

Moise Nicoară in Historiography*

Corneliu Pădurean**

Abstract:

Moise Nicoara was one of the most important fighters for the rights of Romanian Orthodox inhabitants of Transylvania and Banat during Austrian domination.

After the Treaty of Carlovitz, 1699 and the Treaty of Passarovitz, 1718, the Romanian Orthodox Church from Transylvania and Banat was placed under the jurisdiction of Serbian Orthodox Mitropoly with the residence in Carlovitz. It is not considered a random decision, though.

Moise Nicoara was born in Gyula, today in Hungary, in 1784. He has claimed from the Austrian authorities a Romanian Orthodox Bishop in Arad instead of the Serbian one since 1815. His efforts were successful only in 1829 when the first Romanian bishop was elected, but unfortunately Moise Nicoara had already sought asylum in Wallachia at that time.

His personality has been under the attention of historians and men of culture. The article is a brief overview of how his life and activity were presented by the Romanian historiography.

Keywords: rights, foreign domination, Orthodoxy, bishop, identity, nationality

Moise Nicoara had been mentioned only randomly in writings until 1943 when Cornelia Bodea's work (aged 27 back then) entitled *Moise Nicoara (1784–1861) and his role in the struggle for national and religious emancipation of Romanians from Banat and Crisana*. was published by the Diecezana Publishing House in Arad. These facts are mentioned by the author herself in the introduction of her book.

The first reference dates from 1839, namely from his lifetime and it belongs to Felix Colson, who appreciated his merits as “man and school inspector in Muntenia” in his work entitled „De l'état présent et de l'avenir des Principautés de Moldavie et de Valachie” published in Paris by Pougin Publishing House (Bodea, 1943: 3).

Only after five years from Moise Nicoară's death on October 1, 1961, *Familia* Review from Oradea published “the first lines, the very

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** Professor PhD, “Aurel Vlaicu” University of Arad, corpad@gmail.com

first biography, the first tribute” paid to Transylvanian fighter for the rights of his nation (*Ibidem*).

Moise Nicoara’s memory in the pages of publications from those times is more visible in the 8th decade of the 19th century (*Ibidem*: 4). Among those who have dedicated their time to the memory of Moise Nicoara, we mention Iosif Vulcan in the volume *Potretele și biografiile celebrităților române (Portraits and biographies of Romanian celebrities)* published in 1869, C. A. Rosetti in the newspaper *Românul*, Partenie Gruescu and Ioan Arcoși in *Albina Review* from 1870, as well as Demetriu Popa in no 12 of 1879 of the publication *Biserica și Școala*.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the personality of Moise Nicoară came to the attention of several scholars. Clerks, professors but also other intellectuals begin to show interest for his biography as well as his role in the struggle for religious emancipation of Romanians from Banat and Hungary. These were the times when researchers made investigations in archives and libraries in the country and abroad, when documents¹, letters from Moise Nicoara’s correspondence with other personalities², articles and studies³, as well as more complex writings were published⁴.

Ascaniu Crisan, the principle of Moise Nicoara High School published an article entitled *Moise Nicoara in the Principality of*

¹ Vasile Mangra in the Library of Romanian Academy, who published the results of his enquiry in a few issues of *Tribuna newspaper* between 1907 and 1908; Avram Sădean in the State Archives of Vienna (see Cornelia Bodea, *Moise Nicoară (1784–1861) și...*, p. 5, note 4); Damaschin Iovanovici, who researched in the Archives of Budapest, published in *Revista teologică* from Sibiu in 1916 and in *Biserica și Școala* from 1918; in the brochure *Afurisirea lui Moisi Nicoară* in 1925, published by R. S. Molin.

² Sever Secula published in 1904 letters sent by Moise Nicoară to relatives from Arad area; Ioan Lupaș published a letter from the correspondence of Bishop Vasile Moga and Moise Nicoara in the monographic work dedicated to Andrei Șaguna in 1911; in Iacob Radu’s study, *Samuil Vulcan, episcopul unit al Orăzii-Mari(1806–1839) și biserica ortodoxă română* published in 1925 19 letter of Moise Nicoară and Samuil Vulcan were published in the appendix; Constantin Fierăscu published in *familia Review* No. 4 of 1934 the article *D. Țichindeal, contribuție documentară*, which uses information from D. Țichindeal and M. Nicoară’s correspondence.

³ Panaitescu Perpessicus, published in “Salonul literar” of Arad, March 15 – May, 15, 1925, *Câteva cuvinte despre Moise Nicoară*; Ascaniu Crișan, *Moise Nicoară în Țara Românească*, „Hotarul”, 1937, No. 7, p. 196; Teodor Botiș mentions the role of Moise Nicoară in the struggle for a Romanian Bishop in Arad, in *Pagini din istoria dezrobirii* written at the celebration of 100 years from the instalment of a Romanian Bishop in Arad, namely Nestor Ioanovici in 1829; in “Omagiul lui Ioan Lupaș” printed in 1943, Gheorghe Ciuhandu published the study *Un nobil român: Moise Nicoară (1784–1861)*.

⁴ Ștefan Pop synthesized in 1929 all information available to that point about Moise Nicoară in the work *Frământări românești în jurul scaunului episcopesc ortodox de la Arad*.

Wallachia, in „Hotarul” Culture Review of Arad in 1937. As revealed by the title, the author focused on the period spent by Moise Nicoara in the Principality of Wallachia. The author’s opinion of Moise Nicoara’s presence in the Principality of Wallachia is worth being remembered: „If Moise Nicoara is placed behind Gheorghe Lazar in terms of spreading the national culture, he is an innovator in supporting the Romanian cause in front of the world. It is his belief that without the support and goodwill of the Great Powers, the fate of Romanian people would change with great difficulty” (Crișan, 1937: 195).

In this context, we mention also the work of Gheorghe Ciuhandu, priest from Arad, *Un „nobil” român – Moise Nicoară (A Romanian “nobleman” - Moise Nicoara)* published in the same year with Cornelia Bodea’s monographic writing. Apart from other topics approached by the work and referring to Moise Nicoară’s biography, the author analysis his expenses during his stay in Vienna because „in the times of Moise Nicoara’s travels to Vienna and his residency there, he had engaged many financial debts” (Ciuhandu, 1943: 160–163).

In addition to these bookish concerns, Moise Nicoară’s personality had been under the attention of some institutions, like the Orthodox Episcopacy of Arad.

The future bishop Vasile Mangra, religion teacher at that time (Bodea, 1943: 5) suggests the writing of a monographic work about the personality and role played by Moise Nicoară in the emancipation of Romanians from Banat and Hungary. His suggestion was presented during the Eparchial Synod of Arad.

In 1923, the Consistory of Arad offered a prize of 20.000 lei for research and processing of information from the manuscripts stored in the Library of Romanian Academy. A similar proposal was made by the management of „Moise Nicoară” High School of Arad.

Under these circumstances, the publication in 1943 of the work signed by Cornelia Bodea was an unfulfilled desire of Romanians up to that point.

The future academician published actually her PhD thesis which was presented two years before. Her scientific advisor was Nicolae Iorga and after his assassination Cornelia Bodea worked under the guidance of Gheorghe I. Brătianu with Constantin C. Giurescu, Ion I. Nistor, Nicolae Cartoian and Alexandru Marcu as scientific referees. The PhD thesis was revaluing the documentary and archivist stock stored by the Library of Romanian Academy for the first time. It was the beginning of a beautiful career of an exquisite personality of Romanian historiography with a clear discourse and carefully selected information.

The event did not remain unobserved; it has been written about it in *Biserica și Școala*, the newspaper of the Orthodox Episcopacy of Arad in the issue of July 6, 1941.

As testified by the author in the introduction to her work but also later on other occasions like private conversations or public speeches, the study of Moise Nicoară's personality was suggested to her by her teacher, the scholar Nicolae Iorga. During a seminar with other students, he addressed the following impulse: "Because you are from Arad, you could study M. Nicoară's manuscripts stored by the Academy because it is a pity not to know his tumultuous but also varied and interesting life" (Bodea, 1943: 10). In gratitude for this advice, the author dedicated the book to her outstanding professor.

Another reason, personal in our opinion was her mother's relatedness to the Moise Nicoară's family.

Corneliei Bodea's interest for Moise Nicoară dates back to the year 1937, when she has published *Les réflexions d'un Roumain sur l'époque du tanzimat en Turquie* in „Review historique de sud-est européen”, no 4, 6, 10–12. In the same year and in the following one she published the articles *Crâmpeie de biografie (Brief biography)* and *Acum o sută de ani (One Hundred Years Ago)* which showed Moise Nicoară's ties to Alexandru Gavra (*Ibidem*: 7).

Being raised in the positivist school of Nicolae Iorga and Gheorghe I. Brătianu, Cornelia Bodea used the documents from the Library of Romanian Academy, remaking Moise Nicoară's activity and his activity for the national and religious emancipation of Romanians in the years 1815–1825 but she had also used information from papers published prior to her PhD thesis. The work finished with the events of 1825, when according to the author „a chapter of Moise Nicoară's life was coming to an end”, and afterwards „the background, the horizons and people are completely changed” (*Ibidem*: 10).

The author concludes that Moise Nicoară contributed significantly to a „national and religious awakening and ascension of Romanians from Banat and Hungary... his deeds place him among *founders of Romanian history*”.

Extremely valuable for those interested in Moise Nicoară's activity until he left Austria are those 155 documents published by Cornelia Bodea in their original language.

The years after 1825 were discussed by Cornelia Bodea in a few pages with the title *Anii cenușii de după 1825 (Dark Years after 1825)* in a book published in 2001 and entitled *Moise Nicoară. Gyula (Hungary) 1784 – București 1861* (Bodea, 2001). It is actually an awakening of “Nicoară myth” (*Ibidem*: 24), as stated by the author

herself, and it was published at the celebration of 140 years from his death for “stone marking of his last resting place”.

On the same occasion, 140 years from his death Maria Berényi published in “Lumina”, Social, Cultural and Scientific Review of Romanians from Hunary, in Gyula, Hungary a memento entitled *140 years from Moise Nicoară's Death*.

A controversial issue throughout the years was Moise Nicoară's date of birth.

In her work from 1943, Cornelia Bodea stated that he was born on Nov 29/Dec 4, 1784 (Bodea, 1943: 13). The same date of birth is mentioned by Eduard Găvănescu in the volume „Evocări”, published in Arad in 1971. We believe that the professor from Arad took over the information from Cornelia Bodea since both of them were collaborators of „Hotarul” Review.

ON the other hand, Vasile Mangra mentions the date of November 30, 1784 in “Tribuna” of Dec 23, 1907/Jan 8, 1908 and the following two issues. The same date was indicated also by P. Perpessicius in the above mentioned number of “Salonul literar”. We believe that the author had used the date provided by Vasile Mangra since it was the only one available at that time.

There are also works which suggest 1785 as year of birth. Thus, *Dicționarul enciclopedic român (Romanian Encyclopaedic Dictionary)* volume III published in 1965, lists near Moise Nicoara's name, the year 1785 with no date of birth and 1861 as the year of death. In “Orizont” Review from Timisoara in 1985, on March 8, Alexandru Roz published an article entitled *A fighter for national rights, 200 years since the birth of Moise Nicoară* (Roz, 1985). It is clear that 1785 was the year of Moise Nicoara's birth for him, too. In a few years, in 2002, the historian from Arad tries to prove in his article *Contributions to the biography of Moise Nicoară* (Roz, 2002: 3–7) that his date of birth was January 17, 1785. In his support, he used the Christening register of Romanian Orthodox Church from Gyula. The Christening and the “three days long” “feast” mentioned by Cornelia Bodea (1943: 13) are supposed to have taken place Sunday, January 19 (Roz, 2002: 4). In the article which reproduced the listing Nicoară Petru and Maria, the parents of the child whom it had been given the christening name of Moisi, the only date mentioned by the author is the year 1785, the rest being his own suppositions. Maybe new investigations would provide new data but until then the date of birth remains November 29, 1784. And in fact it's not the date of birth which assigns meaning and dimension to the struggle of Moise Nicoară for the rights of Romanians, the people amongst whom he had arisen.

After the publication of Cornelia Bodea's work, all other works, either monographic writings or studies and articles which approached the personality of Moise Nicoară or the struggle for national emancipation at the beginning of the 19th century, related more or less to her work. Lack of new documentary sources as well as the strange unfolding of his life were the reasons for which Cornelia Bodea's work remained the most important writing about Moise Nicoară until nowadays.

Moise Nicoara's personality was completely forgotten during the years of communist. Communists even tried to remove him from the collective memory and therefore the name of the Moise Nicoara high school was changed by the authorities into „Ioan Slavici”. On the occasion of 200 years from his birth, besides the article published by Alexandru Roz in „Orizont” Review, Milente Nica published also an article entitled *Moise Nicoară (1784–1861)* in “Mitropolia Banatului” (1985). We can notice that the article considered 1784 as the year when the fighter for the rights of Romanians from everywhere was born.

After the fall of the Communist Regime, the personality of Moise Nicoara was again under the attention of researchers, especially from Arad area.

In 2000, the young researcher Cosmin – Lucian Seman, born in Pecica (Arad County) published an article entitled *Moise Nicoară în Basarabia – 1839* in “Revista Bistriței”, a publication of County Museum of Bistrița Năsăud. The author was revaluing Moise Nicoara's travel diary to Basarabia in the year 1839, which had been preserved by the Library of Romanian Academy. According to the author's opinion “the rise of the Romanian nation at all levels so as to be honoured and not despised was the aim of all actions, meetings and discussions Moise Nicoara had with the people of Basarabia” (Seman, 2000: 256).

The most important writing about Moise Nicoara after the December revolution of 1989 belongs again to Cornelia Bodea. In the above mentioned work, published in 2001, *Moise Nicoară. Gyula (Hungary) 1784 – București 1861*, the author has made a shortened biography and has presented the stahes of his struggle with brief references to his life after 1825. She described his life in that period as “gloomy”. The novelty of this work about Moise Nicoară consists of the publication in its appendix of a diplomatic memorandum referring to the position of *Romanian Principalities towards the policy of neighbouring empires – Ottoman, Habsburg and Tsarist (Historical insight; Diplomatic Memoir)*, as well as the *Appeal to the Emperor Francisc I, on August 15, 1819*. The publication of these two documents was determined by the author's wish to “illustrate a fragment of the Romanian Moise Nicoara's

concerns, thoughts and beliefs in such a gloomy period of his life; those were times of darkness when the only sparkle of light projected in the future was the unitary state-like picture of his nation” (Bodea, 2001: 54).

Besides the work published by Alexandru Roz in 2002, which has already been mentioned in this study, we want to list here Liviu Marghitan’s writing entitled *O viață, un ideal, o izbândă. Moise Nicoară (1784–1961)* (*A life, an ideal, a victory. Moise Nicoara (1784–1961)*) published in 2007. The author’s contribution, who is better known for his writings in the field of archaeology consists mainly of synthesis of what has already been published about Moise Nicoară.

The last piece of writing we want to mention although it is not dedicated to the unexhausted Romanian struggler, is the one signed by the late historian of Romanian Orthodox Church of Arad area, the priest Pavel Vesa. In his article *The movement for ecclesiastical emancipation in Arad Episcopacy in the first decades of the 19th century* (2009: 103–124), the author makes a parallel between Dimitrie Țichindeal and Moise Nicoară, who had different views on the struggle for national emancipation of Romanians from Banat and Crișana.

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