

COSMOPOLITAN AND MULTICULTURAL PATH

MINI-RESEARCH

ORADEA – A “MELTING POT” CITY

Ever since the Middle Ages Oradea was a cosmopolitan city inhabited by Hungarians, Romanians, Italians, Germans, Jews, Gypsies, Slovaks etc. which brought with them some of the cultural baggage of their places of origin. The beginnings of Oradea's history are tied to the Hungarian kingdom, which in 11th century began expanding eastwards into Transylvania. According to a later source, the *Vienna Illuminated Chronicle* (written in the second half of 16th century), King Ladislaus I the Holy (1077-1095) “*found in the parish of the Fortress of Bihor, between the rivers Criş, a place where, beckoned by angels, he decided to build a monastery dedicated to The Virgin Mary which he called Varad.*” Several settlements would form around it, which ultimately merged in the mid-19th century, forming Oradea. Throughout the period in which it was under Hungarian rule, up until Transylvania turned into an autonomous principality under Ottoman suzerainty in 1541, the city received special attention from Hungarian royalty, being visited by many royal figures, some even showing their desire to be entombed here.

The Hungarian community is responsible for the enrichment of some monastic institutions, most of which are subsidiaries of larger monasteries (such as the one patronized by St. Stefan, or those belonging to orders the Dominican, Franciscan, Augustinian, Hospitaller orders), or secular buildings, which unfortunately failed to resist the passage of time and the repeated sieges which the city underwent. The community was also the initiator of complex cultural activities.

The Italian community was well represented in Oradea during the Middle Ages, as speaking this language in its streets was an element of everyday life in the 15th century. The cultural development of Oradea and the emergence of Humanism and the Renaissance were made possible to a large extent by some bishops and hierarchs of the Catholic Church in the city coming from the Italian peninsula. Ladislaus Déméendi, a native of Naples, was among the first of many such church leaders; of his immediate successors, Andrea Scolari will remark himself as being “considered a perfect incarnation of the spirit of the Renaissance, a prelate worthy of the period that remained in the history of the papacy as the pontificate of gold”. For the entire period that he held the function of bishop at Oradea tried to gather at his court a large number of Italian artists who built chapels, raised altars then adorned with the

most luxurious decorations. Books were not neglected either, Andrea Scolari having the first initiative of establishing a library in Oradea, especially after a good many books were burned in a fire that started in the sacristy. Slowly, humanism exceeded the limits of the episcopal court, emerging into the urban environment, influencing the peoples' way of life here.

The continuation of the humanist-cultural tradition in the city on the banks of the Crişul Repede River remained interrupted throughout the first part of the 15th century, due to a series of other high priests of Italian origin: Giovanni de Milanesi da Prato, Giovanni de Cuirzola and Giovanni de Dominis da Arbe. However, “the most impressive Renaissance personality in Central Europe of the age was bishop Iohannes Vitéz de Zredna, an example of a man preoccupied by all the important concerns of his age, an illustrious patron”. His court became a place of gathering for great scholars and cultured people, such as the Polish Gregor von Sanok, Filip Podocatharo from Cyprus, the Dalmatian Nicolaus Machinensis, the Italian humanist Marzio Galeotti from the court of Matthias Corvinus, the poet Gaspare Tribraeco etc.



His relations to the illustrious astronomer Georg von Peurbach were also of a close nature, leading to Peurbach writing a geometry treaty and founding an astronomic observatory in Oradea, at his request. He also benefited from the friendship of the humanist Enea Silvio Piccolomini, who later became pope, under the name Pius the Second. He remained in the memory of his successors as a passionate collector of books, many of which were obtained directly from the Florentine editor Vespasiano da Bisticci. His noble preoccupation was to be sung about in lyrics by Janus Pannonius, the first great creator or Renaissance poetry in this part of Europe.

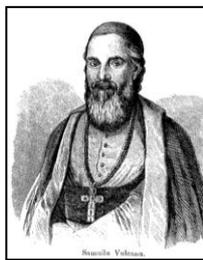


Iohannes Vitéz de Zredna's successors continued to perpetuate the Renaissance values. Johannes IX. Filipecz de Prosznicz made serious efforts in order to print monk Rogerius' poem (*Carmen Miserabile super Destructione Regni Hungariae per Tartaros* – Latin for “Sad Song for the destruction of the Kingdom of Hungary by the Tartars”) kept in Oradea as a manuscript, in the year 1488, in Brno; Váradi János was drawn to music and poetry, gathering many artists to his court; Kalmancsehi Domokos was known for his passion for books, commissioning excellent ornaments for many of these, Franciscus di Castello being one of those who tried to satiate his thirst for beauty; the same passion was shared by his



successor, Szatmári György, who, in order to enrich his library, established relations with two great Italian editors, the brothers Giordano and Aldo Manuzio.

The Romanians, although a long-time minority between the other ethnicities, began to assert itself culturally, especially starting in the 18th century. The process became more accentuated during the time of high priests Moise Dragoș, Ignatie Darabant, Samuil Vulcan etc. These preoccupied themselves constantly with the educational system, trying to enlighten the largest possible segment of the population by founding numerous village schools, as well as by printing books. Through this last objective, the endowment of schools with text books was desired, as well as the publication of scientific papers of general interest, meant to improve day to day life and to cultivate the aesthetic taste. Relations with the typography in Buda, the closest to Oradea, were thus multiplied at a sustained pace.



For Romanians in the city and in the Bihor County, the cultural enlightenment of this age is predominantly tied to Samuil Vulcan. Close friend to the most notable representatives of the Transylvanian School (Samuil Micu, Petru Maior), the prelate from Oradea personally undertook the printing of as many Romanian books as he could, while also supporting the historic works of Petru Maior and the finalization of the “grand” Dictionary of the Romanian language and coordinating the elaboration of the polyglot dictionary called “The Romanian-Latin-Hungarian-German Lexicon”, published in Buda in 1825. Samuil Vulcan also supported the construction of an impressive library, not necessarily through the number of volumes kept (in 1830, it held 1574 books, out of which 117 were in Romanian), but through their diversity. During his episcopacy, Oradea became a meeting place for scholars, the names Ioan Molnar Piuariu, Vasile Coloși, Ioan Corneli, Ioan Teodorovici, Ioan Budai-Deleanu and so forth joining the afore-mentioned representatives of the Transylvanian School.

The second half of the 19th century in Oradea was marked by the emergence of multiple cultural societies, such as the Society for Lecture of the Romanian Youth of Oradea Mare (established in 1852), the Popular Circle of Oradea-Velența and Oradea-Under-Fortress (established in February 1870), the Society for Archeology and History of Bihor County (December 1871), The “Hilaria” Chant Gathering (1875), the Szigligeti Society (1891) etc. There emerged multiple cultural magazines and newspapers as well, out of which Familia (“The Family”) stands out, initially being published in Pesta, under the leadership of Iosif Vulcan, then moving to Oradea, as well as Șezătoarea (“The Story Circle”), the first popular

paper with wide distribution throughout Transylvania. The Hungarian press was heralded by multiple titles, such as Bihar, Nagyvárad or Nagyvárad Napló.

A significant presence in the city's life was entertained by *the Jews*, even though, due to the destruction of multiple archives, the reconstitution of their medieval history is a difficult task. Seldom mentioned before 1660, they began to make their presence felt especially in the 18th century. At the end of the 19th century, the Jewish community, although divided, managed to build two synagogues – the Neolog one in the city center (in 1878) and the Orthodox one (in 1890).



The multicultural aspect of Oradea can also be easily highlighted at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Its position at the western border of Romanian space led to the inclusion of the city, throughout this age, into the Central-European world, with tight connections to Vienna and Budapest. This situation materialized itself into multiple outlets, the most prominent of which being the architectural one (Art Nouveau), bearing the mark of



specific architectural currents in Central Europe. From the buildings or historic complexes which represent this architectural stage of development, the most important are the Fortress, the Town Hall Palace, The Palace of Justice, The Black Eagle Palace, the Orthodox Diocese Palace, the Roman-Catholic Diocese Palace, the Apollo Palace, the Stern Palace, and the Moskovits Palace etc.

Currently, Oradea's multicultural status derives from the cohabitation of a heterogeneous population, with numerous ethnicities which contribute to the life of the **CITADEL**.