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Preprint / Preprint

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Brie, M. (2009). Birth Dynamics and Structure in the Romanian Village in North-Western Transylvania (former half of the 19th century – beginning of the 20th century). *Romanian journal of population studies*, 3(2), 70-95. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-329957>

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Birth Dynamics and Structure in the Romanian Village in North-Western Transylvania (former half of the 19th century – beginning of the 20th century)¹

Mircea Brie

Abstract. Birth will be approached from both regional analysis and family perspectives. In the latter case, a complex survey reconstructing family in two sample villages in the survey will show specific aspects of birth. The aims and objectives of our analysis are to establish besides birth rate the possible connections between collective mentality and the act of birth and conception, birth degree, mother's age, number of children in a family, etc. On the other hand, birth will be explained and highlighted by making reference to documents and statistics on births in the region in parallel.

Key words: birth, family, marriage, collective mentality, child death, traditional village, Bihor, Satu Mare

Human population can be perceived as a complex dynamic system. Entering the system was conditioned by the intensity of birth rate phenomenon. The complexity of this system was provided by the major influence of marriage, divorce and mortality of people on birth rate. Due to these reasons, we will often make reference to these correlated phenomena all through the research.

Birth rate will be approached both from the perspectives of regional and family analysis. In the latter case, a complex survey to reconstruct families from two sample localities will show aspects specific to birth rate. The aims and objectives of our research are to establish not only birth rate, but also the possible connections between collective mentality and the act of birth, conception, birth range, mother's age, number of children in a family, interval between births, etc. On the other hand, the phenomenon of birth rate (characterising the number of living newborns within a human community as delimited by time and space¹) will be explained and highlighted by making reference in parallel to documents and statistics on births in the region – mainly counties of Bihor and Satmar – information coming from official sources of the Hungarian state.

1. Birth rate in the counties of Bihor and Satmar

In 1818, *Bihor* was divided into five circles just like in 1849. It was made up of 455 villages and 57 *pustie*². Between 1850 and 1861, the county was abolished and replaced with two administrative districts. Restored in 1861, Bihor was finally separated from Debrecen in 1876³, with no special alterations on a territorial level.

In 1842⁴, the number of the Oradea Roman-Catholic Bishopric inhabitants raised to 417,962. Out of them, 32,474 were Roman-Catholics (RC), 113,996 were Greek-Catholics (GC), 129,624 were Orthodox (O), 834 were Evangelic (EV), 135,791 were Calvinists (CH), and 5,173 were Israelites (Iz). On the whole, on the level of the bishopric, there was a Romanian ethnic majority⁵, which represented 58.2%.

In 1880, in the localities currently making up the Bihor County there were 314,607 people according to the official census. Out of them, 167,034 were Romanians, 125,996 Hungarians, 3,665 Germans, 4,805 Slovaks, 396 Ruthenians, 53 Croats and Serbians, 567 foreigners, 1,728 other nationalities, while 10,363 people had unknown mother tongue, according to the official census of the Hungarian state⁶. The same year, from a confessional perspective, Bihor had the following structure⁷: 145,013 were Orthodox, 33,875 Greek-Catholics, 31,701 Roman-Catholics, 86,231 Protestants (Calvinists), 1,111 Evangelicals, 98 Unitarians, 16,457 Israelites, and 121 other religions. In 1900, when a census was made, the localities of current Bihor had 418,816 inhabitants. Out of them, 217,025 had Romanian as their mother tongue, 188,601 Hungarian, 3,341 German, 7,809 Slovak, 82 Ruthenian, 134 Croatian, 28 Serbian, and 1,796 other languages⁸. From a confessional point of view, 183,401 were Orthodox, 45,976 Greek-Catholics, 49,378 Roman-Catholics, 113,611 Calvinists, 1,753 Evangelicals, 120 Unitarians, 23,626 Israelites, and 951 had other religions.⁹

From a political-administrative point of view, before the union with Romania in 1918, Bihor was organised as a county. The county underwent several territorial changes during the epoch we focus on.

¹ The paper *Birth Dynamics and Structure in the Romanian Village in North-Western Transylvania (former half of the 19th century – beginning of the 20th century)* was published in *Romanian Journal of Population Studies*, vol. III, no. 2, Cluj-Napoca, 2009, p. 70-95.

Considering the reorganisations (entailing demographic mutations as well), the population in the Bihor County¹⁰ was the following:

COUNTY	1880	1890	1900
Bihor	446,777	516,704	468,575

In 1890, the number of Romanians was 219,940 in the county. By 1900, their number raised to 238,455¹¹.

During that decade, the number of Romanian inhabitants increased by 18,515 people. It may be a natural growth (as we consider), or we may deal with immigration of Romanians (it is less significant than the increasing number of Romanian population; however, the documents show there was a certain immigration). In 1900, only 14.8% lived in the two cities of the county (Oradea and Salonta).

Lying in the north of Crisana on the Somes River, the *County of Satmar* had 242 villages, 17 towns and two cities with a population of 224,800 inhabitants in 1877. As compared to the previous period, the same county had 225 localities in 1780, 207 in 1834, and 262 in 1847. The 1880 census made by the Hungarian state recorded 293,092 inhabitants; the 1890 census recorded 323,768 inhabitants.

At the time of the 1900 census, 225 localities were analysed in the Satmar County, out of which four cities (Satu Mare, Baia Mare, Carei and Baia Sprie). Without including the territory west from the current border with Hungary, 224,294 people lived in the county.

In order to determine the *gross birth rate* (ratio between the number of living newborns and the average population in one year¹²) and birth rate in general, we will use information found in official statistics of the Austro-Hungarian state (we include here first statistic yearbooks and censuses), as well as information from parish registers of births (baptism records) written down by priests.

When analysing the total number of births, in 1866-1870 (at the beginning of the period studied by us), in the Bihor County, we can notice that there was no steady evolution¹³. In 1866, 9,625 boys and 9,061 girls were born, on the whole 18,686 children. The year 1867 marked a decrease in the number of living newborns; thus their total number reached 17,587 children (9,202 boys and 8,385 girls). The following two years brought a significant growth in the number of births. In 1868, there were 19,011 births, out of which 9,946 were boys and 9,065 were girls. The following year, the number of living newborns reached 19,283 children (9,751 boys and 9,532 girls). The year 1870 brought a decrease in the number of newborns to 18,916 (9,618 boys and 9,298 girls). Though unsteady, we can say that we deal with a slight growth of births. If we analyse these figures, we can see that the number of girls is lower than that of boys, sometimes even significantly.

At the same time, in the Satmar County, the number of births grew from 11,559 (1866) to 12,205 in 1870. The increasing number of births was not steady either. If in 1867, the total number of births reached 11,917, the following year it decreased to 11,092 to increase to 11,507 in 1869¹⁴.

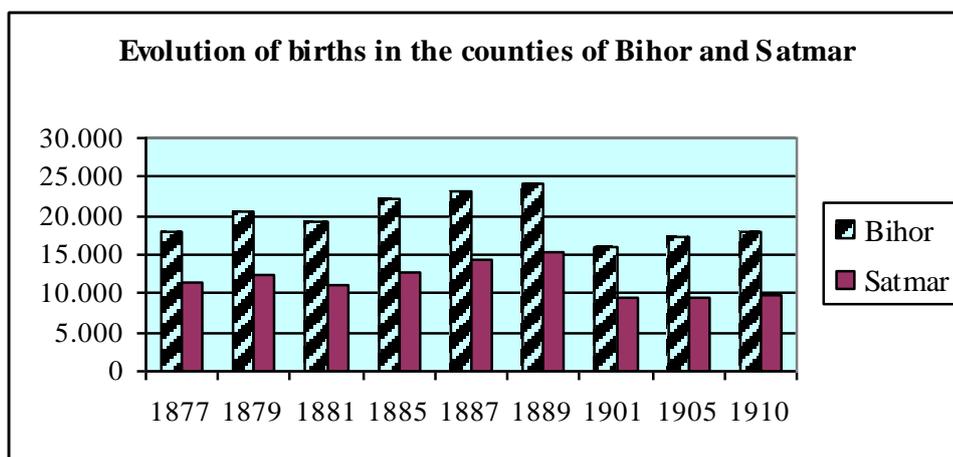
Evolution of births in the counties by sex¹⁵

Year	County	Newborn		
		Total	Boys	Girls
1877	Bihor	17.806	9.116	8.690
	Satmar	11.412	5.934	5.488
1879	Bihor	20.546	10.675	9.871
	Satmar	12.379	6.380	5.999
1881	Bihor	19.230	9.932	9.298
	Satmar	11.124	5.755	5.369
1885	Bihor	22.194	11.518	10.676
	Satmar	12.824	6.598	6.226
1887	Bihor	23.285	12.052	11.233
	Satmar	14.239	7.302	6.937
1889	Bihor	24.127	12.336	11.791
	Satmar	15.213	7.763	7.450

In order to analyse the information as shown in the tables, we have to point out that as far as the years 1901, 1905 and 1910 were concerned, only births in the localities on the current Romanian territory were introduced, without including all the territory of the counties¹⁶. We think that such an approach is only a quantitative and not qualitative shortcoming, as the evolution of birth rate as a demographic phenomenon can be noticed with no inconvenience (we remind that we calculate the gross birth rate index to 1,000 inhabitants).

If we look at the table above, we can see, as expected, a much higher birth rate for males. Out of the total number of newborns in our database, 51.54% were boys and 48.45% were girls.

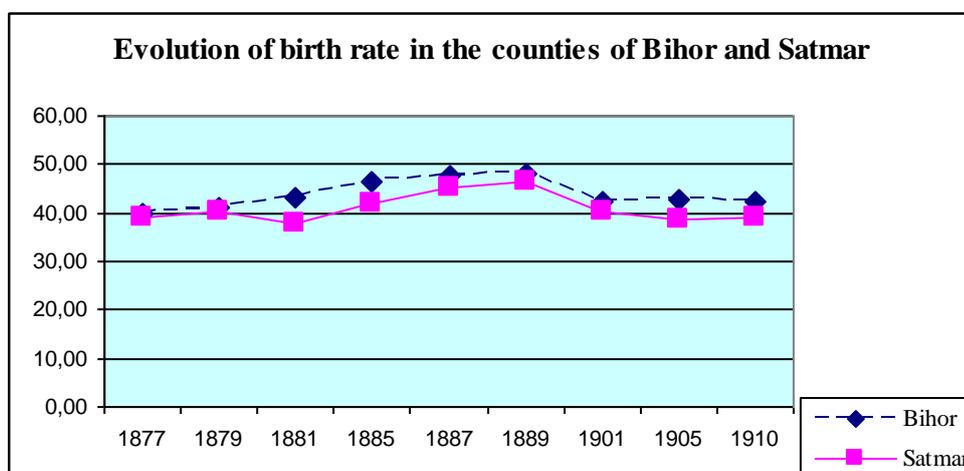
From a quantitative point of view, as seen in the chart below, during the latter half of the 19th century, there was a steady growth of births on the level of the whole county. The ascendant trend is insignificantly influenced by the stop and slight downfall in 1880-1881. The same (numerical) ascendant trend can be noticed for 1900-1910, when only localities belonging to the current Romanian state have been considered. If we make a comparison, we can see that the two counties had an almost identical evolution in point of births, except for the fact that there was a much greater number in Bihor than in Satmar due to the fact that the area was much larger.



* For the years 1901, 1905 and 1910, only births on the current territory of Romania have been considered

From the point of view of birth rate evolution, this was a time for great changes. The very high birth rate as we will see in the following charts was doubled by a very high death rate. The influence on natural mobility of population was even higher as we deal with an extremely high infantile mortality. There were also the deep economic crises together with epidemics (we particularly envisage the cholera epidemics in 1872-1873 and its prolongation¹⁷) with an unimaginable demographic pressure. People reacted. As Fernand Braudel pointed out concerning “biological system”, on a short term, “the active and the passive go hand in hand: if one of the adversaries goes ahead, the other one reacts”¹⁸. According to this theory, Ioan Bolovan gives the example of the reaction of people in Transylvania after the cholera epidemics in 1872-1873, when the excessively high mortality rate was followed by a significant growth of birth rate. In Transylvania (that is, the territory of the former Principality), from 76,705 births recorded in 1873, they reached 83,721 the following year; their number grew to 87,984 in 1875 and to 91,542 in 1876¹⁹. A dead child had to be replaced. Birth rate significantly grew all these years until 1890.

Despite all these deep changes, the demographic phenomenon of birth rate preserved its specific features all through the 19th century not only in this region, but in much larger areas on a European level.



If we make a comparative analysis of birth rate evolution with the numerical evolution of births, we can see a slight change brought about by the alteration of birth rate evolution after 1890: after a steady growth in the 8th and 9th decades, in the last decade of the 19th century we can identify a period of decreasing birth rate. The gross birth rate index in Bihor decreased from 47.9‰ (1889) to 42.48‰ (1901). There was the same descendent trend in Satmar from 46.56‰ to 40.18‰.

The decrease of gross birth rate is obvious against the background of a trend of normalisation in the region. An economic and socio-cultural positive evolution is able to lead the “natural reaction” of decreasing number of births. We have to see if mortality significantly decreased too, otherwise the hypothesis has no consistence.

Evolution of birth rate in the counties of Bihor and Satmar (‰)

	Bihor	Satmar
1877	39,85	38,94
1879	41,14	40,08
1881	43,04	37,95
1885	46,64	41,80
1887	47,56	45,05
1889	47,97	46,56
1901	42,48	40,18
1905	42,70	38,53
1910	42,46	38,93

Sources: „*Magyar Statistikai Évkönyv*”; Adam and Puşcaş, 652-655.

We can see the same phenomenon by analysing the two important cities in the counties. The number of births steadily grew all through the period covered by our analysis; yet, during the first years of the period, there was a slight decrease. We could consider that it had to do with the reaction of the population against cholera epidemics (mentioned above) in the years following 1873. The effects of this perturbation diminished by 1880, when the number of births slightly decreased.

2. Dynamics and structure of births in the Romanian traditional village

We will use this opportunity to lay stress on family, on its re-composition based on archives documents preserved due to church records. Our attempt to approach the issue of birth rate from this perspective faced a small obstacle because of the fact that births had to be correlated with other demographic events, mainly marriage and decease. As the period we focus on in the case of marriages is 1860-1910, the natural question is: what is the exact starting point of our survey on birth dynamics and structure in families established at the time? It is the moment of marriage and hence that of the formation of new families, or all births recorded in 1860-1910. It is easy to understand that, after 1860, children were born in families settled before that year and that, after 1910, children were born in families settled before that year. We consider it natural (although we pointed out the impediment, even shortcoming, we encountered, which could be minor if we make a distributive analysis of the phenomenon) to choose the option of analysing births in families we managed to reconstruct (in 1860-1910). Considering the situation, we have to point out that we will follow births in families established during the span we covered, although it assumes the insertion in the database of children born after 1910 (which is a random benchmark). As we know the reality found after researching marriage, we also have to point out that we do not exclude the idea that some marriages only became “official” at the time, although they might have existed before and had other children (as we will see in our survey). Thus, we have to introduce in our survey certain aspects depending on the specific and mentality of the community approached.

These aspects can be considered shortcomings of our research. On the other hand, they will show even more clearly the connection with the act of marriage. If we know the total number of marriages and the number of children (total and by families), we have the opportunity to see the dimension of the demographic process on the level of the locality as well as on the particular level of each family.

From another perspective, if we analyse the official census made by the Austro-Hungarian state at the time as well as statistics provided by officials, we will try to see demographic aspects as they developed. This would remove the shortcomings mentioned above to a great extent; it will also make it possible to place in the general demographic context all the population belonging to the counties of Bihor and Satmar²⁰.

We think that, if we study aspects concerning people’s reproduction, we have to follow the evolution of social, political or legal situation of the state (on the matter)²¹. We cannot ignore the living conditions of people in the region, the economic progress or rebound, epidemics, and hard labour of men, women and children. The hard living conditions led to early death of many people; many children did not reach

adulthood. Infantile mortality and the numerous diseases killing children were a challenge to parents. They often had many children, so that “reproduction was assured”²².

The Romanian society we envisage is traditional (we call it Romanian society despite the fact that the region used to belong to Austro-Hungary and we focused not only on Romanian ethnic communities, but also Hungarians, Germans, Jews, Slovaks, Gipsies – Romanians lived peacefully with these communities often in families beyond “accidents” and strong emotions of some inhabitants in the region irrespective of their ethnicity, language or religion); it does not belong to general existence laws of such a society. The new is hard to impose. Children were born; they grew up and got married in the village (in most cases). They seldom left the locality. In this case, one of family’s roles was to provide children socialisation, which was essential for their social integration. Obviously, it was not their focus. The peasant had no objectives; he did not make a philosophy out of words; he did things as his ancestors used to. At an early age, children had to see things just like adults did²³. This reality caused decease at an early age. In many cases, children’s frail body could not accept the situation; many had physical and mental disabilities. Natural selection had a word to say when medicine was basic and almost exclusively popular; the healthy survived, the others did not.

Another issue we envisage is illegitimate children (relatively low number in these parishes although their number was much higher, as we could see in the previous analysis). We only approach the case of families or people with children that finally got married (it is easy to understand that it was not always the case). Although the community sanctioned such “misbehaviour”, we have to see another aspect of the situation. Community accepted “marriage” although it was not always official. This was due to the fact that many youth could not pay for the derogation required in special cases by ecclesiastic authorities²⁴. Also, many people intending to remarry had no money for divorce. They separated and remarried but not officially. So, many young people accepted to live together, in which case their children were illegitimate. A shortcoming of our paper is mainly due to this fact: as mentioned above, we lose the information of children born in such conditions. Once we lose this information, it is practically almost impossible to trace the demographic phenomenon. Yet we express our conviction that the analysis on the first sample parish correlated with statistic information from lay sources has been edifying and encompassing to see and understand these aspects of daily life.

As we said in the previous subchapter, the attempt to reconstruct families is carried out through an analysis on localities as samples (Ghenetea – Greek-Catholic parish, and Suncuius de Beius – Greek-Catholic parish). We think that the choice of these localities lying in different areas not only geographically can respond to our intent and requests to outline the image of the phenomenon not only in these localities, but in the region.

A. Birth rate in Greek-Catholic families in Suncuius de Beius. Case study

We could become less flexible if we analyse birth rate through statistic information. We should not exclude any event from the context. Certainly, we cannot analyse each and every case; yet we can highlight special cases and the ones characteristic of most families. It is not easy to reconstruct family. However, we consider it necessary in order to get a definite image on birth rate. We will never be aware of certain particularities if we keep listing figures on living newborns.

We would like to point out right from the beginning that we will be concerned with all children born in families married in 1860-1910 in the Suncuius Greek-Catholic parish. We consider only children whose families were officially joined by priests and who were members of the parish. As mentioned before, we will not consider children who, although born at the time, did not belong to these families; they could belong to families married before 1860 or families living in concubinage, or whose parents were not Greek-Catholic parishioners. It is precisely for this reason that at the beginning of the period the number of children was pretty low and decreased after 1910.

In 1860-1910, the Greek-Catholic vicar celebrated 185 marriages²⁵. 679 children were born in these families²⁶. Out of them, 331 were boys and 348 were girls. It is interesting that, although normally the number of boys at birth was higher, the situation was different, as there was a higher number of girls. There was an average of 3.67 children/family. It was not a very high average for the period. One single family out of the 185 had no children. The family was formed on March 30th, 1908 by joining Lingurar Georgiu and Lingurar Armanca, both aged 60 at the time they married. As opposed to them, there was a family having 9 children. Catharina Dumitras married Ioanu Puje in 1875 and had 9 children (5 boys and 4 girls) between 1880 and 1901²⁷. Six other families had 8 children each.

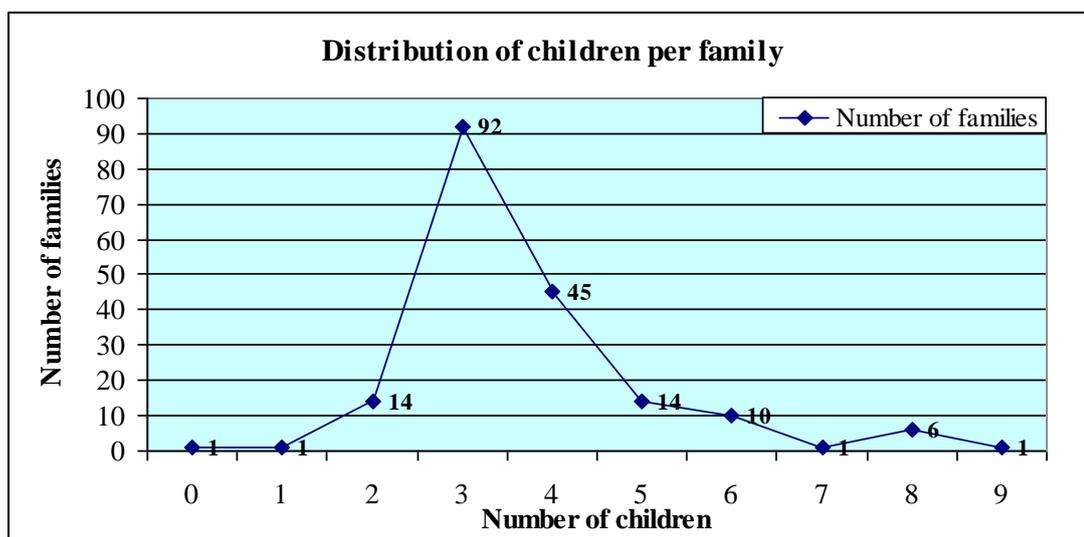
Numerical and percentage distribution of children per family

Number of children	Number of families	Total children	Percentage of total number of children (%)	Percentage of total number of families (%)
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0	1	0	0	0,54
1	1	1	0,15	0,54
2	14	28	4,12	7,57
3	92	276	40,65	49,73
4	45	180	26,51	24,32
5	14	70	10,31	7,57
6	10	60	8,84	5,41
7	1	7	1,03	0,54
8	6	48	7,07	3,24
9	1	9	1,33	0,54
Total	185	679	100	100

Source: National Archives, Bihor County Directorate (hereinafter A.N-D.J. BH), *Colecția Registrelor de Stare Civilă*, file 1197, f. 11-24; file 1198, f. 1-99; file 1199, f. 1-46.

Almost half of the families in the parish had 3 children (92 families representing 49.73% of the total number of families and making up 40.65% of the total number of children). They were followed by families with 4 children (45 cases, that is, 26.51% of the total number of children). Due to the high percentage of families with 2 to 5 children (89.19%), we can say that the locality was steadily developing to the modern family (nuclear family with small number of children) with no major mutations. The change, visible throughout the period is undoubtedly due to the fact that they were close to Beius and the main access road connecting Beius Depression to Oradea. The village inhabitants, mainly young people and men, were involved in a process of mental change mainly due to direct contact with the “outside” world through territorial mobility.



Though we have not complete information, it is important to point out the fact that we deal with a quite high *infantile death rate* in the community. At least 46 children (as recorded by the priest²⁸) died before turning 1 (that is, 6.77% out of the total number of children born in these families²⁹). Many newborns died at an early age; most of them never reached adulthood. There were five families (when priests recorded the data) having at least two children dying before turning 1. We will attempt to show the cases of these families in a chronological order by the date they married. The first family joined Timra Moise and Lingurar Ana on June 30, 1861 whose first two children (born 7 and 9 years after they got married) died before being 2 months old. Budo Catarina and Puje Iosif married on the 16th of February 1868 (aged 20 and 26 respectively) and had eight children, out of which three died before turning 1. Two children aged less than 1 died in the family joined on November 16, 1902 made up of Georgiu Bodo and Eva Flore. Two other children died in the family of Lingurar Zaharia and Ileana (married October 5, 1908). The last case with at least two children dead before turning 1 was the case of Lingurar Iosif and Floare (married October 5, 1908)³⁰.

In order to have a general image on the quantitative aspect of the phenomenon, we will try to show an *annual birth rate*.

Annual birth rate (1860-1924)*

Year	No. children						
1860	-	1877	10	1894	8	1911	9

1861	1	1878	16	1895	15	1912	14
1862	5	1879	9	1896	7	1913	4
1863	6	1880	16	1897	16	1914	3
1864	5	1881	18	1898	7	1915	9
1865	8	1882	21	1899	9	1916	4
1866	8	1883	16	1900	14	1917	1
1867	9	1884	15	1901	12	1918	3
1868	16	1885	20	1902	19	1919	4
1869	13	1886	15	1903	15	1920	1
1870	12	1887	15	1904	7	1921	-
1871	14	1888	10	1905	15	1922	1
1872	13	1889	16	1906	7	1923	-
1873	9	1890	12	1907	15	1924	2
1874	14	1891	10	1908	20		
1875	9	1892	13	1909	13		
1876	19	1893	13	1910	19	Total	679

*Children born in families married in 1860-1910

Source: A.N-D.J. BH, *Colecția Registrelor de Stare Civilă*, file 1197, f. 11-24; file 1198, f. 1-99; file 1199, f. 1-46.

Although irrelevant at the beginning and end of the period (reasons have been expressed above and concern families married before 1860 and children born after 1910), the information in the table highlights the average of children born in a year.

It goes without saying that the average of living newborns in the Greek-Catholic population in Suncuius de Beius was of about 14-15 children per year (the information referring to 1880-1910 with an average of 14.21 births/year is relevant from this point of view). There are no absolute figures for the period precisely for the reasons mentioned above. There were years with high averages, such as: 1882 (22 births), 1885 (20), 1908 (20), or low averages, such as: 1896, 1898, 1904 and 1906, when only seven children were born³¹.

We will now attempt to focus on another aspect, that is, *monthly number* of birth and conception of the 696 children born at that time. This analysis may show some constraints and determinisms originating in collective mentalities and the socio-economic particularities of the locality.

Although there were months with a high number of births (July, March, October, December, February) and others with a low number of births (May, September, August), we can still notice a relatively balanced distribution of births.

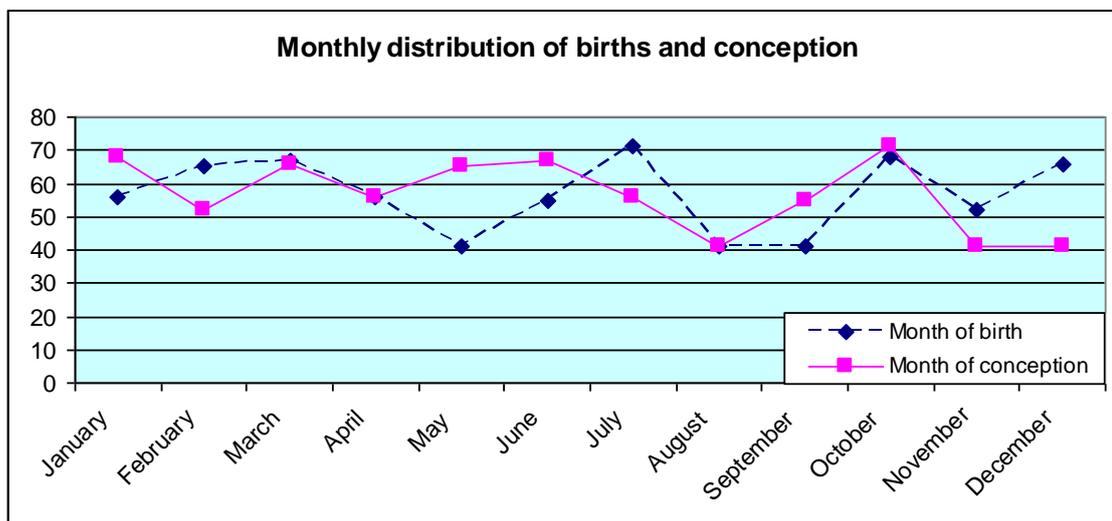
Monthly number of newborn (1860-1924)*

Month of birth	Month of conception	No. of newborns	Month of birth	Month of conception	No. of newborns
January	April	56	July	October	71
February	May	65	August	November	41
March	June	67	September	December	41
April	July	56	October	January	68
May	August	41	November	February	52
June	September	55	December	March	66

* Children born in families married in 1860-1910

Source: A.N-D.J. BH, *Colecția Registrelor de Stare Civilă*, file 1197, f. 11-24; file 1198, f. 1-99; file 1199, f. 1-46.

This division per months also shows the months when children were conceived (if we accept that there is an interval of nine months between conception and birth). During hard field labour time (August, September), there was a decreasing number of conceptions, as well as in November and December (a time we can associate with Christmas fast). Abstinence during Easter fastening period is debatable (March-April), when there was a high number of conceptions (66 in March and 56 in April). It is for this reason that we cannot generalise the idea that during fastening periods (at least) part of the people refrained from sexual relations. They could not be controlled by Church, unlike marriages. However, it is certain that hard exhausting labour during the year influenced conception. Yet, this did not determine important differences in point of months of conception.



The *age of mother at birth* is another aspect we have envisaged. If we analyse all births, the age of mother at birth, as well as the age of mother at marriage, all correlated with the span from marriage to births, the first or the last born, we can have a more accurate picture on birth rate and family in general.

If we analyse all 185 marriages in 1860-1910, we can see that women's age at marriage was quite young (if we consider only marriage between people marrying for the first time). The number of women who remarried was quite high. Most of the times, they were widows; there were few cases when the remarried woman was a divorcee. By correlating the age of mother at birth with the span until first birth³² and the age of the woman at marriage, we can have some information on family life realities. We consider it necessary to show all details concerning mothers' age at first and last birth, as well as all births (by groups of age, as shown in the table below).

Age of mother at birth (1860-1924)*

Age (in years)	Total newborn	Firstborn	Last born
≤ 20	82	63	1
21-25	201	56	23
26-30	204	29	63
31-35	96	8	42
36-40	46	3	22
41-45	22	4	15
46-50	11	3	7
≥ 51	6	1	4
Average age	28,3	23,01	31,6
Minimum age	17	17	19
Maximum age	58	55	58

* Children born in families married in 1860-1910

Source: A.N-D.J. BH, *Colecția Registrelor de Stare Civilă*, file 1197, f. 11-24; file 1198, f. 1-99; file 1199, f. 1-46.

If we make a comparative analysis between women's age at marriage in the parish and the information in the table above, the number of first born, when the mother is 20 years old at the most, we see that it is equal (63 cases) with the number of women marrying at an age between 15-19 years old³³. Moreover, besides the 63 firstborns, the total number of children born by women aged 20 at the most is 82. It is hard to accept that all these women (married at 15-19) had immediately after at least one child (there were 6 women having two children before turning 21³⁴). Besides, as we can see, the one year span we have considered (as far as marriages are concerned, the groups are one year younger; for instance, the group of 20-24 years old at marriage corresponds to the group of 21-25 years old at birth – thus, we introduce the pregnancy period in the equation) cannot fully solve the problem. The error margin is of three months (the span from 9 months to one year needed from the conception of a child to its birth). Thus, if a women turning 20 two months before marriage (framed in the second age group) had a child nine months after marriage (when she was 20 and 11 months), then the child belonged to the mother's first age group (under 21). Therefore, we cannot tell for sure that the first children belonging to mothers under 21 were born by the 63 women that married in the interval including those aged 19. As we could see in parish records, some of them

were born by women of the same age with widower partners (thus, they no longer belonged to the 63 women involved in marriages between partners at their first marriage).

As far as the total number of children born within a certain age interval was concerned, we can see that most of them belonged to the interval between 21 and 30 years old (405 out of 679). A quite high number of children belonged to the 31 – 35 years age group (96). As it is natural, as the mother's age is higher, the number of children is lower. There were six cases of children born when their mothers were over 51 years old. An isolated case was that of Raveica Popa (born in 1844) who, as a widow, lived with Petru Budo (born in 1842), who was a widower too. On the 1st of December 1899, when she was 55, the woman had a boy named Savu. The following year, on the 10th of October 1900 (she was 56), she had a girl (Ana). As a consequence of these events, the two concubines made their relationship official by getting married at the church (November 3rd, 1901). After getting married, on the 28th of May 1902, the 58 year old woman had another child, Miron, who died a month later³⁵. Besides that case, there was another similar situation: a 56 year old woman, Maria Groza (married to Ioan Budo on the 27th of August 1875), had a child on the 23rd of February 1910; then, Groza Zamfira (married to Flore Florian on the 11th of November 1894) and Maria Kraszta (married to Iuan Kavdar on the 8th of May 1897) had babies when they were 51³⁶. Mother's age when she had the last child is less relevant, as a woman could have one or two children when she was still quite young. Another woman could have several children, so she had a certain age when she had the last child.

It is worth mentioning mother's average age at birth (28.3 years old), at first child (23.01 years old) and last child (31.6 years old). For correlations and a better understanding of these aspects, we should refer to the analysis of marriages in the parish. In this context, it is worth mentioning that woman's average age at first marriage was 20.4 years old (in the case of man, the average age was 26.2 years old). The minimal age of woman at first child was 17 years old, and for the last child it was 19 (in this case, it was a family who had only one child). As far as mother's maximum age at birth is concerned, we remind the case of the woman who had her first child when she was 55 and the last when she was 58. We do not intend to end the debate without pointing out that in the case of 11 families, the mother's age was not recorded, so their children could not be considered.

As a conclusion, we can say that the number of Greek-Catholic community members in the parish increased at the time. It is easy to understand if we consider that at the time, the average number of children per family was 3.67. If in 1900, for instance, the Greek-Catholic population in Suncuius was of 388 people, in 1910 their number increased to 437. This growth concerned not only Greek-Catholic families; it held true for the whole community³⁷. The population increased from 789 to 893 inhabitants. However, we cannot say that the increasing number of Greek-Catholic parishioners was due only to a high birth rate and a high natural growth. This might be due to conversion to this confession of some people or, as shown before, to mixed marriages. Several people of Greek-Catholic confession settled there at the time (some precisely to get married).

If generally most families had several children, it does not necessarily imply that there was a high natural growth. Mortality was quite high. The lack of appropriate food, of medicine and physicians, as well other aspects involved a high death rate amongst children.

B. Birth rate in Greek-Catholic families in Ghenetea. Case study

A suburban settlement of Marghita, Ghenetea lies in the north of the Bihor County, 2 km far from Marghita. Lying in a hilly area, the settlement had a quite low number of inhabitants. The mostly Romanian population counted 315 inhabitants in 1880 (only 45 people did not state Romanian was their mother tongue – 30 chose Hungarian)³⁸. On the 1900 census, there were 103 houses in the village with 523 people (466 of Romanian language, 54 of Hungarian and 3 of "other languages" – we notice that there were 12 Jews identified not by language, but by their religion³⁹). The following decade, until 1910, when a new census was organised, the number of inhabitants raised to 68 people. From a confessional point of view, the Greek-Catholics were dominant (89.8% in 1880⁴⁰; 86.8% in 1900⁴¹).

In 1860-1910, the Greek-Catholic vicar celebrated 82 marriages (from a numerical point of view, there was a clear-cut difference as compared to the parish in Suncuius de Beius where there were 185 marriages at the time – but the Greek-Catholic community was at least twice as much)⁴². 416 children were born in these families. Out of them, 208 were boys and as many girls. So, we deal with an average of 5.07 children/family⁴³. It is a much higher average than in Suncuius de Beius, where the average was 3.67 children/family. From this point of view, we can consider that it preserved traditional rural society features. However, there is a slight change that we will analyse below.

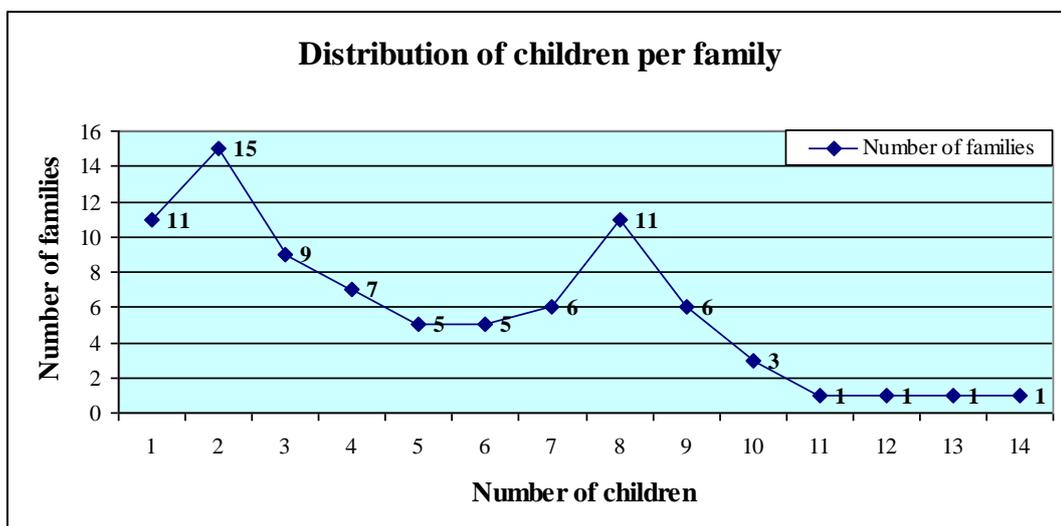
Number and percentage of children per family

Number of children	Number of families	Total children	Percentage of total number of children (%)	Percentage of total number of families (%)
1	11	11	2,64	13,41
2	15	30	7,21	18,29
3	9	27	6,49	10,98
4	7	28	6,73	8,54
5	5	25	6,01	6,1
6	5	30	7,21	6,1
7	6	42	10,10	7,32
8	11	88	21,15	13,41
9	6	54	12,98	7,32
10	3	30	7,21	3,66
11	1	11	2,64	1,22
12	1	12	2,88	1,22
13	1	13	3,13	1,22
14	1	14	3,37	1,22
Total	82	416	100	100

Source: A.N-D.J. BH, *Colecția Registrelor de Stare Civilă*, file 461, f. 32-50, 64-75; file 462, f. 4-101; file 463, f. 1-21.

At least one child was born in all 82 families. As we can notice in the table above, families with two children were more often seen (15 cases, that is, 18.29%). They were followed by families with one child (11 cases, that is, 13.41%). There were also 11 cases of families with 8 children. If we analyse this situation in correlation with the information in the chart below, we can see a very interesting fact in the parish: there seems to be a break of modernity trends (when nuclear families had few children) from the old behaviour of traditional rural world (when families had several children).

As we can see in point of number of children, there were two groups of numerous families with: 1-4 children (representing 51.2% of total number of families and 23.07% of total number of children) and 7-9 children respectively (representing 28.05% of total number of families and 44.23% of total number of children). Between the two categories of families (that seem to be different “worlds”), there was a low number of families with four or five children (5 cases each). Despite the above mentioned trends obvious due to the great number of families with 1-2 children and families with 7-9 children, most children born in the parish were in families with several children. Although the number of families with 1-2 children was greater towards the end of the period, the percentage of these children is low mainly due to the fact that most children were in families with several children, although the number of such families was decreasing.



Even for a society preserving obvious traditional features, such as the one in this village, there was a consistent number of mothers giving birth to more than 10 children. No less than 7 women in the village had at least 10 children, out of which one had even 14 children. The number of births does not necessarily lead to a numerous family: out of the 14 children born by Magyar Ileana (married to Korb Ioan on the 26th of November 1901), only 7 managed to survive the first two years⁴⁴. A similar situation was that of Szarka Augustin family (married on the 10th of November 1910) whose wife had 13 children; yet they had to accept

the death of 5 children before turning 1⁴⁵. In a family with 12 children (Cutus Vasile married Reccsan Marie on the 11th of January 1894), only 8 children survived to reach 1 year old; only five of them reached 20⁴⁶.

Infantile mortality in those families was quite high: 63 children died before turning 1 (15.14% of the total number of living newborns), thus reaching an infantile mortality rate of 151.4‰. This is one more reason to consider the village as not having enough resources and means to overcome economic crises and epidemics in the region in 1870-1880.

This is a world where many were born and many died. Some would say they were born to suffer; some others, that they died to be happy. It was community mental influencing (thus relieving pain) parents, who chose to have another child when one died. Maybe God will have mercy on this one.

The relatively low level of births in the village was mainly due to the low number of families at the time can be seen in the *annual birth distribution*. As mentioned in the case of Suncuius de Beius, the information referring to annual distribution of births for the first period is not relevant for a general and exhaustive picture on birth as a phenomenon in the parish. The explanation is that we have only considered children born in families settled after 1860 without those born after 1860 in families settled before 1860. After 1910, the phenomenon repeated, as children born in families settled after that year have not been included in our survey. Yet, these shortcomings have been assumed right from the beginning of our survey on family reconstruction.

Annual distribution of births (1860-1933)*

Year	No. of children	Year	No. of children	Year	No. of children	Year	No. of children
1860	-	1879	6	1898	7	1917	2
1861	1	1880	5	1899	7	1918	3
1862	1	1881	9	1900	6	1919	7
1863	1	1882	9	1901	9	1920	3
1864	2	1883	4	1902	10	1921	3
1865	1	1884	15	1903	8	1922	1
1866	4	1885	8	1904	6	1923	4
1867	8	1886	4	1905	6	1924	1
1868	6	1887	10	1906	6	1925	4
1869	9	1888	9	1907	6	1926	2
1870	10	1889	4	1908	7	1927	1
1871	11	1890	12	1909	7	1928	2
1872	7	1891	5	1910	4	1929	1
1873	3	1892	10	1911	9	1930	1
1874	8	1893	13	1912	5	1931	
1875	5	1894	11	1913	3	1932	1
1876	9	1895	9	1914	6	1933	1
1877	4	1896	7	1915	6		
1878	9	1897	10	1916	2	Total	416

*The children were born in families established in 1860-1910

Source: A.N-D.J. BH, *Colecția Registrelor de Stare Civilă*, file 461, f. 32-50, 64-75; file 462, f. 4-101; file 463, f. 1-21.

From the point of view of annual distribution, there is an annual average of 7.84 newborns in the period we have analysed (1880-1910). Fluctuations, considered rather cyclic and accidental, are less significant to consider external factors to have influenced birth either positively or negatively. Economic crises, social pressure and turmoil could have influenced mortality (immediate and visible effects were mainly mortality amongst children who were more vulnerable in front of ubiquitous death).

Monthly distribution of newborns (1860-1933)*

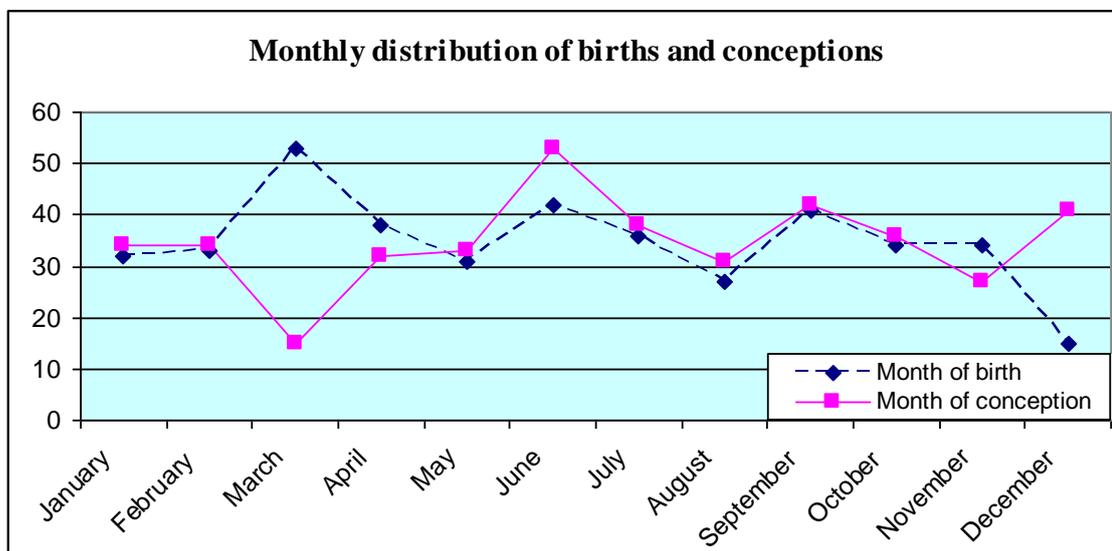
Month of birth	Month of conception	No. of newborns	Month of birth	Month of conception	No. of newborns
January	April	32	July	October	36
February	May	33	August	November	27
March	June	53	September	December	41
April	July	38	October	January	34
May	August	31	November	February	34
June	September	42	December	March	15

* The children were born in families established in 1860-1910

Source: A.N-D.J. BH, *Colecția Registrelor de Stare Civilă*, file 461, f. 32-50, 64-75; file 462, f. 4-101; file 463, f. 1-21.

The monthly distribution of newborns shows slight trends of maximum and minimum points during the year. Community, family and particularly Church control were mainly focused on the act of marriage and

less on births. Obviously, the moment of birth should not be considered as a benchmark in identifying possible causes of births concentrated in certain months of the year. Birth was not usually programmed. Control or community influence, if they existed, were expressed in the sense of limiting and restraining the time of conception. Individuals' sex life could not be defended or controlled. Yet, traditional society regulated some behaviours originating in morality imposed by the Church most of the times. Sexual abstinence during fastening periods was more or less respected. From this point of view, we could say that at least 15 births in December (corresponding to conception in March) could have originated in deep religious feelings. The expected minimum for Easter fast is no longer obvious, so there is no solid support for our hypothesis.



We think that sex life and conception were mostly influenced by agriculture and specific of season works. The months with agricultural activities were months with a low rate of conception (March, April and May – corresponding to spring agricultural activities; July and August – summer season; October and part of November – autumn agricultural season). Between the three important agricultural periods there were significant periods of conception. An example in point is the month of June, a month with little agricultural work, when 53 conceptions are recorded (more than the triple of March).

The *age of mother at birth* is another important element in our survey. As expected, most mothers gave birth (see below the table on span of time between marriage and birth) during the first years after marriage. Mother's age at birth, mainly first child, largely depended on average age at marriage. As the average age at marriage in the parish was 21-22 years old, the following years in women's life were rich in births (over half of mothers had a child within 2 years after marriage – 51 children were born during that interval). Returning to mother's age at birth, we can notice, after links with age group from marriage to births, that most births belonged to the mother group age of 21-25 years old (105 cases) and 26-30 years old (108 cases) making up 51.2% out of the total number of living newborns. A number of 36 children were born by mothers aged less than 20 (30 of them being firstborns). Out of the 36 children, 2 were the last born (both being single child to their mothers – one aged 17, the other aged 19). We can also see that 5 children (all second range children, none being last child to their family) were born by women who were not at their first birth. Papp Ilusca (18) had a boy in June 1868, only 4 months after marriage; he died a month later. Only one year later, she gave birth to a girl⁴⁷.

Mother age at birth (1860-1933)*

Age (in years)	Total newborns	Firstborn	Last born
≤ 20	36	30	2
21-25	104	29	14
26-30	108	13	11
31-35	86	7	13
36-40	64	1	225
41-45	18	2	17
46-50			
≥ 51			
Average age	29,08	23,6	33,98
Minimum age	17	17	17

Maximum age	45	45	45
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* The children were born in families established in 1860-1910

Source: A.N-D.J. BH, *Colecția Registrelor de Stare Civilă*, file 461, f. 32-50, 64-75; file 462, f. 4-101; file 463, f. 1-21.

Mothers' average age at first birth was tightly related to women's age at marriage. If the average age at marriage was 21-22, the first child was born at an average age of 23.54 years, a figure showing once again that the first child was usually born within two years after the parents married. Mother's average age at last birth shows a behaviour specific to traditional rural world. On the one hand, woman gave birth to children until it was possible from a biological point of view without attempting to limit births. This reality found in Ghenetea is proved by the very high number of children born by mothers belonging to the 36-40 age group (26 cases representing 31.7% were last born children) and the 41-45 age group (16 cases representing 19.5% out of the total number of last born children). The fact that over half of the last born children in the parish were born when their mothers were not that young anymore, when births were accidental from a biological point of view, completes the idea. On the other hand, late births were but a "completion" of families after a whole series of deaths amongst children. Last but not least, there was a trend of parents to conceive other children for fear of being alone considering that first children either got married or were old enough for marriage. Mother's average age at last birth was 33.91 years old. Considering all births, mother's average age was 29.08 years old, a higher level than other localities. The lowest age of a mother having a child was 17 years old (Papp Ilusca born in 1855 and married on the 14th of February 1870 to Papp Stefan, when he was only 15). The birth proved to be much too difficult for the body of the young woman, as she could bear no more children afterwards⁴⁸. At the age of 44, Ileana (married to Magyar Georgiu in 1877) had a child dying the same year (1901)⁴⁹. There are two interesting cases when women gave birth to the only child in the family at an old age. In 1868, Kis Maria, a 40 year old widow from Ghenetea, married Toth Vasiliu, a 27 year old young man from Patlusa, a widower himself. Two years later, in 1870, when she was 42, she had a girl named Irina⁵⁰. In the second family made up of Lazar Ioan (42) and Pustav Ilusca (23) on the 19th of November 1860, the first and only child was born 22 years after their marriage, in 1882, when the woman was 40⁵¹.

After the analysis carried out through family reconstruction on birth in the two villages, there have been enough arguments favouring the hypothesis of personal and family emancipation. Women had less and less children, age at birth changed and so did the intervals between births. Even child mortality (we will approach the topic when debating mortality) altered, that is, it diminished as family changed. Children were more appreciated in families with few children. These trends were slightly visible in Sunceius de Beius and more obvious in Ghenetea, mentioning that several families were still traditional through their behaviour.

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A.N-D.J. BH, *Colecția Registrelor de Stare Civilă*

Notes:

¹ Virgil Sora, Ilie Hristache and Mircea Paul Despa, *Demografie*, (București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1983), 155.

² Iosif I. Adam and I. Pușcaș, *Izvoare de demografie istorică*, vol. II, *Secolul al XIX-lea – 1914. Transilvania* (București: Direcția Generală a Arhivelor Statului, 1987), 30.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁵ This is possible if we admit that Orthodox and Greek-Catholic parishioners were Romanians (yet we do not exclude certain exceptions).

⁶ Traian Rotariu (coord.), *Recensământul din 1880. Transilvania* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Staff, 1997), 361.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 360.

⁸ Traian Rotariu (coord.), *Recensământul din 1900. Transilvania*, (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Staff, 1999), 614-615.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 616.

¹⁰ Alexandru Ilieș, *Etnie, confesiune și comportament electoral în Crișana și Maramureș*, (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1998), 24.

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¹³ Adam and Pușcaș, 236.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹⁵ The sources of information were the yearbooks *Magyar Statistikai Évkönyv. Szerkeszti és kiadja. Az országos Magyar Kir. Statistikai. Hivatal* (hereinafter „*Magyar Statistikai Évkönyv*”), I Füzet (1877 – Budapest: 1878; 1879 – Budapest: 1881; 1881 – Budapest: 1883; 1885 – Budapest: 1887; 1887 – Budapest: 1889; 1889 – Budapest: 1891).

¹⁶ For the period after 1900, information has been provided by Adam and Pușcaș, 652-655. Reference has been made to Rotariu, „*Recensământul din 1880*”, 50-51, 274-275; Rotariu, „*Recensământul din 1900*”, 110-113, 474-477.

¹⁷ The effects of cholera epidemics in 1872-1873 were catastrophic: in the Bihor County, 30,447 persons were ill, out of which 10,980 died (1,096 in Oradea), which represents 2.28% out of the total population of the county; in Satmar 17,330 persons were ill, out of which 5,268 died, that is, 2.13% out of the total population of the county. Adam and Pușcaș, 243-244.

¹⁸ Apud Ioan Bolovan, *Transilvania între Revoluția de la 1848 și Unirea din 1918. Contribuții demografice* (Cluj-Napoca: Centrul de Studii Transilvane, Fundația Culturală Română, 2000), 117; Fernand Braudel, *Structurile cotidianului*, vol. I (București: 1984), 14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ The information referring to these administrative units were recorded in censuses published under the coordination of Traian Rotariu, and in the paper entitled *Izvoare de demografie istorică* (vol. II), quoted before. Also, due to the National Archives – Bihor County Directorate (hereinafter A.N-D.J. BH), we had the statistic yearbooks „*Magyar Statistikai Évkönyv*”.

²¹ We refer to the chapter on lay and church law referring to family.

²² Vladimir Trebici, *Demografie* (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1979), 275. The well-known demographer considered that population through family “provides reproduction when at least two children reach maturity”.

²³ Ioan Mihăilescu, *Sociologie generală* (Iași: Polirom, 2000), 208.

²⁴ Sorina Paula Bolovan, *Familia în satul românesc din Transilvania. A doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea și începutul secolului XX* (Cluj-Napoca: Centrul de Studii Transilvane, Fundația Culturală Română, 1999), 86-88.

²⁵ A.N-D.J. BH, *Colecția Registrelor de Stare Civilă*, file 1197, f. 25-33; file 1200, f. 1-14.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, file 1197, f. 11-24; file 1198, f. 1-99; file 1199, f. 1-46.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, file 1198, f. 1-99.

²⁸ The column referring to children deceases in these families was not always filled in. Consequently, we cannot accurately say how many children aged less than 1 died. Out of them, 46 were recorded. We will analyse the topic when approaching infantile mortality.

²⁹ Infantile mortality rate reached 67.7%. A.N-D.J. BH, *Colecția Registrelor de Stare Civilă*, file 1197, f. 40-52; file 1201, f. 1-72.

³⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, file 1197, f. 25-33; file 1200, f. 1-14 (Marriage register); file 1197, f. 11-24; file 1198, f. 1-99; file 1199, f. 1-46 (Baptism register); file 1197, f. 40-52; file 1201, f. 1-72 (Death register).

³¹ *Ibid.*, file 1198, f. 1-99.

³² We will show details on span of time from children's birth in these families.

³³ See analysis on marital strategies for this parish.

³⁴ A.N-D.J. BH, *Colecția Registrelor de Stare Civilă*, file 1197, f. 11-24; file 1198, f. 1-99; file 1199, f. 1-46.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Data from Traian Rotariu's papers on censuses in 1900 and 1910, papers quoted before.

³⁸ Rotariu, „*Recensământul din 1880*”, 50-51.

³⁹ Rotariu, „*Recensământul din 1900*”, 110-111.

⁴⁰ Rotariu, „*Recensământul din 1880*”, 50.

⁴¹ Rotariu, „*Recensământul din 1900*”, 111.

⁴² A.N-D.J. BH, *Colecția Registrelor de Stare Civilă*, file 461, f. 64-75; file 463, f. 1-21.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, file 461, f. 32-50, 64-75; file 462, f. 4-101; file 463, f. 1-21.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, file 462, f. 4-101; file 463, f. 1-21; file 464, f. 1-90.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, file 461, f. 34-42.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, file 461, f. 32-50, 64-75; file 462, f. 4-101; file 463, f. 1-21.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, file 461, f. 32-50.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* The girl, Irina, survived the conditions living up to 77 years old in 1947.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, file 461, f. 32-50, 64-75; file 462, f. 4-101.