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**CULTURAL SOCIETIES FROM  
HUNEDOARA  
1870-1918  
- SUMMARY -**

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**Key words:** county, Hunedoara, dualism, culture, „Astra”, societies, reunions, choirs, theatre, teachers, women, statutes, general assemblies, members, elites, associationism, Romanian language.

### **Argument**

The extent of expression of a people's culture includes beside the scientific, literary, artistic, educational creation, also the activities carried out by associations and societies from the most varied profiles: reading societies, women's meetings, meetings of teachers, choirs, Chants meetings etc.. From Sibiu, one of the thriving cultural centers during the dualistic period followed by Brasov, Fagaras, Blaj, Cluj, Lugoj, Arad, Oradea and Baia Mare, the cultural movement is attested in the Hunedoara county, as well.

The researched topic, Cultural Societies from Hunedoara 1870-1918, highlights the Romanian culture in Hunedoara County, and also Transylvania, by exemplifying the cultural network of Hunedoara's societies and their activity models and also the innovation required by the Transylvanian literature and the culture society of the Romanian people – „Astra". Associations, societies, meetings, casinos, choirs that appeared in Transylvania in the second half of the nineteenth century brought with them the largest and most mature Romanian national movement, due to long periods of deprivation of political rights of Romanians during the dualist period.

Our study covers the period of Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy, established in Transylvania in 1867, even though the reference year in the title is 1870. This year is related to the foundation of the Romanian Theatre Society Fund in Transylvania, in Hunedoara County, in Deva, representing, as importance, the second cultural institution of Transylvania after „Astra”.

The research methods consisted of the analysis of archival documents from Hunedoara County Department of National Archives, original documents at the Museum of Dacian and Roman Civilization - Deva, supported by the existing literature, studies and articles and also information taken from periodicals of the time. We will mention only the main archival funds: Fund. Court Prosecutor of Hunedoara, The Greek Catholic Vicariate of Hateg, The Greek Catholic Parishes from Lupeni, Hunedoara and Orastie, the Orthodox Parishes of Hateg, Orastie, Deva, Dobra, Brad and Huneodara on which the network of cultural companies of Hunedoara was rounded and nuanced.

## **I. The Need of Historiographical Approach**

The historiographical approach is urgently needed to counter some views which maintain the view that cultural societies are sufficiently treated. A fact which strengthens this claim would be the references, which for "Astra" is quite rich through work and specialized articles that were devoted to it. Information about the "Astra" in Hunedoara we find in the studies and articles of Rodica Andrus, Eugenia Glodariu or Dorin Gotia. Some of the headlines of the authors mentioned: *Some Data Regarding the Activity of Hunedoara's "Astra" Branches*, *The Activity of Hunedoara's "Astra" Branches*, *Proceedings of General Meetings of "Astra" Held in Hunedoara County*, *People's Libraries of "Astra"* or *The Activity of "Astra" in the Period 1914-1918*, we can say that they demonstrate a lack of continuity and a segmental approach. On one hand they treat some form of activity performed by "Astra" and on the other, they limit to its activity to a small time segment.

In the class of monographic works, the historiography character of the theme is relatively poor. Vasile Curticeanu published in 1968 a comprehensive work that presents the Romanian cultural societies as some basic agents that led to the achievement of The Union in 1918. In the same vein, there are also certain chapters of *The History of the Romanians* and *The Romanian History. Transylvania*. The books cited in this part of the comment had the purpose of cultural propaganda, aiming to stimulate societies through a better understanding of their work. They remain indispensable bibliographic references for a future historiography of societies across Transylvania.

Information on cultural societies we can find in the articles *Sargetia*, *Corviniana*, *The Orastie Magazine*, *Centennial Society for Romanian Theater Fund* etc. *Acta Musei Napocensis*, with strict reference to a single company.

By documentary search of the period between 1867 and 1918, we found that we were on a field sequential researched from the point of view of the history of culture, namely the cultural societies in the county of Hunedoara. Under these circumstances, the emergence of a major research theme named Cultural Societies from Hunedoara 1870-1918 is becoming a necessity and a contribution to the cultural history of Transylvania, Hunedoara county respectively.

## **II. The Political and Cultural Context of Transylvania during the Dualistic Period**

Deprived of political organization and weakened by the conflict among the passivists who opposed to the participation in the new political order and the activists, who demanded the defense of national interests on all fronts, the Romanians could not do anything more than submit some protests. In this attempt falls *The Declaration* of Blaj in 1868, through which the Romanian intellectuals reaffirmed their faith in the autonomy of Transylvania and the

*Nationalities Act* of the same year, to which most Romanian political leaders haven't reacted with sympathy because it sustained the centralized Hungarian national state.

Between 1869 and 1890 Romanian passivists saw as their primary objective the restoration of the autonomy of the Principate. They were convinced that only through autonomy their nation was protected by the constitution and could develop politically and culturally. But they lacked an organization that could mobilize public opinion. Other Romanians from Maramures, Crisana, Banat had their own political agenda and rejecting their passivists, they regularly sent Members in the Hungarian Parliament.

After 1881, the Romanian National Party was formed as a single political representative of the Romanians in Transylvania, as an attempt to redress the situation, but party leaders continued the same struggle to regain autonomy by maintaining passivity, citing historical and constitutional reasons. The only way to break the deadlock was the rethinking of passivity and creating a strong party which would send representatives to Parliament. After 1900, activist ideas would gain ground breaking the tradition established by the passivists. Political imperatives have changed over the years thus leading to new activism, in quality differing from the former one. Typical supporters of the new course were lawyers from Orastie, who founded the *Freedom* newspaper to promote their ideas. The publishing of an open letter in 1902, coming from Ioan Mihiu, a local landlord and attorney, in which he requested the giving up of passivism, has sparked great surprise being continued with success by the activists, one year later, when Aurel Vlad, a lawyer, also from Orastie was elected member of Parliament on a platform which abandoned passivity and restoration of the autonomy of Transylvania.

The creation of Romanian regional societies moved toward the national cultural movement on a very wide geographical area. Nationality-culture-society dialogue, brokered by cultural societies, gives an indication of some key cultural modernization of Romanian Transylvanian area. In this realm of cultural action Hunedoara County is also a participant, initially through meetings that came from Sibiu in order to raise the cultural level, then increasing the index of culture, as Romanian peasants were able to participate in cultural activities organized at large, providing the necessary process for conceptualization of the desiderata.

### **III. "Astra" and the Cultural Societies in Hunedoara**

Given the importance of "Astra" and its cultural, political and social role, shown to the Romanians from Hunedoara, the work *Cultural Societies in Hunedoara - 1870-1918* should include Astra's activities manifested in Hunedoara. However, the volume of existing information in the *Astra Fund* and the *Francisc Hossu Longin Fund* in the Sibiu County

Department of National Archives, Cluj County Department that the National Archives, in conjunction with the magazine *Transylvania*, constitute an independent work that way. However, "Asociatiunea" having a rich activity in Hunedoara County, there must be cited, as to which, in the paper, it will be included in the chapter "*Astra*" and *Cultural Societies in Hunedoara*. Support and cooperation relationship between the main cultural institution in Transylvania and other regional companies is shown in this chapter. Therefore, we treated the first part of the thesis the relationship that 'Astra' had with cultural societies from Hunedoara, then the independent analysis strictly linked to their activities.

Under their statutes, the main purpose of the *Association for Romanian Literature and Romanian People's Culture* was "the submission Romanian literature and culture of the Romanian people in particular fields of study, drafting and editing of literary works and other such works". And, indeed, "Asociatiunea" succeeded through focusing around it what was most valuable in the Romanian culture, to conduct an extensive cultural activity. If we look at the statutes of other cultural societies from Hunedoara, the *Meetings of Romanian Women in the County of Hunedoara*, *Meetings of the Greek Catholic Literate in the Land of Hateg*, *The Choir Meeting of Orastie*, *The Romanian Casine* from Deva and Orastie we can conclude that all are pursuing the same goal – the awakening of national spirit - its accomplishment being performed, whether on common ground in some action, either through mutual support with publications, guidelines, advice.

Guidance by "Astra" was not done by rigorously established plan, but responded to specific requests coming from other companies and especially inviting them to take part in activities organized by her. Although in relationship with The Romanian Theater Fund Society "Astra's" attitude was somewhat hostile, as she was leader of the Transylvanian Romanian cultural movement, it hasn't entered in its program the guidance of the younger generation, although by its statute tried to guide their steps and respond to all inquiries. Its concerns fall within its support of youth reading societies, aid to students and schools, mediated by *Teachers' Meetings*, the support for those who learn a trade, members of the *Artisans' Meetings* or organizing exhibitions with the help of *The Women's Meetings in Hunedoara County*.

#### **IV. The Network of Cultural Societies. Organizational Structures**

The largest chapter in the paper structure is dedicated to a chapter on cultural societies network from Hunedoara in the second half of the nineteenth century up to the Union in 1918. Regarding the working methods, the study is based on the documents studied in Hunedoara County Department of National Archives, published works, general and special related to the cultural societies in the county of Hunedoara. Also, given that the companies were carriers of the

ideas and spiritual creations, we also investigated the difficulties and strategies of this process by dividing the chapters: *Cultural Societies* where the emphasis is on The *Romanian Theater Fund Societies in Transylvania* and the *Reading Societies* of Deva and Orastie. A second chapter deals with of the *Greek Catholic and Orthodox Teachers' Meetings* and the *Greek Catholic and Orthodox Teachers' Meetings* in the county of Hunedoara. The activity of the Orastie choir and St. Nicholas Church choir in Deva have been the subject of the third chapter, and finally we analyzed meetings that even though hadn't held cultural activities, showed a cultural bias.

A chief concern - the cultural raising of the village and the spread of literacy has led to discussion the foundation of *Teachers' Meetings*. Based on archival documents that can support both the Orthodox in the Greek Eastern Teachers' Meeting in the county of Hunedoara, but also the Greek Catholic Teachers' Meeting in the land of Hateg attempted to rescue the Romanian religious education from the attempt of the officials to denationalize. At the same time with the teachers' meetings, women meetings occurred and also meetings of music and singing, reading circles and reading societies, called Casina.

Meetings of singing gathered around talents and enthusiastic people in this sense *The Choir of Orastie* then the Song Assembly in the same city, under the leadership of Ioan Branga cultivated secular pieces, creating a repository of national songs, which he distributed throughout the county and beyond. In addition, a special attraction offered the theater meetings for the Romanian public and appeared to support the lack of organized theater. Of these, the *Romanian Theater Fund Societies in Transylvania* played an important role in the cultural life of Transylvania, including Hunedoara County. By the meeting in Deva, from 4th to 5th October 1870, the ultimate goal was not achieved, establishing a national Romanian theater in Transylvania, but through which has been established a central body by which theatrical activity took place in many cities, Transylvanian villages, including in Hunedoara.

Equally, the reading societies as simple forms of organization of cultural life fulfilled a greater role in the action of social and political progress of the Romanian people. Romanian Casina or Romanian Reading Society of the literate from Orastie and its surroundings was the place of meeting for the adult audience: artisans, peasants and intellectuals. Among its objectives were: reading newspapers and magazines and also developing the interest for theater, music and other cultural events as dictated by the time. It was also a meeting place for the Romanians' evenings which were spent in the Romanian Casina. The Casina is located in the forefront of national commemorative themes, was an unflinching support of other companies during general meetings and exhibitions, from the Casina emerged all the actions that had an interest for the Romanian public. We appreciate that, gradually, it regulated the Romanian life. Orastie, through

all it had represented in the period studied, marked a cultural activity pattern, covering the range of cultural activities and also being remarked on the publishing field.

Remarkable has been the work of Romanian women's meeting of Hunedoara County, since 1886, located in Deva, which included women from many villages from the county of Hunedoara. The large number of members of the *Romanian Women's Meetings* of Hunedoara county in Orastie resulted in the establishment of a branch location. Thus, was put into operation on 1 January 1907 in Orastie under the care of Victoria Erdélyi, in the *Workshop Meeting*, the first loom. We can say that both women meeting and workshop activity had a broad perspective, what concerned the progress of domestic industry development, the mission to help widows and orphans of the county of Hunedoara. We place a great importance in the social dimension, i.e. the linking of intellectual woman and daughter of the people. Such meetings of women have the capacity to encourage women's movement, giving them a credit to a society still based on traditional relationships, in which the leading position belonged to men. In the work presented we can observe the co-work between women and men in ensuring the smooth development not only of the Women Meetings but also the Workshop Meeting of Orastie.

Among the Romanian public opinion enjoyed a large echo the ethnographic exhibitions, not only those organized by the "Astra" but also those of the *Romanian Women's Meetings* of Hunedoara county, with balls and recovery actions of folk heritage. Such concerns have had a multiple impact. First it was identified the material progress of the Romanian people in domestic industry and craft, and secondly, it could be seen the artistic level reached by the popular creation. In another vein, the presence of a large number of Romanians from all provinces in these exhibitions gave the demonstrations a national tint, enhancing the Romanian solidarity. Obviously, the opening of the "Astra" museum in Sibiu in 1905 was "one of the most grandiose Romanian national holidays.

Each company has started setting up meetings, and elected a steering committee which drafted the Statute. It provided: name, purpose, residence, means used to achieve the goal, society officials, central committee, rights and duties of members, general meetings, and company dissolution.

In the company, members had well-defined role. Framing them as founding members for life, ordinars and aids depended on their contribution and reflected, in fact, a social hierarchy. Their inclusion was usually done with a general meeting, also then some of them being penalized (for members of the *Teachers' Meetings* for unjustified absence from the meeting) or awarded (if members of the *Romanian Women's Meetings*). A systematic action to increase the number of members had a financial incentive primarily to grow the fund for individual companies or to provide financial support to other cultural societies.



One of the fundamental forms of business associations were ordinary general meetings, annual in most cases, or special, held on special occasions. Beyond solving administrative problems, the importance fell on tax-related details, members, various reports, in the general meetings they debated issues of general Romanian interest, were organized public conferences and theater performances. In those meetings we must see a form of sociability, an expression of pleasure to be with others, being anchored in a festive dimension. We can also say that general meetings were great opportunities to ensure the unity of the national strategy.

## **V. Task Models**

Specific forms of activity were effective means by which national identity had to overcome the level of the elites into a state of assimilated consciousness in the villages, where the majority of Romanians were living.

Each company had a unique form of expression, in order to spread culture. We mention: the affirmation of Romanian language through a national theater, the appearance of a place of public assembly and the spread of science in the adult library, provided by *Reading Societies* or *Romanian Casine*, literacy spread because the *Teachers' Meeting*, conferences, lectures and establishment of literacy courses, the role of Choirs and Singing Meetings through encouraging of secular songs presented at various art events, progress shown in exhibitions domestic industry by *Romanian Women's Meetings* in the county of Hunedoara. They offered the best organization for discussion, confrontation and validation of the many ideas that appealed to the masses in this historical period, where they were reviewed and discussed the problems that worried the Romanian society.

The celebrations have generally had a diverse artistic purpose: choral interpretations, music, voice or instrument solo, reciting, dancing, recitation, folk festivals, called *nedeia*, dancing, popular theater, etc. We can also talk about different motivational areas.

Perpetual concern for recovery of the past had its basis in the desire to appoint successors. Connections between the missing links, or of those who founded a society or cultural meetings and those who appreciate their role was woven through commemorations and jubilee.

All forms of activity undertaken by Hunedoara cultural societies had a social and festive side. We can understand festivism, only if we take a look at the whole Romanian society in Transylvania, where we see a world who discovers with amazement the rural areas and submit it to a civilizing offensive.

## **VI. The Hunedoara Company and the Union of 1918**

It is known that cultural societies had no national side-stated policy, but the analysis I have seen in the references shows that ultimately it has been subordinated much of the events. Attempts undertaken under this point reach another objective of the paper, referring to the political purpose Hunedoara cultural societies, which have made a contribution in achieving the Union in 1918. In these societies characters crystallized, the national feeling was perfected and the tendency to work for common interests. Romanian inhabitants of this land have enthusiastically participated in the Grand National Assembly in Alba Iulia, on December 1st, 1918, which decided the unification of Transylvania with Romania. Those left behind were celebrated in their communities the great act of union, and from several individuals were sent telegrams of adherence to the important decisions of the meeting.

Our approach was based on the study of manuscripts in the private collection Victor I. Suiaga in Hunedoara County Department of National Archives. Based on these, this chapter was prepared to make references to the associatism in Hunedoara, the political discourse of the elites in their struggle to maintain the Romanian language in schools and administration and the personalities that were part of different cultural societies.

### **Conclusions**

In the final considerations we tried an overview of the national cultural and political movement of cultural societies and reaching a general conclusion, the partial ones being stated at the end of each chapter or subchapter.

Transylvanian cultural societies, including those in Hunedoara, had a dominant activity at the time. Major acknowledgment is given to "Astra" because it considered the nation as a whole, by promoting a cultural dialogue between elites and masses. Overall, "Astra" was an example and a measure of value for other cultural societies, thus to Hunedoara, for this it had been presented in big lines.

For achieving and sustaining its cultural program, "Astra" has managed to create an organizational system whose working mechanism has been continuously improved, according to its periods of activity, its necessities, by the forms and means available. Municipal agencies, primary organizational forms, then the branches, constituted the most important means by which ideas of "the Association" came into direct contact with people and organized dissemination of culture in large masses of the population in villages and towns. In the education oriented programs the Deva, Brad, and after 1900, Dobra and Orastie branches were listed as the most experienced and stable territorial structures.

For cultural emancipation, the branch directors pledged for that purpose, so the specific institution and the development phases were related to the leader's personality.

In recognition by the Central Committee of the "Astra" for the Hunedoara branches' involvement in cultural activities, general meetings were conducted in Hateg (1864) and Deva (1874 and 1899). They, in their cultural celebration events hypostasis, represented the largest Romanian national meetings. They have represented the moment for the major debates and decisions, the time to sign in massive members, but also time for collaboration with other cultural societies of the county. Their mood can be characterized by enthusiasm, determined to show his commitment to the "Association". All the meetings held cultural lectures, which stressed the fact that literacy came to an adjacent result, that of the establishment of adult schools, people libraries. The themes of the lectures weren't focused on one side, although they were predominantly cultural, but the leaders took into account the complementarities between culture, economics, and hygiene.

In these branches emphasis was placed on cultural activities of the "Astra", which occurred in very different plans: research studies, conferences and lectures for people, the establishment of public libraries and schools for peasants, museums, exhibitions and commemorative moments, national Casina and cultural support for Romanian schools with textbooks, scholarships for students, apprentices and top students, the publishing of scientific books and literary development of artistic activities, exhibitions, ethnographic, traditional folk recovery, increased literacy, family and child care, public hygiene, the education of youngsters for useful activities, helping craftsmen, banks, credit institutes, etc..

The existence of these actions has stimulated a more active involvement of enlightened minds, appearing even more societies that enhanced the spiritual empowerment. They have evolved both horizontally, i.e. variables and on a vertical plane, i.e. that of their frequency, taking into account the finding of specific forms for youth - Reading Society, for women - women's meetings, to support the illiterate or those less literate - adult schools where teachers had an important role, for workers - craftsmen meetings, for those with artistic inclinations - meetings of singing, choruses, theater societies.

In provinces under foreign ownership, regional cultural societies, including those in the county of Hunedoara, represented outbreaks of affirmation and growing consciousness of the Romanian national dignity, in order to encourage and support education and culture in Romanians. Their importance can be seen from two perspectives. On one hand, they have launched and supported activities fertile enough to assert Romanian national individuality, due to the concentration of the political and intellectual elite of all Romanians under foreign domination. On the other hand, through their regional character, they stimulated cultural activity

on a fairly wide geographical area, while promoting rural communities and access to cultural act. Setting up meetings or cultural associations, which connected rural communities to the act of culture, even if sometimes it could only be achieved through local elite - priests, teachers, and notaries – was to resize the culture-society dialogue.

As seen, regardless of the objectives they had, Hunedoara's cultural societies were involved not only in the social and cultural life of the county, but they have also contributed to the achievement of a national political program of the Romanians, with the final goal to achieve the Union in 1918. The Union Act from December 1, 1918 is evidence of a collective will through collective vote received from the 1,228 delegates and by unanimous adherence of the crowd gathered on Horea's field.

Teachers, priests, lawyers, Romanian intellectuals in general, from all over Transylvania, thus from Hunedoara County in line with the aspirations of the whole Romanian nation, started in November 1918 towards villages and towns to build institutions that would prepare union. There was new evidence that there was an elite both central and local. Active participation of representatives of cultural societies from Hunedoara, knowledge and identification of the time's issues, expressing confidence and commitment to decisions taken or to be taken by the Romanian National Central Council, to meet national ideal are signs of a full national solidarity.

The volume of documents studied in Hunedoara County Department of National Archives and existing information in the literature and periodic segment it covers, 1870-1918, are proof of the continuity of traditional social and cultural movement, in an authentic Romanian area, Hunedoara county, with a major role in national history.

The information contained in this paper in conjunction with other works on similar themes, complement what has already been issued for certain areas of Transylvania. Moreover, after research has been done, this thesis could contribute to a repertoire of Romanian cultural societies, which functioned during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century in Transylvania or even throughout Romania.

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