

A Century of Romanian Higher Education in Cluj. The Beginnings

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Abstract: The organization of the University of Upper Dacia in Cluj was the result of an admirable solidarity of the Romanian academic environment. Prestigious names from the universities of Bucharest and Iaşi rallied around the project of establishing a Romanian higher education institution right in the heart of Transylvania. The phenomenon is not surprising. A simple look at the historical process of organizing the Romanian universities in the Old Kingdom shows that both the educational institutions from Iaşi and Bucharest owed their systematization and progress to some Transylvanians as well. They applied the principle they adhered to and upheld, according to which the evolution of a nation can be done only through culture. They were convinced that only in this way could a dialogue with the great European nations be reached. Thus, they put the theory into practice.

Therefore, the inter-Romanian university mobility took place, initially, from Transylvania to the Romanian extra-Carpathian territory. Later, at the beginning of the 20th century, the meaning of this movement was reversed, i.e. from the Old Kingdom to Transylvania. In 1919, when they were asked to contribute with their experience and expertise to the organization of Romanian higher education in Cluj, the teachers of the universities of Iaşi and Bucharest answered affirmatively. Our approach highlights the contribution of these teachers to the organization of *Alma Mater Napocensis*.

Keywords: universities, Cluj, Iaşi, Bucharest, professors, Romanian higher education, academic mobility

The events of 1918, which culminated in the achievement of full national unity and the formation of Greater Romania, generated the favourable context for the realization of another ideal of great value for the Romanians of Transylvania: the University that taught in Romanian in Cluj. The mission of this institution was extremely important for the era that was opened by the Great Union, namely the creation of generations of intellectuals with modern thinking, which would contribute to the consolidation of the entire nation state and connect it to the new European order, configured based on the principle of self-determination of nations. *Alma Mater Napocensis* was, thus, throughout its existence, as defined by Professor Vasile Pușcaș, a university “in the service of the nation” (Pușcaș, 1988: 129-138).

In the Romanian space, the modern university was a reality of the 19th century, with previous evolutions, whose debut can be identified at the beginning of modern times.

For example, in Transylvania, which was connected from a confessional and cultural point of view to the space of Central Europe, university-level instruction was organized in the form of colleges, which functioned alongside monasteries since the 16th century. A first structure of this type created in Cluj, at the initiative of Father Antonio Possevino, in 1581, was the *Major Jesuit College*. It was, moreover, the institution that foreshadowed over time the modern university of Transylvania (Pop, 2012).

With an ephemeral existence, the college was disbanded in 1605. The same monastic order constituted a new institution of higher education after almost a century, in 1698. The suppression of the Jesuit order in 1773 resulted in the takeover of the College by the Piarist order, in 1776. A few years later, with the reforms promoted by Emperor Joseph II, the institution lost its university rank, being called a “royal academic high school” (Costea, 2012), and since 1822 only a “high school”, being left with a semi-university status. The language of instruction was also changed, i.e. Hungarian instead of Latin.

After the Revolution of 1848, the leaders of the Romanian national movement in Transylvania were on the verge of gaining a victory in this field. Thus, the Vienna Court finally accepted the creation of a Romanian university in Transylvania, for pragmatic reasons, of a political nature.

The Court wanted to stop the exodus of young Transylvanians, tempted to study in Iași and Bucharest, after the establishment of universities here in 1860 and 1864, respectively. In addition, it wanted to send a message to the Romanian state through the benevolent attitude of the Monarchy towards Romanians. Thus, in 1865, just one year after the establishment of the University of Bucharest, the Viennese Court approved the project of establishing a Law Academy. But the Romanians' desideratum was not realized, due to the conclusion of the dualist pact in 1867 (Sigmirean, 2000: 100).

Fortunately, the initiative of the intellectual circles in the Romanian Principalities did not have the same end. The evolution towards the modern nation and the formation of a national culture imposed the establishment of university structures in accordance with the requirements of the time.

The University of Iași had already had, in 1919, a modern educational experience of almost 60 years. With "roots" going back to the 16th century, when Despot Vodă founded a College in Cotnari, where Latin, rhetoric and dialectics were studied, the Mihail's Academy (Academia Mihăileană) was founded in 1835, and in 1860 the inauguration, in the presence of Prince Alexandru Ioan. Cuza, of the University of Iași (Iacob, 2013: 15-16). Even if the three Romanian provinces had a different historical evolution, they were always united by national consciousness and culture. Books, ideas and people of culture circulated between the three Romanian historical provinces, so that in Bucharest and Iași we meet Transylvanian teachers throughout the modern era. When it was founded in 1860, the University of Iași had at its professors the Transylvanians Simion Bărnuțiu, Petru Suciuc, Ștefan Emilian, Ioan Popp, Ștefan Micle, famous names, with European level training, who laid the foundations of higher education in Iași (Iacob, 2013: 42). When Cluj needed the enlightened minds of Iași, they came to contribute to the building of the new university fortress, in Transylvania which was united with the motherland.

In the case of Bucharest, too, one could speak of an academic tradition. Since the time of Constantin Brâncoveanu, a Royal Academy functioned in Wallachia, organized in 1694 alongside the monastery of Saint Sava (Sfântul Sava). Later, Gheorghe Lazăr (1779-1823), a Transylvanian refugee in Bucharest and a visionary of his time, succeeded in 1818 to lay the foundations of a higher education

institution in Romanian, which operated in the old building in St. Sava. (Berciu-Drăghicescu, Bozgan, 2004).

A few years later, in 1842, another Transylvanian, August Treboniu Laurian, would link his name to the Romanian school in Bucharest. At the invitation of Prince Alexandru Ghica, he arrived in the town on Dâmbovița to fill a teaching position at St. Sava College. (Balaci et al., 1964: 17-20).

Based on these antecedents, on July 4/16, 1864, through the decree of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, the University of Bucharest was established. Thus, the higher education institution that functioned since 1694 under the name of the Royal Academy of St. Sava, which later became, in 1818, St. Sava College, reached another level of its evolution.

In Transylvania, however, in this period of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, despite the efforts of the Romanian intellectuals, it was not possible to organize a higher education institution with Romanian as the language of instruction. However, the university tradition continued in Cluj, through a new form of organization. In 1872, the political authorities agreed to the creation of the “Ferenc József” University, with Hungarian as the language of instruction (Csucusuja, 2012).

The first world conflagration would change the situation. Immediately after the outbreak of the Great War, the leadership of the University of Bucharest sent a memorandum to King Carol I and the Prime Minister requesting Romania's entry into the war on the side of the Entente. The main argument invoked was the liberation of Transylvania and its union with Romania. This position was not new. For the most part, the teaching staff had supported over time the national movement of Romanians in Transylvania (Berciu-Drăghicescu & Bozgan, 2004: 94–96). Then, we must not omit the fact that the education of Bucharest owed its organization and progress to some Transylvanians who did nothing but understand that the evolution of a nation can only be done through culture. However, this objective could not be achieved without a modern higher education system in the national language. Only in this way could a dialogue with the great European nations be reached.

The achievement of Greater Romania at the end of the First World War also led to the development of the Romanian higher education

system. What Transylvania gave to Wallachia through Gheorghe Lazăr or August Treboniu Laurian, both trained at the Academic College in Cluj, was returned a century later, in 1919, as a duty of honour. It was the turn of the great intellectuals and teachers from Bucharest and Iași to support the organization of higher education in Romanian at the University of Cluj.

According to the Resolution of the Grand National Assembly from Alba Iulia of December 1, 1918, the Board of Directors had to deal with the takeover and organization on a modern basis of the University of Cluj. In March 1919, taking advantage of the favourable context created by the withdrawal of Hungarian troops on the demarcation line, important measures were taken for the organization of the university by Valeriu Braniste, the new head of the Cult and Public Instruction Resort within the Governing Council. Thus, on March 23rd, 1919, the Ministry of Public Instruction in Bucharest was notified of the initiative of the Directing Council to take over the University of Cluj starting with the academic year 1919-1920. It was expressed, at the same time, the intention to consult the Universities of Bucharest and Iași, for support and suggestions. Also, the Minister of Public Instruction from Bucharest was requested to mediate the secondment of qualified personnel from the Universities of Bucharest and Iași, to ensure the organization and development in the best conditions of the Romanian language teaching process at the University of Cluj. A university commission was formed, consisting of delegates of the Governing Council and representatives of the two universities in the Old Kingdom. The members of this commission were to examine, on the basis of a regulation, the candidates' files, and then to make proposals to the Governing Council. The response of the two Romanian Universities was prompt, both in Bucharest and in Iași sending renowned specialists to lay the foundations of Romanian higher education in Cluj (Pascu, 1972: 17-19).

In the University Commission, which was meant to reorganize the University of Cluj and to select the teaching staff, out of the 20 members, 12 were from the Universities of Bucharest and Iași, three for each field that was expected to be part of the institution. Thus, the teachers from Iași Dimitrie Gusti, Petru Poni, Em. Teodorescu, M. Cantacuzino or M. Manicatide together with those from Bucharest: G. Țițeica, Șt. Longinescu, Iulian Teodorescu, Ernest Juvara, Gh. Marinescu and the Transylvanians Vasile Goldiș, Ioan Lupaș, Onisifor Ghibu,

Alexandru Borza, Emil Hațieganu, P. Poruțiu, Iuliu Moldovan, Iuliu Hațieganu, under the coordination of Nicolae Iorga, analysed each file of those who applied for the positions opened for competition at the future departments of the University of Cluj. The proposals of the members of the Commission were sent to the Governing Council, which was responsible for appointing the teachers. The work of the members of the Commission was not easy at all, given that the University of Cluj had to be organized in a few months.

After completing the first stage, namely the selection of candidates, the organization of faculties, departments, laboratories and institutes was started. The professors from Iași stood out again, through their experience, leaving their mark on each of the four faculties that were being set up. Thus, the suggestions of the Iași academician Petru Poni (one of the pioneers of Romanian chemistry) along with those of Țițeica, Mrazec or Alexandru Borza had an important weight in the establishment of the Faculty of Sciences. Regarding the Faculty of Letters, the main role was undertaken by Vasile Pârvan, but also supported by Nicolae Iorga, along with Onisifor Ghibu, Ioan Lupaș and Dimitrie Gusti, the historian, sociologist and aesthetician from the University of Iași, who is considered the founder of Sociology in Romania. The Faculty of Law was structured on the ideas supported by Bucharest professors Cătuneanu and Răducanu and Iași law professors Iulian Teodorescu, rector of the University of Iași between 1919 and 1920, and Vasile Dimitriu, professor of commercial law at the same university, who became the first dean of the Faculty of Law in Cluj and the second rector of the Romanian university in Transylvania. The Faculty of Medicine was also organized through the experience of the doctors-professors Gheorghe Marinescu from the University of Bucharest, of the paediatrician M. Manicatide from the University of Iași, with the contribution of the Transylvanians Iuliu Moldovan and Iuliu Hațieganu.

In the organization of the Romanian University of Cluj, the Romanian legislation was taken into account, as well as the functioning of the two already existing universities, from Bucharest and Iași. In Cluj, four faculties were organized: Medicine, which had two departments - medicine and pharmacy; Law and State Sciences; Letters and Philosophy, with three sections - history philology, philosophy; Sciences, with five sections - mathematics physics, chemistry, natural

sciences, geography. Each faculty of the Cluj institution had its own structure, which incorporated the departments, institutes, but also the auxiliary units, generically called services and offices, among which were, among others, laboratories, museums, and research stations (Pascu, 1972: 21-22).

After a period of only five months of sustained activity of the commission and with a teaching staff selected under exceptional conditions, in a very short period, on November 3rd, 1919, the Romanian University of Cluj opened its doors. As its first rector, Sextil Pușcariu, remarked, “*at the beginning of the summer (the university) still had foreign institutions and no teachers, and in autumn it opened its doors wide to young people eager to learn*” (Celebrations, 1920). The impressive number of students, over 1800, entitled the same rector to announce, full of pride: “*We have opened and are operating four faculties*” (Pușcariu, 1983: 463), respectively: the Faculty of Medicine, the Faculty of Law and State Sciences, the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy and the Faculty of Science. Officially, however, the inauguration of the University took place later, respectively, between January 31st and February 2nd, 1920.

In recognition of the efforts made for the organization of the higher education institution in Cluj, the renowned professor of the University of Bucharest, Vasile Pârvan, gave the inaugural lecture. It was also the first conference in Romanian held at the Napocense academic institution (Sălăgean, 2012: 130). The impact it had was exceptional, being considered both at the time and later a true ethical and deontological charter of the university profession. In fact, the professor appreciated the academic environment in Cluj, including materially supporting the new institution. He donated his salary and daily allowance to support the students. His donation was turned into a fund, used to reward students who wrote the best works in the field of Romanian history and ancient archaeology. In the opinion of some personalities who had taken the pulse of the beginning of the road of the Cluj institution, such as the historian Ioan Lupaș, Pârvan was considered “*the spiritual founder of the University of Cluj*” (Pușcaș, 2003: 129).

Together with the selected staff, the Commission decided to invite professors or famous researchers to teach courses or hold lectures and

to organize research institutes. Once again, the two sister universities in Iași and Bucharest sent professors of the highest academic standing. The contribution of these scientists, established as specialists at the University of the Old Kingdom, was essential in the organization and affirmation of the Cluj higher education institution.

Among the great school personalities in Cluj, who came from the University of Bucharest, whether they were already teachers or only its graduates, can be mentioned Gheorghe Bogdan-Duică, Florian Ștefănescu-Goangă, Alexandru Lapedatu, Nicolae Bănescu, Ion Popescu-Voitești, Nicolae Abramescu or Dimitrie Pompeiu.

A sign of the collaboration of the two Romanian higher education institutions, but also as an expression of gratitude for the support that the University of Bucharest granted to the University of Cluj, especially in its first years of existence, the only doctorate honoris causa awarded to a teacher from Romania by *Alma Mater Napocensis* was awarded to the professor from the Faculty of Medicine in Bucharest, Gheorghe Marinescu.

Among those invited to the Faculty of Letters was the historian **Ioan Ursu** (1875-1925), professor at the University of Iași. His mentors were Dimitrie Onciul and Nicolae Iorga, who noticed his intellectual potential and encouraged him to continue his studies abroad. Ioan Ursu obtained the title of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Berlin. In Cluj, he was full professor of Universal History and director of the Institute of Universal History. Originally from Transylvania, born in the Brașov area, he left the department at the University of Iași to settle in Cluj. Militant for the union of Transylvania with Romania, he had been a member of the National Council for the Unity of Romanians, based in Paris. He was actively involved in structuring Romanian education from the position of chairman of the Parliamentary Instruction Commission. In 1910 he became a corresponding member of the Romanian Academy (*Anuarul Universității din Cluj*, 1923).

The Faculty of Letters also benefited from the experience of a native of Iași, Professor **Vasile Bogrea** (1881-1926). Trained at the School of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Iași, he left in 1910 for Berlin to study classical philology and comparative linguistics, obtaining a doctorate in 1913. He was one of the lecturers of the University from Vălenii de Munte (organized in 1908 by Nicolae Iorga, as a form of national propaganda), and took part in ASTRA's actions, as

he resonated with the ideal of uniting all Romanians in one state. Thus, in 1919, when the University of Cluj needed him, he did not hesitate to answer affirmatively, becoming an adjunct professor and later full professor of the discipline of Classical Philology (Latin) within the Department of Classical Languages. He held the position of director of the Seminar of Classical Studies, he worked side-by-side with Sextil Pușcariu in establishing the Museum of the Romanian Language and the Ethnographic Society. In 1920 he became a corresponding member of the Romanian Academy. His untimely death, in 1926, at only 45 years old, stopped his exceptional professional ascension (Macrea, 1965: 249-260). In honour of the great professor, one of the amphitheatres of the University of Cluj, where entire generations of history students studied, was named after him.

The Faculty of Sciences was organized and consolidated through the activity of some teachers from Iași, who set up schools, in their fundamental meaning, in Cluj in the fields in which they worked. This is the case of **George (Gheorghe) Vâlsan** (1885-1935), the one who laid the foundations of the geographical education of Cluj. In 1919, he created the Institute of Geography within the University, thus giving birth to the Geographical School in Cluj. G. Vâlsan was considered, at the same time, the father of modern Romanian geography education (Bârsu et al., 2000: 332). A graduate of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy in Bucharest, he further specialized in Berlin and Paris, being a scholarship holder of the *Romanian Society of Geography*. In 1915 he obtained the title of doctor, and a year later he began his activity as a university teacher in Iași, where he remained until 1919. There he taught physical geography, and in Cluj he was a full professor of general geography. He also founded, together with Emmanuel de Martonne and Romulus Vuia, the Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania, where an open-air section was organized. His name is also linked to the founding in Cluj, in 1923, of the *Romanian Ethnographic Society*, of which he was president until 1927. George Vâlsan was the one who introduced the ethno-geography course at the University of Cluj. In 1930, he left Cluj to work at the University of Bucharest. Member of various international geographic societies, in 1919 he became a corresponding member of the Romanian Academy, and in 1920 a full member (Predescu, 1999: 882).

The School of Chemistry in Cluj also owes a lot to the University of Iași and especially to Professor **Petru Poni**, the founder of the Romanian School of Chemistry, who formed the team at the Department of Chemistry of the beginnings of the Romanian Transylvanian University. He managed to convince **Gheorghe Spacu** (1883-1955), who was one of his most brilliant students, to come to Cluj. Spacu came from Iași, from the position of associate professor to the position of associate professor, and in 1922 he became a full professor of analytical and inorganic chemistry at the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Cluj (Cluj County Service of National Archives, *Ferdinand University* fund). He held the positions of vice dean of this faculty in the academic year 1923/1924, dean the following year, and in 1925/1926 he led the University from the position of rector. Extremely disciplined and rigorous, demanding with his students, he has the merit of laying the foundations of a real “nursery” of young chemists at the University, a real school of chemistry that will stand with dignity next to the one in Bucharest or Iași, standing out through prodigious scientific activity. Representative names for the field of chemistry were formed here, future academics who carried on the fame of the Cluj school of chemistry and of Professor Gh. Spacu (Marcovici & Munteanu, 1982:26). The most famous of them was that of Raluca Ripan, the first woman dean, the first woman rector of a university in Romania and the first Romanian academician, who was in fact the successor of Professor Spacu's work in Cluj, after he moved to Bucharest. The professor saw in his doctoral student the same work force and the same dedication for the profession that he had, which determined him to request her transfer in 1920 from Iași, to the position of head of works. Raluca Ripan defended her doctorate in Cluj, in 1922, becoming the first Romanian doctor woman in chemical sciences (SJCAN, *Ferdinand University* fund). In 1931, as a lecturer, she took over the master class in general chemistry from Professor Ostrogovich.

Raluca Ripan went, together with the entire educational institution in Cluj, through the difficult educational moments of the refuge between 1940 and 1945, when she had to move to Timișoara so that the faculty could continue its activity. In 1945, after returning to Cluj, she played an important role in restoring everything that the Cluj school of chemistry meant (Coman & Copaciu, 2017: 13).

The founding of the University of Upper Dacia in Cluj was thus the result of an admirable solidarity around the same Romanian university project in the heart of Transylvania, around which prestigious names from the universities of old Romania, Bucharest and Iași, rallied. In this way, Romanian language education was institutionalized at the University of Cluj and the foundations were laid for an academic centre that will prove its strength and viability over time, establishing itself as an important player on the national and international academic scene.

The establishment of the Romanian university in Cluj was an event of the greatest importance for the intra-Carpathian province united with the Country. Within it, we managed to co-opt the best researchers, professors, first-rate specialists, national and international reference names.

Thus, Romanian language education was institutionalized in Cluj and the foundations were laid for an academic centre that would prove its strength and viability over time. In fact, the University of Cluj has established itself over time both at a national and international level as a successful institution.

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