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ILUMINISTĂ: BARONUL SAMUEL VON BRUKENTHAL (1721-1803)  
- REZUMAT ÎN LIMBA ENGLEZĂ -**

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**COLLECTING CONCERNS IN THE ENLIGHTENMENT  
TRANSYLVANIA: THE BARON SAMUEL VON BRUKENTHAL  
(1721-1803)  
- ABSTRACT -**

**Keywords:** Samuel von Brukenthal, Enlightenment, collecting, Protestant University, Saxon Scientific Society, Transylvania, Vienna, Maria Theresia.

The present research grasps Baron Samuel von Brukenthal all along the process of constitution of his collections. The Baron Brukenthal, governor of Transylvania between 1777 and 1787, collected throughout his life books – especially printed in the 18th century –, paintings, etchings, coins, minerals, and objects of archaeological type, all of them acquired as result of diggings carried out all around Transylvania. The result of these efforts was not the birth of a curiosity cabinet, a *Wunderkammer*, but of what was to become later the largest museal complex on the territory of the future state of Romania, which came to include Transylvania after 1918 as well.

We have been able to take advantage from our position inside the Brukenthal National Museum, namely that of a curator in the library, a position that we have been filling since the autumn of 2007. During this period, we have had the opportunity of publishing scientific articles in the museum magazine and we also had within reach the sources necessary to the drafting of the present work.

By the ampleness of his collecting activity, we can state that the baron must be not only the foremost collector of Transylvania of all time but one of the foremost collectors of Europe. So that it was not in vain that the Viennese biographer Lisa Fischer has named her book *The Eden beyond the Forests*. As a sequel to a complex historical process, in the Vienna of Maria Theresia there were two great collectors, the empress herself and Brukenthal. This happened during the years when the latter stayed there, between 1759 and 1774. Tradition holds that the baron has received donations from the empress.

In the commencement, the baron collected books, coins, and paintings, and he must have taken part in person in auctions and lotteries. In this sense is attested his taking part in the

lottery with paintings from 1772. The collecting activity, which consisted in the acquiring of works as valuable as possible from all scopes, no longer had as its purpose the strengthening of aristocratic image with the purpose of representation, as was customary during Baroque times. Instead it fitted the ethos of the Enlightenment, which aimed at educating and enlightening the wide audience. This was made in the sense of increasing knowledge of the world and the search of “happiness”, a very cultural staple notion of this age.

We can thus ascertain that Baron Brukenthal’s activity is marked upon by the attempt at removing the “baneful blueprints that an entire Middle Age populous with the cannons and bans of theology had left behind”, the search of natural causes of phenomena – as a proof is the occurrence of Bahrdt’s works within the library –, the urge to resort to experience, and the persuasion that thought led by experience may lead to unforeseeable results. Although the baron had remained devout to Protestant theism, we can witness a “thaw” from dogmatics and scholastics”, a new way of seeing the world.

If during the past century the clientele of private libraries was made up chiefly of noblemen and whole decades could pass by with no book acquired, the collections are opened to the public, whereas the ones who sponsored them make continuous and assiduous acquisitions. As one has seen, Brukenthal was in correspondence with the abbot Neumann until 1800. The last painting was bought in 1802, the last but one year of his life, whereas the painting gallery was opened to the public in 1790. In the same sense one could see that the baron has encouraged projects of the kind of a Protestant university in Transylvania and of the Saxon Society of Sciences, unfortunately not carried out.

One can perceive thus baron Brukenthal as an authentic *Aufklärer*, as much an encyclopaedic spirit as a man deeply interested in the enlightenment of the people, of founding societies and educational institutions.

As regards our sources, we have had two types of manuscripts at hand. The first one is the three-volume catalogue drafted around 1805, so that nearly immediately after the baron’s death. The second one is the manuscript series that includes this fund, almost utterly acquired by the baron. This series is thematically arranged and is made up of no less than eleven volumes. It is true nonetheless that the writing is much more rarefied. In studying the titles recorded in these manuscripts, as well the writing, a variety of late *cancellaresca*, we could realize that they must have been drafted during the sixth and the seventh decades of the 19th

century. For a future researcher of the book fund, this fact is a clue that the bulk of the donations from the old Transylvanian owners entered the library subsequent to this time. As far as we could appraise, the 1805 catalogue contains around 11,000 book titles printed between approximately 1465 and 1800 (we have the impression that the last book that Brukenthal bought was printed in 1801 or 1802), so that also including the incunabula that he acquired. These ones are not in great number, around 25 and by no means 76, as mentioned in several places. On drawing a comparison between the two manuscript sources, we can identify a very small number of books acquired between 1803 and 1850. An illustrative example is the in-folio volume *De architectura* by the great Italian Mannerist architect Sebastiano Serlio. This volume was printed in Venice in 1569 and was not acquired by the baron, but must have entered the library subsequently, as a donation.

For the other collection we have also used the archivistic, unpublished, resources, which are invaluable, the catalogues and inventories also kept in the library, more exactly within the manuscript collection. That is why the library has been rightfully considered as the “brain” of the institution. We give as an example, for art, the five manuscripts from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; for minerals, Eder’s catalogue from 1796; for coins, the nine handbooks drafted during baron Brukenthal’s lifetime; whereas for the archaeological collection an inventory from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The difference between these catalogues and the one the books, in three volumes (which is actually a legacy) stays in the fact that, if the latter is but a list of titles, devoid of any comment, the catalogues of the other collections include many descriptions and scientific opinions of the authors, accompanied by a bibliography. They give even the pages looked for. These aspects only increase even more the value of these manuscripts. Especially the mineralogical catalogue appears very valuable to us and we assess that its printing would be of interest in the future.

The encyclopaedic spirit becomes apparent from the variousness of the collections: first and foremost the library, then the painting gallery, the numismatic collection, the mineralogic and archaeological ones. If it is true that the painting gallery was opened chiefly for foreigners and travellers, the library, the minerals, and the coins were the baron’s favourites and they were put together in the middle of the palace, at the first floor, where the creation of a Temple of the Muses was intended to be made. There these collections could be visited and a lecture room had also been arranged. We could see that the coins were especially

ancient, Greek and Roman, and that within the German ones the issues of Maria Theresia prevailed. The archaeological collection had a Transylvanian ethos. Nonetheless, the real extent of the baron's interests can be seen from the research of the old library inventory, even if later the celebrity of the museum was due to the painting gallery.

The library stands on the first place in baron Brukenthal's last will and is by far the most important collection in terms of number of items – the painting gallery standing second in the will.

The library seems to have been created in order to serve as a university library and the baron intended that the books be a sound basis for the students' documentation. Anyway, if eventually the library could not serve a university or a scientific society, its founder was able to put it instead in the service of the young Saxons who, in the aftermath of the 18<sup>th</sup> century wars, did not have any longer the opportunity to study in German universities, finding instead a very rich, perfectly up-to-date intellectual resource at Sibiu.

The conclusion is that, from a thematic viewpoint, the Brukenthal library was then nearly a *summa* of the knowledge of the epoch. From what one may establish out of the studying of the correspondence the baron Brukenthal and his emissaries carefully watched the offer at the auctions, visited private persons as well (as for instance the widow von Briffeau), at the same time being well documented as to which were the works most appreciated by the scholars' community at that moment. We could see that the baron Brukenthal had ordered books at Napoli, in Italy, a geographic place remote from Transylvania and it is not at all improbable that during his stay in Vienna he had ordered more in other places as well, for instance in Paris, London, or Amsterdam, perhaps even in Copenhagen, but we are not in possession of data referring to that. We do not exclude either visits of the baron in these capital cities. The abundance of works printed in Paris and Strasbourg, many of them quite valuable in-folios, many in Latin, pleads in favour of our hypothesis. We also have in mind Canonicus Neumann's 1780 letter, in which the latter lets the baron Brukenthal know about a coin offer in Paris, also mentioning the existence of a special messenger with regular trips to the capital of France. An useful hypothesis might be that the baron could have ordered books there. We were also able to ascertain that the baron bought English books, the titles being quite numerous, but also valuable. Even more numerous are the books printed in the Netherlands and in the library are extant a series of works printed in Copenhagen, a thing that can be

explained through the common religious denomination. However, these books are in Latin or German, such as *Antiquitatum Danicarum* by Barbolinus, from 1689; on the title pages of these works, in the place of printing, the Latinised toponym *Hafniae* can be found. The baron bought the works of botanics, zoology, and mineralogy by the great Swedish scholars (Linné, Bergman, Cronstedt și Wallerius), in order to provide a support for the mineralogical collection and the latter was visited, as stated, by the Dane Esmark, who much appreciated the crystallised gold.

We have thus the impression that the voids in the book fund trace to the fact that the works that are effectively missing were not extant on the Viennese market in the second half of the 18th century and that the baron must have hoped to acquire those ones sometime as well. For instance, he did not succeed in acquiring Sebastiano Serlio's architecture treatise or Fresnoy's book about Joan of Arc, which was the most important on this topic at that time. Another thing which once again confirms, if needed, the value of the library is the great number of the in-folios, which, as one can notice from the reading of the letters, would have been even more numerous had the prices on the Viennese market been lower. Moreover, in the correspondence they insist on the in-folio volumes.

If, for instance, the baron did not succeed in buying a certain number of 16th and 17th books, instead he bought 18th-century in-folio books. We wonder if in his eyes these ones were not actually much more valuable – even though more room was needed to keep them –, as they were much more up-to-date from the viewpoint of their content and adorned with etchings of great value that illustrated the text, thus making it much more accessible and being much more adequate to the purpose of setting up a university or national library. We believe that there would not have been of any use for the baron some older and old-fashioned books from the point of view of the content. They might also have been in a unsatisfactory conservation state – perhaps, among others, badly bound – and lacking visual support. In our opinion the baron Brukenthal did not have in mind either the acquiring of works in languages hard of access to Transylvanians, as Spanish, Russian, or Scandinavian languages, due to the language barriers that these ones would have involved. Neither was planned that these languages be taught in the Protestant university, so that the baron intended the acquiring of recent, well appreciated in the scientific world of the time and very often of great sizes and to treat in great detail that subject matter, which was often historical. For instance, the baron

Brukenthal included in his private cabinet many-volumed books, up to eight or nine, miscellaneous writings with historical and ethnographical subject matter, a history of Denmark or of other countries. For the history of Russia or Sweden – an interesting topic of the age being the adventurous life and rule of Charles XII) Voltaire, then an unquestioned authority, was preferred. Our impression is that, as to the endeavour to utterly cover all the branches of knowledge, the baron Brukenthal effectively did “more than was humanely possible”, by introducing this exhaustive treasury of knowledge into a peripheral province.

The books printed in Transylvania (*Transylvanica*) are extremely few. Among them prominent is an in-folio book with a philosophical-religious content, whose author is the German professor Alstedius. This work was printed in 1635 in Alba Iulia. We also mention Martin Albrich’s philosophy book from Braşov in 1655, Petru Bod’s works, six in number, all of them printed in Sibiu, and an interesting book on the circle quadrature, printed at Cluj in 1767. We have to notice that the circle quadrature problem has not been solved even nowadays and it formed part of Transylvanian scholars’ interests at that time, to their merit.

From the bibliological point of view we also have the impression that the valuable works are especially the 17<sup>th</sup> ones and their reprintings from the following century, through rarity and also through the specific feature of an item, the hand jottings and the ex-libris. Out of the analysis of the titles also results the fact that within the 16<sup>th</sup>-century collection one can find few bibliophile rarities, in spite of small exceptions such as Andreas Baccius’ book on wines. In exchange, against our expectations, the manuscript jottings and the ex-libris found in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century books are extremely few if one has in mind the proportions of the collection. The books bought by the baron generally tend to be less worn out and with less jottings than the ones from the Chapel Library. Some of them have no jottings, no ex-libris, and find themselves in an excellent state of conservation, even an enviable one.

An interesting chapter is that of the old owners, who are Transylvanian chiefly for the 16<sup>th</sup>-century books. Their jottings are made during the last three decades of this century and the next century, this fact indicating that the baron bought these books in Transylvania, probably from Martin Hochmeister. We thus hold that Hochmeister was in possession of a second-hand bookshop, wherefrom the baron chose what was of interest to him; he also was drawn by the lower prices of these books.



As to the old foreign owners, we have been surprised at the fact that we have found more information about the ones who had made hand jottings than about the ones who had applied ex-libris. We cannot explain this phenomenon yet. Examples of Transylvanian owners are Georg Deidrich, Martin Kelp, Mathias Wermer, and the goldsmith Paul Schirmer. The names of printers the most often afloat are a few 16<sup>th</sup>-century German ones, in the United Provinces the Elseviers and Hackius. The printing centres are Köln, Frankfurt, Wittenberg, Leipzig, Leiden, Amsterdam, Rome, Paris, and London, but less Vienna which, due to sundry grounds, had much remained behind the rest of Western Europe.

The scarcity of ownership jottings proves that the largest part of Brukenthal's library was acquired shortly following the printing of the books. Few items reached European or some Transylvanian owners, whereas the good shape of the books is proof of the low circulation and of good storing conditions during the founder's lifetime and after his death.

As regards the art collection, the baron Brukenthal had in view the widening of the visitors' horizon, the purifying, the Aristotelic *catharsis* through art by way of admiring the beauty of the works. The horizon widening was carried out on the one hand by way of exhibiting Biblical and mythological scenes and on the other hand for the beholder an outlook on the everyday life in Europe through the display of genre scenes painted for instance by Bamboccio, Brouwer, and others. The natural beauties of our continent were presented by way of the landscapes. The beholding of biblical scenes helped the visitors to create an idea as fitted as possible about the moral, theological, and mystical content of the Old and New Testament and Christ's suffering for the redemption of mankind. Not least was intended the culturing of the audience; Transylvanians must have come in touch for the first time with the art of Western Europe and not at all with any kind of art, but with sonorous names of the age, fashionable in Vienna. Only commencing in 1894, in the aftermath of German specialists' visits, did come to light the fact that some pieces, chiefly by Dürer and Rembrandt, were replicas. In the article of his death the baron Brukenthal was firmly persuaded that he had come in possession of everlasting values of European art. According to the 18<sup>th</sup>-century encyclopaedic spirit, he intended the acquiring of as many representative works for the fine arts as possible, a purpose that the baron actually accomplished, at least for the greatest part. We could ascertain the existence in the painting gallery of especially valuable works, for instance by Jan Fyt, the foremost Dutch still-life painter, and of rarities (Bamboccio, Ottmar

Elliger). Brukenthal succeeded in coming into possession of works by some of the greatest painters – Rubens, Tizian. Lucas Cranach is a special case, as he was called “The Painter of the Reformation”, and we are persuaded that the baron greatly desired to acquire paintings by him, a thing that was moreover carried out.

The arranging of the gallery reveals a careful and long, well-balanced inquiry, based upon sound reading and enjoying the appreciation of the intellectual *élite* of the time. During this documentation the baron benefited from Johann Martin Stock’s qualified help. The latter was especially called from Bratislava and moreover his death affected the activity within the gallery – among others, the manuscript catalogue was left unfinished and the taking stock was only completed in 1837. A conclusive illustration of these purposes is a line from the Dresden gallery catalogue: “The goal is [...] that of elevating through what it provides for the public Well-being. [...] There treasures beautify the spirit, shaping the taste of the Nation”. Anyway, the gallery arranging was a very difficult task, in the end one could not succeed in strictly observing all academic norms, as one can see out of the reading of the old catalogue, which closely render the location of the paintings.

As to the numismatic collection, the baron considered necessary to provide the university or the scientific society with such a wing, as he was rightfully persuaded that coins and medals made up a “metallic archive of history”. The beholding of these items could provide the interested ones an outlook on the past, on the evolution of economic life. The small-sized and coarsely worked coins suggested a period of crisis, whereas those larger-sized and carefully-worked ones, a period of thriving. Visitors could gather precious information about the context in which the issue of the coins took place and the status of the cities that used to strike coins. As one could see, Sibiu and Alba Iulia are well represented for the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Transylvania. Certain historical facts could also be better known by way of studying numismatic witnesses. Special events – alliances, marriages, victories, the conclusion of peace treaties – were recorded by medal striking and the baron Brukenthal could only think of himself as advantaged by possessing such rare, valuable, sometimes bigger than usual, pieces. The beauty of the silver and gold medals was an extra trump that could attract the interested ones. The coin inscriptions also were valuable witnesses of bygone times, rendering the mentalities of those ages and, as an example, the Roman emperors’ propaganda. Michael Grant finds in numismatics the two principles of imperial power rendered on coins: *Imperium*

and *Auctoritas*. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century the emperor Aurelian faced the revolt of the clerks and workers at the Rome mint – true, from reasons unknown today –, and the establishing of Diocletian’s tetrarchy is best attested by numismatic witnesses. The founding itself of Constantinople in 330 is recorded through a silver medallion. Inscriptions occurring since the end of the Middle Ages represent a political and spiritual programme – in the case of Hungary representations of Virgin Mary, the patron of the kingdom, and those of Saint Ladislaus were preferred. As one could see, the baron did not limit himself to the bare coin acquiring, but he also obtained numismatic literature, around 120 titles. It was correlated to the coin and medal stock, thus increasing the value of the library as well. Eckhel’s *Doctrina numorum veterum*, a revolutionary work at that time, is also nowadays a kind of numismatists’ Bible, being a staple work that laid the foundations to the great 19<sup>th</sup>-century syntheses. In its turn Eckhel’s synthesis relies to a great extent upon that of Vaillant, whose works the baron Brukenthal secured almost utterly and not in vain – these works being much used by the authors of the manuscript catalogues of the collection. On the other hand, these manuscript catalogues are an example of ability and rigorousness, these documents preserving their topical interest even nowadays, even if they do not include data as regards the origin of the coins, due to a limitation of work methods of early modern times.

Following in the footsteps of the Viennese pattern established by the emperor Franz I, Maria Theresia’s husband, the baron Brukenthal also set up a mineral collection. The 18<sup>th</sup>-century Austrian scientific expeditions, also continued during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were prestigious, benefited from state financing and had as a consequence the setting up of mineralogic cabinets. Parallely to this, in the capital of the empire there were more persons with an interests in mineralogy than in any other European capital, Vienna being thus a hub of this concern. The *raison d’être* of the baron Brukenthal’s collection is that of encyclopaedism, the gathering of knowledge from all scopes and thus one could not avoid natural sciences. As in the case of the archaeological collection, the mineralogic one has got a nearly pure Transylvanian ethos. Visitors could acknowledge the richnesses of the subsoil of the province. It seems to us that one of the main criteria in choosing the items was the aesthetic one; “beautiful minerals”, of relatively great size, prevail; the pieces arrived in the collections after 1803 are inferior in number and size to those acquired by Brukenthal. The pieces display special forms and colours, there are many rare samples, representative and much praised by

Eder in his 1796 catalogue. The staple pieces of the collection may very well have been the gold samples, highlighted by Jens Esmark.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century also, according to the encyclopaedic spirit, archaeological science was born. One must have inferred since that time that archaeology provides everything for the ages for which written or other witnesses are scarce. The items found bring information about religious customs and mythology; through the information about the deceased, funerary sculpture is the mirror of life; through steles and inscriptions we know trades and the way of life. Accommodation and its military protection are rendered by bricks bearing stamps of Roman legions. The archaeological collection, although small in number, filled a special place in the baron's view, precisely from the desire of educating the audience. The staple piece, Hecate Triformis, is a unique in Dacia and one could not find a double until nowadays. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the inscriptions in the collection were included within the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, one of the corpuses that today make easy the preparation and interpretation work. During Brukenthal's time the research of the so-called *realia* imposed itself by way of resuming diggings. The excavations raised enthusiasm and echoes throughout Europe; in-folio works were drawn up and also reached the baron Brukenthal's collection. The research of Roman vestiges, but also their perception by the cultured audience was much made easy by the knowledge of Latin and classical mythology; Transylvanians had the luck to live in a cultural space that claims itself from the Renaissance. Certain is the fact that the baron wanted to offer a perspective towards the as ancient as possible history of Transylvania; that obviously increased national pride, to make people see in a truer light the past of the province and reinforced inside themselves the sentiment of continuity.

By assembling the data that we have got within reach about baron Brukenthal's collections we hold that they make up a "hybrid" ensemble, surpassing the size of a curiosity cabinet but not having got enough scope to be considered a museum, in part because of the great weight of the library. In our opinion, the name *The Cultural-Artistic Institute Brukenthal*, a title chosen in the early 1800s, is utterly legitimate.

The founder's collections lie at the base of the institution of today. The collections have remained complete all along the period since the baron Brukenthal's death. The library was opened to the public the first, in September 1784, followed by the painting gallery in 1790. The old collections have become the object of research according to scopes, resulting in

the publishing of speciality papers and books, as well as in the organising temporary exhibitions. These cultural events continue nowadays as well.

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