

AN UNKNOWN MONOGRAPHIC SKETCH BY H. STAHL: COVASNA, 1924

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ABSTRACT

Henri Stahl, a writer from the first half of the 20th century, is known in Romanian culture as the inventor of the shorthand system adapted to the Romanian language, but especially as the father of writer Henriette Yvonne Stahl and sociologist Henri H. Stahl. Close friend of historian Nicolae Iorga, one of the most renowned professors and intellectuals of those times, Henri Stahl was also influenced in his education by the sociologist Dimitrie Gusti, another public figure relevant to the pre and interwar timeframe. He left behind several volumes, both specialized (stenography and graphology), monographic and fictional literature. This article aims to highlight the existence of a book not mentioned in the list of H. Stahl's works, Covasna, a monographic sketch published in 1924 in Bucharest by United Romanian Printing Houses.

Keywords: the Stahl family, Henri Stahl, Covasna, monographic sketch.

1. THE STAHL FAMILY

Henri Stahl (1877–1942) was part of a family of French-German immigrants who settled in Bucharest. His father, Joseph Stahl (1820-1890), originally from Iugolstadt, was a Prussian subject.

“According to family memories, he left his native Bavaria as a young man, traveling to Greece with the future King Otto. Under unknown circumstances, he was taken prisoner by the Turks and taken to Istanbul. There he learned Oriental languages (Turkish, Arabic, Persian), as well as Romanian. In addition, he was fluent in German, French, English, Italian, Modern Greek, Ancient Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit. He arrived in the Wallachian capital around 1850, possibly through the intervention of Prince Barbu Ştirbei. It seems that the prince had him as his dragoman (interpreter) during his visit to

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Istanbul and, appreciating his exceptional linguistic skills, brought him back with him when he returned to the country”⁶¹.

After arriving in Bucharest, Joseph Stahl worked as a “magistrate translator”, as he used to sign his publications, contributed to the organization of the telegraph service and the Romanian Post Office, and was a member of the City Guard. However, he devoted himself mainly to teaching languages. During his lifetime, he wrote numerous linguistic textbooks and dictionaries, which were printed in Bucharest starting from 1852. In 1881, he opened a German school for girls, which enjoyed a certain degree of fame in the epoch⁶².

Orphaned by his father at the age of twelve, Henri Stahl attended the “Dimitrie Cantemir” high school and then the “Gheorghe Lazăr” high school. As a child, he was passionate about finding a graphic system that would allow him to write as fast as he spoke. In his third year of high school, he found his first real shorthand book in an antique shop, but it had a complicated and cumbersome shorthand alphabet. A few years later, by chance, he found the alphabet of the French Priest Émile Duployé. In 1898, he published his first shorthand book: *Stenografia Duployé. Adapted to the Romanian language by Henri Stahl*⁶³. Over time, he created his own original shorthand system, which he published in 1908⁶⁴.

Henri Stahl studied both literature and law (where he met Nicolae Iorga, with whom he remained friends for 25 years), demonstrating aptitude in many areas. Passionate about shorthand, he became a revising stenographer in the Chamber of Deputies (at that time, there was no technology for recording speeches, which had to be noted down in real time). On the eve of Romania’s involvement in the Great War, Stahl, who had a fairly large family, worked between 1 a.m. and 6 a.m. at the Romanian Telegraph Agency (he knew no less than six languages). He was also a professor at the Higher War School, the Military School for Infantry Officers, and the Military School for Artillery,

⁶¹ „Din amintirile familiei, și-ar fi părăsit Bavaria natală de tânăr, plecând în Grecia odată cu viitorul rege Otto. În circumstanțe necunoscute, cade prizonier la turci și este dus la Istanbul. Aici învață limbile orientale (turca, araba, persana), dar și românește. În plus, stăpânea germana, franceza, engleza, italiana, neo-greaca, greaca veche, latina, sanscrita. În capitala valahă ajunge în preajma anului 1850, posibil prin intervenția prințului Barbu Știrbei. Acesta l-ar fi avut, se pare, dragoman (interpret) pe durata vizitei sale la Istanbul și, apreciind excepționalele sale cunoștințe lingvistice, l-ar fi adus cu sine la întoarcerea în țară”, în Irina Stahl, on a book by Henri Stahl, „Henri Stahl, patriot roman cu nume german. Introducere la Porumbacu” [“Henri Stahl, Romanian patriot with a German name. Introduction to Porumbacu”], in *Atelier*, August 29, 2018, Available at: <https://atelier.liternet.ro/articol/19636/IrinaStahlHenriStahl/HenriStahlpatriotromancunumegermanintroducerelaPorumbacu.html>, Accessed on September 12, 2025.

⁶² *Ibidem*.

⁶³ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁴ This shorthand system was officially adopted in 1941.

Engineering, and the Navy⁶⁵. He was a judicial expert and professor at the Higher School of Archival Science and Paleography⁶⁶.

From his marriage to the Frenchwoman Blanche, he had three children (Gaston, Henriette and Henri.).

Henri Stahl married Blanche Alexandrine Bœuve (1874-1953), a young French woman who had arrived in Bucharest accompanied by her son of several years, Gaston. All three children of the family: Gaston, Henriette, and Henri would become prominent figures in Romanian culture, each distinguishing themselves in a different field. Gaston Bœuve (1894-1969), who would adopt the pseudonym Șerban Voinea, would become a well-known theorist and leader of Romanian social democracy. A lawyer by profession, he would pursue a career in diplomacy, serving for a time as Romania's ambassador to Bern. Henriette Yvonne (1900-1986) would become one of the most important writers in Romanian literature. Henri (1901-1900), who added his father's initial to his name to distinguish himself from him, was one of the leading members of the sociological school led by Dimitrie Gusti. The shorthand he learned from his father was very useful in recording the data and information he collected in the field⁶⁷.

2. THE WORK OF HENRI STAHL

Despite his many obligations, encouraged and promoted by Nicolae Iorga, who often published his texts in his journals, Stahl managed to gain some literary notoriety. In a few years, he published several volumes. In 1910, *Bucureștii ce se duc* (*The Bucharest That Fades Away*) appeared, a history of the city written with great humor and nostalgia for its past; in 1912, *De la manevre și alte schițe vesele* (*From Maneuvers and Other Cheerful Sketches*), a collection of sketches; in 1914, *Un român în lună* (*A Romanian on the Moon*), a science fiction novel, a first of its kind in Romanian literature, and in 1915, *Macabre și viceversa* (*Macabre and Vice Versa*), another collection of sketches. In addition to these, there are also specialized books, including *Curs complet de stenografie cu vocale* (*Complete Course in Shorthand with Vowels*) (1909), later republished several times⁶⁸.

To these titles the volume *Covasna* can be added, published in 1924 in Bucharest by United Romanian Printing Houses. On the last page of this volume,

⁶⁵ Codruț Constantinescu, „Henri Stahl pe frontul României Mari” [“Henri Stahl on the Greater Romania Front”], in *Revista 22*, 2019, Available at: <https://revista22.ro/cultura/henristahlpefrontul-romaniei-mari>, Accessed on September 12, 2025.

⁶⁶ Irina Stahl, on a book by Henri Stahl, „Henri Stahl, patriot roman cu nume german. Introducere la Porumbacu” [“Henri Stahl, Romanian patriot with a German name. Introduction to Porumbacu”], in *Atelier*, August 29, 2018, Available at: <https://atelier.liternet.ro/articol/19636/IrinaStahlHenriStahl/HenriStahlpatriotromancunumegermanintroducereLaPorumbacu.html>, Accessed on September 12, 2025.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*.

with the note “By the same author”⁶⁹, we find a list of other works by Henri Stahl, in addition to those mentioned above, grouped by category, unfortunately without indicating the year of publication, with the footnote “these can also be requested from the authors: 139 Izvor Street, Bucharest, telephone 13 C II-a”⁷⁰. In the “literary books” category: *Spion [Spy]*, a work awarded by the “Cartea Românească” society; in the “stenography” category: *Curs de stenografie parlamentară. Istoricul stenografiei în România (Alfabetul Stahl) [Parliamentary Stenography Course. History of Stenography in Romania (Stahl Alphabet)]*, work awarded by the Romanian Academy, *Stenografia cu alfabetul latin rezumat [Stenography with the Latin Alphabet]*; *Transformarea mașinei de scris în mașină de stenografie [Transforming the typewriter into a stenography machine]*; *Game stenografice, exerciții gradate pentru obținerea iușelei cu orice sistem [Stenographic Games, graded exercises for obtaining speed with any system]*; *Stenografia Stahl în rezumat [Stahl Stenography in Summary]*; in the “history” category: *Țările Românești până în preajma timpurilor moderne, Evul Mediu [The Romanian Lands until Modern Times, The Middle Ages]* – 12 lectures given to officers of the Special Engineering School (autographed); in the “French language” category: *Curs practic de limbă franceză pentru militari [Practical French Language Course for Military Personnel]*.

Between 1937 and 1939, Henri Stahl also published articles in the magazine *Justiția [Justice]*, one of the alternative documentary sources not used in Romanian historiography⁷¹. Poorly recovered after 1989 (the lack of critical editions remaining in general one of the areas of suffering of Romanian historiography), Henri Stahl’s activity remains largely undocumented; all the more so when it comes to disparate press materials⁷².

3. DIMITRIE GUSTI’S MONOGRAPHIC SCHOOL

On April 8, 1910, Dimitrie Gusti gave the introductory lecture for the course *Introduction to Greek Philosophy, Ethics, and Sociology* in the auditorium of the University of Iași. Newly appointed associate professor in the Department of History of Greek Philosophy, Ethics, and Sociology at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, he took this opportunity to present some of his ideas on sociology and ethics, evoking, for the first time, the possibility of conducting monographic research in Romania. Sociology, as a subject of study, was taking shape.

⁶⁹ Henri Stahl, *Covasna*, United Romanian Printing Houses, 1924, p. 41.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁷¹ George Lascu, „Cum a devenit o vacă ditamai calul. Cazuri amuzante de fals semnalate de Henri Stahl” [“How a cow became a horse. Funny cases of fraud reported by Henri Stahl”], in *Historia*, n.d., Available at: <https://historia.ro/sectiune/general/cumadevenitovacaditamaicalulcazuri572089.html>, Accessed on September 12, 2025.

⁷² *Ibidem*.

In the same year, 1910, Henri Stahl published the volume *Bucureștii ce se duc* [*The Bucharest That Fades Away*]. The book was the result of meticulous research, in which historical sources (documents, maps, studies) were supplemented with information obtained from direct field research. On his frequent trips around the city, Henri Stahl used to take his children with him, Henriette Yvonne, the future writer, and Henri, the future sociologist. Once back home, he would encourage them to write short texts, “compositions”, about what they had seen and done, which sent little Henri in a state of fascination regarding his father and his abilities⁷³.

Interwar monographic research was initiated and developed by Dimitrie Gusti, together with his collaborators (one of whom was Henri H. Stahl). This represented

“one of the most important contributions to the development of European applied sociology, both through the originality of the theoretical system, concepts, and ideology, and through the complexity of the techniques used, the tools, and, last but not least, the interdisciplinary perspective through which this field methodology stood out. Beneficial for Romanian sociology is not only the creation of an internationally renowned school, but also the fact that the intellectual elite of Romania at that time understood the need to propagate Gusti’s ideological system and field research methodology”⁷⁴.

Between 1925 and 1935, Dimitrie Gusti, together with teams of specialists from various fields (sociologists, ethnographers, folklorists, geographers, statisticians, doctors) and his students, organized interdisciplinary monographic research campaigns in several villages. Thus, the first field research campaign in Romanian villages took place in the summer of 1925, in a village in Dolj.

Henri Stahl’s work, *Covasna*, was published in 1924, certainly after his visit to Covasna the previous year. In these circumstances, the author could not have known the methods and rules that sociologist Dimitrie Gusti had indicated for the completion of a monographic work, which defines a broad framework for research on the village, according to his sociological theory of frameworks and manifestations. Proper research must be carried out by a multidisciplinary team of

⁷³ Irina Stahl, „Henri Stahl, două generații, tată și fiu, în timpul Primului Război Mondial” [“Henri Stahl, two generations, father and son, during World War I”], in *Revista română de sociologie* [*Romanian Journal of Sociology*], New series, Year XXIX, No. 3-4, Bucharest, 2018, p. 358.

⁷⁴ „una dintre cele mai importante contribuții la dezvoltarea sociologiei aplicate europene atât prin originalitatea sistemului teoretic, a conceptelor și ideologiei, cât și prin complexitatea tehnicilor utilizate, a instrumentarului și, nu în ultimul rând, a perspectivei interdisciplinare prin care această metodologie de teren s-a făcut remarcată. Benefic pentru sociologia românească este nu numai că s-a creat o școală cu renume internațional, dar și faptul că elita intelectuală din România acelei vremi a înțeles necesitatea propagării sistemului ideologic gustian și a metodologiei de cercetare în teren”, in Carmen Albert, „Cercetarea monografică regională interbelică: cazul bănățean” [“Interwar regional monographic research: the case of Banat”], in *Cooperativa G*, July 14, 2012, Available at: <https://www.cooperativag.ro/cercetarea-monografica-regionala-interbelica-cazul-banatean/>, Accessed on September 12, 2025.

specialists, all coordinated by a sociologist, in order to cover all aspects of life in rural communities, divided into four frameworks – cosmological, biological, psychological, and historical – and then into manifestations – economic, spiritual, legal, and political-administrative.

It is obvious that one person alone cannot carry out a monographic research study that meets all the requirements. However, empirically, Henri Stahl touched on many of these aspects, in a style that was more literary than scientific, leaving posterity a few pages of information of interest to today's researchers of the area's past.

4. COVASNA – TOURIST RESORT IN SOUTHEAST TRANSYLVANIA

Covasna is a town and tourist resort located in the present-day county of Covasna, known as Treiscaune during the interwar period. Until the union of Transylvania with Romania in 1918, Covasna was under the influence of Austro-Hungarian Empire. The interwar period led Romanians from other provinces to “discover” the Transylvanian localities now within the borders of Greater Romania. During the same period, numerous monographic works dedicated to these places that had returned to the country were published.

Thus, three works were published about the commune of Covasna and the adjoining village of Voinești⁷⁵, known and visited since ancient times for their multitude of natural factors (among which mineral waters, mofettes, and ozone-rich air played a dominant role) by numerous tourists and patients who came to recuperate “at the baths” during the interwar period: Henri Stahl, *Covasna*, United Romanian Printing Houses, Bucharest, 1924; Vasile Stroescu, *Covasna ilustrată geografică, ecologică, geologică, balneară, medicală, turistică și arheologică* [*Covasna illustrated geographically, ecologically, geologically, balneologically, medically, touristically, and archaeologically*], Society of Medical Hydrology and Climatology, Bucharest, 1932; V.M. Georgescu, *Băile Covasna din punct de vedere turistic și medical* [*Covasna Baths from a Tourist and Medical Perspective*], The Romanian People Society Cooperative, Bucharest, 1939.

Reading the above-mentioned works, one can notice a certain “exoticism” in the perception of those who came from the Old Kingdom to Covasna, at least from two points of view: the fact that they met many foreigners, gathered in this area, and, equally admirable, that they became acquainted with the healing properties of the Covasna waters, which bordered on magic. But, in addition to these unusual presences, they also encountered normality: Romanians, as everywhere between the Dniester, Tisza, and Balkan Mountains.

Ultimately, tourists conveyed gratitude for finding, in the center of Greater Romania, an area known for its natural splendor and a populace that is

⁷⁵ Covasna became a city in 1952, and the village of Voinești became a district of the city.

distinguished by their hospitality and dignity. The majority of the Romanians living in Covasna were rural, and many of them were pastoralists, many of whom called themselves *mocani*, a term historically used to refer to shepherds from the mountains.

The first study was written by Henri Stahl in the early 1920s, close after the Great Union of 1918. One can advance the hypothesis that his friendship with Nicolae Iorga, “his former teacher, who often published his texts in his journals”⁷⁶, led the writer to these Transylvanian places. It is well known that, in the period after 1918, Nicolae Iorga often paid close attention to the situation of Romanians in what are now the counties of Covasna and Harghita.

“Here, the Romanian scholar is saddened to encounter so many of his people who do not know enough Romanian to say what they nevertheless proudly say in Hungarian: I am Romanian! The priest conducts the liturgy in the language of their ancestors, but the sermon must be delivered in the language that the people can understand... Romanians stumble when speaking their language, the sacred language of their forefathers and ancestors, the language that names their tribe, their beautiful customs, and the wonderful traditions they have preserved’. This is how Nicolae Iorga described, at the beginning of the 20th century, the drama of the Romanians in Secuime, brutally Magyarized by the Hungarian state. The same reality remained at the time of Transylvania’s union with Romania in 1918, a reality also depicted in the letters that the great historian received from Covasna in 1919-1920 and in the articles that those familiar with it published in the historian’s newspaper, *Neamul Românesc* (The Romanian People)”⁷⁷.

5. COVASNA, BY HENRI STAHL, 1924

The work signed by Henri Stahl is not a monographic volume in the usual sense of the term. It can be considered a kind of “monographic sketch”. In fact, this is how it was described by sociologist Henri H. Stahl, the author’s son, who declared he was:

“fascinated by his father’s work and especially by the ease with which he was able

⁷⁶ Irina Stahl, „Henri Stahl, două generații, tată și fiu, în timpul Primului Război Mondial” [“Henri Stahl, two generations, father and son, during World War I”], in *Revista română de sociologie* [*Romanian Journal of Sociology*], New series, Year XXIX, No. 3-4, Bucharest, 2018, p. 367.

⁷⁷ „Pe aici românul cărturar are durerea să întâmpine atâția din neamul cari nu știu românește nici cât trebuie pentru a spune ce spun totuși, cu mândrie, în ungurește: Sânt român! Preotul le face liturghia în limba străbunilor, dar predica trebuie s-o ție în acea limbă pe care oamenii o pot înțelege... Românii șchioapătă vorbind limba lor, sfânta limbă de omenie a moșilor și strămoșilor lor, limba care numește seminția lor, portul lor frumos, datinile minunate pe care le-au păstrat». Așa descria Nicolae Iorga, la început de secol XX, drama românilor din Secuime, maghiarizați cu brutalitate de către statul ungar. Aceeași realitate s-a păstrat și în momentul Unirii Transilvaniei cu România, în 1918, realitate zugrăvită și în scrisorile pe care marele istoric le primea din Covasna în 1919-1920 și în articolele pe care cunosătorii acesteia le publicau în ziarul istoricului, *Neamul Românesc*”, in Petre Țurlea, „Din corespondența românilor din Secuime cu Nicolae Iorga, anul 1919” [“From the correspondence of the Romanians in Secuime with Nicolae Iorga, 1919”], in *Angvstia*, No. 4, 1999, p. 343.

to strike up a conversation with anyone, make himself understood, and win over his interlocutors with simple gestures”⁷⁸.

It is interesting to note that the sociologist and future collaborator of Dimitrie Gusti accompanied his father to Covasna:

“[My father] had a special gift for talking to ordinary people, old and young, winning them over with the simplicity with which he treated them as equals, speaking their language, in the spirit of their mentality. I remember that in order to win the goodwill of some children (the best way to win over their parents as well), he would hand out sweets bought from the street vendors of the time. I remembered him much later, when, wanting to gather a group of children to find out whether or not their rules of play included the opportunity to study children’s ‘rights’ I flew a large kite on one of the village hills, which acted as a magnet for a whole crowd of children, both younger and older. Later, as a teenager and then as an adult, I accompanied him on his ‘monographic’ trips, when he gathered material for his short sketches about places such as Breaza⁷⁹, and Covasna”⁸⁰.

With 42 pages, in addition to the description of Covasna, the book, which can also be considered a tourist guide, contains 23 photographs and a “practical guide” with “therapeutic indications” (general information about the benefits of the “baths” and mineral waters of Covasna), with “practical information” (information about train and carriage schedules, accommodation, doctors and pharmacies, addresses of treatment centers, restaurants, pastry shops, stores, public authorities, and churches, information about parks and promenades, excursion routes outside the town) and data on the “chemical analysis of the sources in Covasna”.

Regarding the way Henri Stahl gathered information about Covasna, researcher Irina Stahl in the aforementioned study about the two Stahls, father and son, states:

“The gift of talking to people and gaining their trust will be passed on to his son, perhaps in part thanks to the example set by his father. When he was in the field, many years after

⁷⁸ „fascinat de munca tatălui său și mai cu seamă de ușurința cu care acesta reușea să intre în vorbă cu oricine, să se facă înțeles și să-și atragă, prin gesturi simple, simpatia interlocutorilor”, in Irina Stahl, „Henri Stahl, două generații, tatăl și fiul, în timpul Primului Război Mondial” [“Henri Stahl, Two Generations, Father and Son, During World War I”], in *Revista română de sociologie [Romanian Journal of Sociology]*, New series, Year XXIX, No. 3-4, Bucharest, 2018, p. 359.

⁷⁹ We have not found any information confirming that the study on the town of Breaza was published.

⁸⁰ „Avea [tata] un dar deosebit de a sta de vorbă cu oamenii simpli, bătrâni și tineri, câștigându-i prin simplitatea cu care le sta la egalitate, vorbind pe limba lor, în duhul mentalității lor. Îmi aduc aminte, că pentru a capta bunăvoința unor copii (cea mai bună cale pentru a o căpăta și pe a părinților), le împărțea zaharicale cumpărate de la negustorii ambulanți de pe vremuri. De el mi-am adus aminte, mult mai târziu, când, vrând să adun o ceată de copii, ca să aflu dacă în regulile lor de joacă există sau nu prilejul unui studiu al «dreptului» copilăresc, am înălțat pe unul din dealurile satului un zmeu măreț, care a jucat rolul de magnet pentru o întreagă droaie de copii, mai mici și mai mari. Mai târziu, ca adolescent și apoi ca om matur, l-am însoțit în excursiile lui «monografice», când a strâns materialul pentru scurtele lui schițe despre localități ca Breaza sau Covasna”, in *Ibidem*.

the events described above, sociologist Henri H. Stahl managed, both through his appearance and his words, to be accepted by farmers and merchants as one of their own. In fact, his recommendation for 'solo' research was to be 'as discreet as possible, to the point of disappearing into the anonymous crowd (...). The job of the lone investigator', he said, 'has something chameleon-like about it, because it forces you to dress much like them, to imitate their way of being and behaving, to speak and, above all, to know how to keep quiet, to listen without appearing to do so and to pretend to listen when your mind is elsewhere'. Henri H. Stahl deliberately preserved the peasant flavor of the language he spoke, convinced of the overwhelming importance of style, vocabulary, and syntax in understanding the peasants. The great difficulty, he states in his memoirs, remains that of 'not confusing the peasant style with the cultured one' and 'finding a way to transition, without betrayal, from one to the other'⁸¹.

The work dedicated to the Covasna resort begins with its geographical location:

"From Sfântu Gheorghe, a small town with many barracks, located on the Olt River, 30 km north of Braşov, a side railway line branches off and crosses the middle of Trei Scaune County, going as far as Breţcu, where the Oituz Gorge begins north of Braşov, a side railway line branches off and crosses the middle of Trei Scaune County, going as far as Breţcu, where the Oituz Gorge begins, evocative of glory and sacrifice. Halfway along this secondary line, at the foot of the Carpathians, at an altitude of 560 m. altitude, is Covasna, the famous ancient spa resort that works miracles (60 km from Braşov)"⁸²

and a first image seen by the writer as he got off the train he had traveled on:

"Several carriages, bristles, and many spacious carts with springs await visitors at the station. Ugly women – like all Covasna women – wearing wide straw hats over black tulip hats, offer you, after a friendly 'ionopot' (Good day), a house to rent and the address of 'the best doctor' (Hungarian)"⁸³.

⁸¹ „Darul de a vorbi cu oameni şi de a dobândi încrederea interlocutorilor săi va fi transmis şi fiului, poate în parte şi datorită exemplului oferit de tată. Atunci când se afla pe teren, mulţi ani după cele descrise mai sus, sociologul Henri H. Stahl reuşea, atât prin aspect, cât şi prin vorbe, să fie luat de ţărani şi negustori drept unul de-al lor. De altfel, recomandarea sa în cazul cercetărilor «de unul singur» era aceea de a fi «cât mai discret cu putinţă, până la dispariţia ta în mijlocul masei anonime (...). Meseria anchetatorului singuratic – afirma el – are în ea ceva cameleonice, căci te sileşte să umbli îmbrăcat cam la fel ca ei, să imiţi felul lor de a fi şi de a te purta, de a vorbi şi, mai ales, să ştii să taci, să ascuţi fără să pari a o face şi să te prefaci că ascuţi, când ţi-e gândul în altă parte». Henri H. Stahl păstra cu bună ştiinţă izul ţărănesc al limbii pe care o vorbea, convins fiind de covârşitoarea însemnătate a stilului, a vocabularului şi a sintaxei, în înţelegerea ţăranilor. Greutatea cea mare, afirmă el în amintirile sale, rămâne aceea «de a nu confunda stilul ţărănesc cu cel cult» şi «de a găsi o modalitate de trecere, fără trădare, de la unul la celălalt»”, in *Ibidem*.

⁸² „De la Sfântu Gheorghe, oraşelul cu multe cazărmi, situat pe Olt la 30 km. Nord de Braşov, se desface o linie ferată laterală care străbate prin mijloc judeţul Trei Scaune, mergând până la Breţcu, unde începe defileul Oituzului, evocator de glorie şi jertfe. La jumătatea acestei linii secundare, la poalele Carpaţilor, la 560 m. altitudine, e Covasna, vestita străveche staţie balneară făcătoare de minuni (60 km. de Braşov)”, in Henri Stahl, *quoted work*, 1924, p. 5.

⁸³ „Câteva trăsuri, brişti şi multe căruţe încăpătoare, cu leagăn pe arcuri, aşteaptă la gară vizitatorii. Femei urâte – ca toate covăsnencele – cu largă pălărie de paie peste tulpănelul negru, îţi oferă, după un «ionopot » (Bună ziua) amabil, casă cu chirie şi adresa «celui mai bun doctor» (ungur)”, in *Ibidem*.

Although we are a few years after the union of Transylvania with Romania, Hungarian is still spoken in Covasna, a fact viewed with amusement by Bucharest resident H. Stahl, probably also because of a words' play (the greeting in Hungarian sounds like the Romanian "io nu pot / I can't"):

"Your gaze is drawn back to the field by a strange ringing of bells: children, with cowbells and sticks in their hands, are trying to scare away the sparrows that have arrived in flocks to help with the autumn wheat harvest... The children interrupt their work to greet you with a 'ionupot' (welcome) and every farmer and every traveler greets you with the same 'eu nu pot', so the Romanian from the old kingdom didn't even make it halfway from the train station to Covasna before he learned how to say 'hello' in Hungarian. Being polite and humorous by nature, he responds seriously to every Hungarian 'I can't' with a Romanian 'yes, I can'"⁸⁴.

Today's Covasna residents can follow (and recognize) the author's route through the town, based on descriptions and photographs:

"From a distance, from Covasna hidden in gardens, you can only see, right at the end of the road, the large square bell tower of the Calvinist church; further to the left, the rounded bell tower of the Catholic church, cut by many small windows, and far away, in the mountains, the small, pointed bell tower of the Orthodox church in Voinești, the clean Romanian village, connected to the Szekler Covasna, both forming an unbroken chain of houses and gardens stretching for almost 6 km"⁸⁵.



Fig. 1 – The Catholic church from 1813. In the background, the town hall. The square tower of this church, with four clocks, is a landmark for orientation in Covasna.

⁸⁴ „Privirea ți-e atrasă din nou spre câmp de un straniu bălăngănit de clopote: copii, cu talăngi și bețe în mână, se silesc să sperie vrăbiile sosite în stoluri, să ajute la culesul grâului de toamnă... Copiii își întrerup ocupația ca să te salute cu un «ionupot» de bun sosit și cu același «eu nu pot» te întâmpină fiecare țăran, fiecare drumeț, așa că Românul din vechiul regat nici n-a făcut jumătatea drumului de la gară spre Covasna și a învățat cum se zice «bună ziua» pe ungurește. Cum e din fire politicoș și glumeț, răspunde și el grav la fiecare «eu nu pot» unguresc printr-un «ba eu pot» românesc”, in *Ibidem*, p. 6.

⁸⁵ „De la distanță, din Covasna ascunsă în grădini, vezi doar, drept la capătul drumului, marea clopotniță pătrată a bisericei calvine; mai spre stânga clopotnița rotunjită și tăiată de multe ferestre mărunte a bisericei catolice și departe, în munți, clopotnița mică, ascuțită a bisericii ortodoxe din Voinești, satul curat românesc, legat de Covasna secuiască și formând ambele un lanț neîntrerupt de case și grădini întinse pe aproape 6 km.”, in *Ibidem*, p. 7.



Fig. 2 – The Catholic church, across the street from the post office, on the national road to Voinești – Târgul Secuiesc – Brețc and the ancient Oituz Pass. The spire of this church, cut by numerous windows, forms the second landmark in Covasna.

As stated at the beginning of the work, H. Stahl is convinced that in Covasna the Hungarian language is used everywhere:

“Only a few merchants, a waiter, and a few former maids throughout the kingdom speak Romanian among the locals. At the post office, town hall, and tax office, the clerks begin to speak Romanian, with a dictionary on the table. Proof that Covasna is part of Greater Romania is provided first and foremost by the renaming of the streets. Here and there, the old name remains on a sign, and so you learn that Rakoczi Street has become King Carol Street; Hunyady Street: Prince Carol Street; Petőfi Street: Eminescu Street; Bathori Street: N. Iorga Street; and the very narrow Alsoprund Street: General Moșoiu Street. Secondly, all the shops have signs written in Romanian and Hungarian’. Secondly, all the shops have their names written in Romanian and Hungarian”⁸⁶.

And 100 years ago, there were “political sympathies” in Romania, as noted in Covasna by H. Stahl:

“But above all, the authority of the central government is painfully felt through the too frequent replacement of magistrates and notaries, following the oscillations of political sympathies, which are always corrupting. And in Covasna, the mistake was made of replacing experienced and honest administrators, who were too old to learn Romanian quickly, with political hacks

⁸⁶ „Românește, dintre localnici, vorbesc doar câțiva negustori, câte un chelner, câteva foste servitoare prin regat. La poștă, primărie, percepție, funcționarii încep – cu dicționarul pe masă – să îndrume românește. Dovadă că totuși Covasna face parte din România Mare o face întâi răsbotezarea străzilor. Ici colo vechea denumire a rămas pe câte o tăbliță și astfel afli că Str. Rakoczi a devenit Str. Regele Carol; Str. Hunyady: Str. Principele Carol; Str. Petőfi: Str. Eminescu; Str. Bathori: Str. N. Iorga și foarte îngusta stradă Alsoprund: Str. General Moșoiu. În al doilea rând, magazinele toate au firma scrisă și românește și ungurește”, in *Ibidem*, p. 16.

who bring shame on our country, when, for example, one had to be dismissed for theft”⁸⁷.

Like any visitor to Covasna, H. Stahl tries out the healing properties of the mofettes and mineral waters, describing amusing stories about the activities of tourists in a unique style that captures the interest of readers. He also details the health benefits of drinking mineral water from Covasna, “rivaling Vichy”⁸⁸. The data he provides on the number of houses and inhabitants in the locality shows that he used statistical information provided by the authorities.

Henri Stahl is also concerned with the social life of the inhabitants, pointing out some less pleasant aspects, which today’s Covasna residents feel somewhat “ashamed” of:

“Next to the very clean *primary school*, with four teachers, attended in the fall by 170 children – who, however, cannot be kept in the village once the shepherds leave with their sheep for the mountains – there is a *kindergarten* and, further up the hill, the recently inaugurated *Middle School*; then there is the little church of *St. Niculae* from 1794, as shown by the painted inscription, which is almost faded. It is a pity, however, that the priest – a young man – serves without an antimension, with an old stole thrown over his jacket. He does not impose, and we should not impose! He doesn’t impose, and we must impose! It’s a shame again that around a beautiful oak-carved shrine, erected on the site of the former church’s altar, rotten branches, rubble, and garbage have been thrown; and the lack of care for the cemetery is painfully upsetting. There is no choir at the church, no library. The Hungarians have a very beautiful one”⁸⁹.

The writer was not impressed by the local mayor either:

“Democracy may be all well and good, but a mayor like the one in Covasna, who until yesterday combined the job of mayor with that of a waiter receiving tips and to whom you would shout ‘Mr. Mayor, a schnitzel without paprika, quickly!’, is not impressive”⁹⁰.

⁸⁷ „Dar mai presus de toate autoritatea Guvernului central e dureros simțită prin prea deasa primenire a pretorilor și notarilor, după oscilațiunile simpatiilor politice a tot corupătoare. Și la Covasna s-a făcut evident greșeala de a se înlocui oameni gospodari experimentați și cinstiți, dar prea bătrâni pentru a învăța repede românește, prin secături politice, cari ne fac țara de rușine, când de pildă unul a trebuit să fie destituit pentru furt”, in *Ibidem*, p. 18.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

⁸⁹ „Alături de școala primară, foarte curată, cu 4 învățători, frecventată toamna de 170 copii – pe care însă nu-i mai poți ține în sat de îndată ce pleacă bacia cu oile la munte – e o grădină de copii și mai la deal Școala Medie, recent inaugurată; apoi urmează bisericuța Sft. Niculae din 1794, cum arată pisană vâpsită, aproape ștearsă. Păcat însă că preotul – un om tânăr – slujește fără antiriu, cu un patrafir vechi aruncat peste jachetă. Nu impune și trebuie să impunem! Păcat iarăși, că în jurul unei frumoase troițe sculptată în stejar, ridicată pe locul altarului fostei biserici, s-au aruncat ciurciuvele putrezite, moloz și gunoaie; iar lipsa de îngrijire a ținuturii te îndis pune dureros. Cor la biserică nu este, bibliotecă nu este. Ungurii au una foarte frumoasă”, in *Ibidem*, p. 27.

⁹⁰ „O fi bună democrația, dar un primar ca cel din Covasna, care până ieri cumula slujba de primar cu cea de chelner primitiv de bacșișuri și căruia îi strigai «Domnule primar, un șnițel fără papricaș, mai iute!», nu impune”, in *Ibidem*, p. 28.



Fig. 3 – Voinești – The Orthodox Church, dating from 1794.

We also find ethnographically interesting information about the way of life of the Romanians in Voinești, the vast majority of whom are sheep farmers:

“The houses in Voinești are smaller, the households poorer, the flowers fewer, because in these places, ceded with great privileges to the Székelys, with the obligation to guard the border from the invasions of the Cumans and Tatars, the Romanians, deprived of land, spent their lives mostly in the mountains with sheep, then working with wood in the forests, or at the factory in *Comando*, in the heart of the mountains. But there is no house where they do not work, at the carved gate, the Romanian women spinning wool, preparing the warp of the fabrics, joking among themselves and happy to talk to those who speak Romanian”⁹¹.



Fig. 4 – Voinești – A peasant house. Hardworking housewives working at the gate of the house with beautiful carved stone pillars.

⁹¹ „Casele la Voinești sunt mai mici, gospodăria mai săracă, florile mai puține, pentru că pe aceste locuri, cedate cu mari privilegii secuilor, cu obligațiunea de a păzi granița de năvălirile cumanilor, tătarilor, Români, lipsiți de pământ, își petreceau viața mai mult în munți cu oeritul, apoi cu lucratul lemnului prin păduri, ori la fabrica dela Comando, în creierul munților. Dar nu e casă unde să nu lucreze, la poarta sculptată, românele, torcând lână, pregătind urzeala stofelor, glumind între ele și bucuoroase de vorbă cu cei de graiu românesc.”, in *Ibidem*, p. 26.

As a conclusion to what he saw in Covasna, the author also offers possible solutions for the development of the area:

“With goodwill and hard work, Covasna-Voinești would take on unexpected importance in a few years, on the sole condition that the locals are assured of legality and that the most honest and hard-working Romanian elements are appointed to the positions of prefect, magistrate, priest, and teacher, *regardless of political parties*. Then, for these pioneers of Romanianism, every ‘*I cannot Hungarian*’ would become a call to patriotism, and the Romanian’s joking reply, ‘*I can*’, would become a commitment to work and honesty, until even the last Szekler has learned what a *good Romanian day* means”⁹².

6. CONCLUSIONS

The members of the Stahl family, who were descended from French-German immigrants, were perfectly integrated into Romanian culture, to whose development they fully contributed. Henri Stahl, an interesting figure of his time, father of writer Henriette Yvonne Stahl and sociologist Henri H. Stahl, close collaborator of Nicolae Iorga and Dimitrie Gusti, was a truly versatile personality, through his studies and professional pursuits carried out with the highest level of passion and competence. Known as the inventor of the Romanian shorthand system and the author of the first Romanian science fiction novel, the writer Henri Stahl was also interested in monographic research. One of these studies, published in 1924 and dedicated to the Transylvanian resort of Covasna, does not appear in his bibliography. We believe that this work should be included in the list of Henri Stahl’s publications, as a necessary and welcome restitution. Even if it is not a large-scale monographic work or one carried out according to classical rules, Henri Stahl’s “sketch” of *Covasna* provides valuable information for today’s researchers of the area’s past.

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⁹² „Cu bunăvoință și muncă, Covasna-Voinești ar lua în câțiva ani o importanță nebanuită, cu singura condiție ca localnicilor să le asigure legalitatea iar, în posturile de prefect, pretor, preot, învățători, să numești cele mai cinstite și harnice elemente românești, indiferent de partide politice. Atunci pentru acești pionieri ai românismului, fiecare eu nu pot unguresc ar deveni îndemn de patriotism și răspunsul glumeț al românului ba eu pot ar deveni un angajament de muncă și cinste, până ce și ultimul secuie va fi învățat ce însemnează ziua bună românească.”, in *Ibidem*, p. 30.

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