries, Professor Ion Barnea pointed out that they speak of the missionary activity of St. Andrew the Apostle in Scythia Minor (today's Dobrudja), most agreeing that the dawn of Christianity in our country has arisen since the century apostolic¹².

The historian C. C. Giurescu, referring to the antiquity of Christianity in our country, said: "*It is certain that there were Christians in Dacia even before it left. Christianity was two and a half centuries old when the legions left (271-275); he had penetrated all the most important centers of the Roman Empire, including the Balkan Peninsula*".¹³ Also, P.P. Panaitescu notices: "*Daco-Roman Christianity began earlier than the inscriptions and monuments allow us to understand, that is, before Constantine the Great (325)*".¹⁴

So, indirectly, the thesis is accepted that the Christian teaching was spread to us in the first century, a fact due, first, to the sermons of Saint Andrew the Apostle in Scythia Minor. Academician Rev. Mircea Păcurariu makes the following statement regarding the preaching of St. Andrew the Apostle in Dobrudja: "According to a tradition, recorded by the church historian Eusebius of Caesarea (around 324), St. Andrew the Apostle preached the Gospel in Scythia. Later tradition states that he moved from Asia to Scythia Maior (southern Ukraine today), then to Scythia Minor (today's Dobrudja), where he preached in Greek cities

⁶ Nichifor Calist, *Istoria bisericească*, II, 30, în „Patrologia greacă”, CXLV, col. 2031 - 2034; vezi și Pr. Prof. I. Rămureanu, *Sfinți și martiri la Tomis –Constanța*, în rev. „Biserica Ortodoxă Română”, (anul XCII), București, 1974, nr. 7-8, p. 986

⁷ Iacob Putneanul, *Viețile Sfinților*, ms. nr. 79, Putna, 1760. f. 263,

⁸ *Minei pe luna noiembrie*, Râmnic, 1778, f. 198,

⁹ Filaret Scriban, *Istoria Bisericească a românilor pe scurt*, Iași, 1871, p. 1-2.

¹⁰ J. Zeiller, *Les origines chretiennes dans les provinces danubiennes de l'Empire Romain*, Paris, 1918, p. 28-30.

¹¹ Irineu, Mitropolitul, *Istoria Bisericii Române*, ediția a V-a, Iași, 1939, p. 8

¹² I. Barnea, *Recenzie asupra lucrării D. M. Pippidi, Intornealle fonti litterarie de cristianesimo daco-româna*, în rev. „Biserica Ortodoxă Română”, București, 1945, (anul LXIII), nr. 1-2, p. 157.

¹³ Constantin C. Giurescu, *Formarea poporului Român*, București, 1973, p.116; a se vedea și: C. C. Giurescu și Dinu C. Giurescu, *Istoria românilor*, I, București, 1974, p. 140.

¹⁴ P. P. Panaitescu, *Introducere în istoria culturii românești*, București, 1969, p. 16

on the Black Sea coast. Some carols and folk creations from Dobrudja or from the left bank of the Prut, as well as some toponyms (the cave of Saint Andrew, the brook of Saint Andrew), also attest to its presence and preaching on these territories. It means that part of the territory of our homeland was evangelized by one of our Saviour's disciples, Saint Apostle Andrew.

3. CONCLUSION

Orthodox Christianity planted by the Church was, is and will be the main constitutive ferment of the Romanian consciousness and of Romania's identity, together with the Daco-Romanian fibre acquired in the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic space over time in Romanism. Undoubtedly, the origin of Romanian Orthodox Church is apostolic, due to the missionary activity of Saint Andrew the Apostle on the territory of Dobrudja district. The presence and sermon of the Saint Apostle Andrew in the Scythia Minor - today's Dobrudja - Romania, in the cities on the edge of Pontus Euxinus is clear, recorded by Eusebius of Caesarea in "Church History" and Romanian carols, folklore and place names.

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