

## THE EVOLUTION OF THE FORMATION OF THE ROMANIAN ACADEMIC ELITE IN COVASNA AND HARGHITA (1871-2025)

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### ABSTRACT

*The study analyzes the evolution of the formation of the Romanian academic elite around the present-day Covasna and Harghita counties during the period 1871–2025, using a prosopographic approach based on an extensive corpus of published and unpublished sources. The research aims to identify the main stages of the formation, development, and diversification of this elite, considering criteria such as the chronological distribution of doctorates, fields of specialization, universities attended, and the geographical origin of the recipients. The analysis highlights the nascent and restrictive nature of the formation of the academic elite during the Austro-Hungarian dualist period, when access to higher education was limited and the dominant fields were law, medicine, and theology. The interwar period marked a qualitative diversification and an opening toward the European academic community, without a significant increase in numbers. In contrast, the communist regime led to a substantial expansion of the academic elite, driven by the democratization of access to education and the development of higher education, alongside a diversification of fields, particularly in the exact and technical sciences. The post-1989 period represents a time of peak development, characterized by rapid growth in numbers, disciplinary diversification, and integration into the international scientific community. The study highlights the essential role of the academic elite in strengthening the cultural and national identity of Romanians within a multi-ethnic space, as well as its contribution to the institutional, educational, and scientific development of the region. Overall, the evolution analyzed reflects the transition from a small and marginal elite to a diversified, institutionalized one connected to the global dynamics of knowledge.*

**Keywords:** elites, Covasna, Harghita, higher education.

### 1. PREMISES

Research on the Romanian elites of the former Three Seats region during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries has been spurred by the publication of several seminal works on this subject. Among these, we mention: *The History of the Formation of the Romanian Intellectual Elite in Transylvania and Banat in the Modern Era*, by Cornel Sigmirean (Cluj University Press, 2000); *The Ecclesiastical Intellectual Elite. The*

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*Priests of Blaj* (1806–1948), by the same author (Petru Maior University Press, Târgu Mureș, 2007); *The Bicentennial Book of Emanuil Gojdu, 1802–2002*, a volume published by the “Gheorghe Șincai” County Library in Oradea in 2008. At the end of 2011, the book *Romanian Students from Transylvania at European Universities in the 16<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, written by the Hungarian historian Szögi László, was launched in Târgu Mureș. Published by “Petru Maior” University Press, the edition was edited and prefaced by Cornel Sigmirean, with a Romanian translation by Zsolt Simon.

It can be observed that, beginning with the reign of Maria Theresa, the imperial authorities in Vienna paid increased attention to the organization and development of education, which was regarded as an essential tool for the modernization and administrative integration of the population, through the training of educated subjects who were aware of their role in supporting the state<sup>87</sup>. This trend is reflected in the emergence and consolidation of a generation of Romanian intellectuals in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Despite the difficulties encountered in their education and professional training, several prominent Romanian intellectuals from the Szekler districts made their mark on public life in Transylvania during the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Historian László Szögi’s work lists the 1,886 Romanian students who studied at European universities between 1592 and 1919. Among them, Alexander Arbutina, born on February 10, 1832, in Cernatul de Jos, was a student at the Military Academy in Vienna<sup>88</sup>, and Aron Boeriu (1834–1901), born in Ghidfalău, Odorhei County, attended secondary school in Blaj, and studied theology in Blaj and Vienna. Returning to Blaj in 1857, he was appointed high school teacher of natural history and Hungarian, a position he held until the 1871–1872 school year. From that year until the end of his life, he served as parish priest and archpriest of Aiud<sup>89</sup>.

Access to higher education, supported in part by scholarships from foundations such as the “Emanuil Gojdu” Foundation, fostered the emergence of a Romanian intellectual elite in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This elite, educated at universities in Budapest, Vienna, Cluj, and Brussels, played an active role in the cultural and political life of Transylvania and contributed to the affirmation of the national ideal, culminating in their participation in the achievement of the Great Union of 1918.

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<sup>87</sup> Ioan-Aurel Pop, „Cultura românească (până la Școala Ardeleană)” [“Romanian culture (up to the Transylvanian School)”], in Ioan-Aurel Pop, Thomas Nágler and András Magyar (coord.), *Istoria Transilvaniei, Vol. III (de la 1711 până la 1918)* [*The History of Transylvania, Vol. III (1711–1918)*], 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Cluj-Napoca, Romanian Cultural Institute Publishing House, 2008, p. 114.

<sup>88</sup> László Szögi, *Studenți români din Transilvania la universitățile din Europa secolele XVI–XX* [*Romanian Students from Transylvania at European Universities in the 16<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*], Târgu Mureș, Petru Maior University Press, 2011, p. 133.

<sup>89</sup> Ioan Lăcătușu, Vasile Lechințan and Violeta Pătrunjel, *Românii din Covasna și Harghita. Istorie. Biserică. Școală. Cultură* [*Romanians in Covasna and Harghita. History. Church. School. Culture*], Miercurea-Ciuc, Grai Românesc Publishing House, 2003, p. 584.

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## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on prosopographic research, grounded in the identification and systematization of information regarding Romanian intellectuals from the present-day counties of Covasna and Harghita who earned a doctorate in science between 1874 and 2025. The corpus of analysis consists of a database created by utilizing published and unpublished documentary sources, which allowed for the chronological and thematic organization of the available information.

The methodological approach aims to capture the evolution of the academic elite in this region based on several relevant criteria: the chronological distribution of doctoral degrees, fields of specialization, universities attended, and the geographical origin of the degree holders. The analysis integrates both the quantitative dimension, highlighted by the numerical dynamics of PhDs in science, and the qualitative dimension, reflected in the diversification of research fields and their integration into the national and international scientific community.

Furthermore, this research falls within the broader framework of the sociology of elites and social history, with the aim of identifying the mechanisms through which the academic elite is formed and established in a context characterized by distinct ethno-demographic and institutional features. In this regard, the analysis is not limited to a simple inventory of cases but seeks to highlight the structural trends and factors that have influenced the evolution of these elites in various historical contexts.

## 3. THE PERIOD OF AUSTRIA-HUNGARIAN DUALISM

The formation of the Romanian academic elite in the area now comprising Covasna and Harghita counties began in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, against the backdrop of the political and institutional transformations brought about by the establishment of the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy. During this period, access to higher education for Romanians was limited, though not nonexistent, and was facilitated in certain cases by support from ecclesiastical institutions and Romanian cultural foundations.

The number of intellectuals who earned a doctorate in science during this period was relatively small, reflecting both the socio-political constraints of the era and the nascent nature of the process of forming a Romanian academic elite in the region. Nevertheless, the existence of these cases indicates the emergence of a generation of pioneers, educated at prestigious universities within the Empire. Most of these intellectuals were trained in fields such as law, medicine, or theology – fields that offered opportunities for professional and social advancement in a context marked by ethnic and religious inequalities. At the same time, their university education contributed to the consolidation of a national consciousness and to the involvement of Romanians in Transylvania in public and cultural life.

Between 1871 and 1915 (a span of 44 years), a total of 28 Romanian intellectuals from the present-day counties of Covasna and Harghita earned doctorates in science, primarily at universities in Budapest and Cluj, but also at other European academic institutions: Dumitru Thodor (Vidacut), Doctor of Legal Sciences at the University of Budapest (1871); Ioan Bozoceanu (Araci), Doctor of Philosophy and Mathematical Sciences (1874)<sup>90</sup>; Alexandru Ceușianu (Porumbeni), Doctor of Medicine in Budapest (1881); Elie Cristea (Toplița), author of a dissertation on the works of Mihai Eminescu, in Budapest (1895)<sup>91</sup>; Teodor Sbârcea (Toplița), Doctor of Medicine in Cluj (1897); Octav Popescu (Toplița), Doctor in Cluj (1900); Cornel Solnay (Tulgheș), Doctor of Law in Budapest (1901); Alexandru Nicolescu (Tulgheș), Doctor of Philosophy and Theology in Rome<sup>92</sup>; Ghiță Popp (Poiana Sărată), Doctor of Law in Cluj (1906)<sup>93</sup>; Constantin Sbârcea (Toplița), Doctor of Medicine in Cluj (1906); Simion Sbârcea (Toplița), Doctor of Law (1906); Szilard Moga (Vâlcele), Doctor of Law (1906)<sup>94</sup>.

The list is rounded out by figures such as Pompiliu Nistor (medicine, Budapest, 1908), Mihai Dobrean (law, Cluj, 1908)<sup>95</sup>, Victor Olah (law, Cluj, 1909), Gheorghe Negoiescu (law, Budapest, 1910), Romulus Olteanu (law, Cluj, 1910), Ioan Baltariu (law, Cluj, 1910), Ioan Iagedics (law, Cluj, 1910), Petru Muscă (law, Cluj, 1910), Octavian Popescu (law, Cluj, 1911), Dumitru Caltofeanu (law, Budapest, 1912), Vicențiu Rauca-Răuceanu (law, Budapest, 1914)<sup>96</sup>, Miron Crețu<sup>97</sup> and Livius Titus Câmpean (medicine, Budapest, 1914), Dominic Gafton (canon law, Cluj, 1915)<sup>98</sup> and Grigore Păltineanu (political science, Cluj, 1915)<sup>99</sup>.

The emergence of this elite must be understood within the specific context of a region where the Romanian population was in a minority and institutionally disadvantaged. Under these circumstances, earning a doctorate in science represented not only an individual achievement but also a form of collective affirmation for the Romanian community.

An analysis of this first generation of Doctor of Science reveals several defining characteristics. First, the predominance of legal and medical studies reflects the professional opportunities of the era and the need for specialists in fields with direct social impact. Second, the concentration of academic training in centers such

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<sup>90</sup> Ioan Lăcătușu, *Personalități din Covasna și Harghita [Personalities from Covasna and Harghita]*, Cluj-Napoca, Carpatica Publishing House, 1998, pp. 27–30.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 69–74.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 85–90.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 117–122.

<sup>94</sup> Ioan Lăcătușu and Erich-Mihail Broanăr, *Repere identitare românești din județele Covasna și Harghita [Romanian Cultural Landmarks in Covasna and Harghita Counties]*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Sfântu Gheorghe, Eurocarpatica Publishing House, 2019, p. 681.

<sup>95</sup> Ioan Lăcătușu, *quoted work*, 1998, pp. 97–100.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 137–140.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 75–80.

<sup>98</sup> Ioan Lăcătușu and Erich-Mihail Broanăr, *quoted work*, p. 681.

<sup>99</sup> Ioan Lăcătușu, *quoted work*, 1998, pp. 107–112.

as Budapest and Cluj indicates institutional dependence on the university structures of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Finally, the relatively small number of these intellectuals underscores the elitist and difficult-to-access nature of doctoral studies during this period, which confers upon these figures the status of pioneers of the Romanian academic elite in the region.

#### 4. THE INTERWAR PERIOD

The integration of eastern Transylvania into the Romanian state after 1918 triggered a complex process of administrative, cultural, and symbolic reorganization. In the counties of Ciuc, Odorhei, and Trei Scaune – territories with a Székely majority – the formation of a functional Romanian elite required not only the imposition of a new legal framework but also the establishment of mechanisms for fostering loyalty and integration.

The interwar period marks a distinct phase in the evolution of the Romanian academic elite around present-day Covasna and Harghita counties, unfolding against the backdrop of Transylvania's integration into the Romanian nation-state and the reorganization of the educational system. However, in numerical terms, this period is characterized by relative stagnation, with only a few intellectuals identified as having earned a doctorate in the sciences between 1920 and 1939. Among them are figures such as Nicolae Colan, a native of Araci, who pursued doctoral studies in theology in Berlin (1920–1921)<sup>100</sup>, Gheorghe Pop of Poiana Sărată, a Doctor of Law from the University of Budapest (1922), Bujor Teculescu, who completed doctoral studies in criminal law in Paris, Aurel Gociman-Oituz, a doctor of economic sciences from Cluj, and Aurel Grigore Bucur, a doctor of medicine from Bucharest (1939), who specialized in Lyon<sup>101</sup>.

This apparent numerical stagnation can be explained by several structural factors. First, the legacy of inequalities from the previous period continued to influence the Romanian population's access to higher education, particularly in peripheral and predominantly rural areas. Second, the postwar institutional reorganization took time to produce visible effects in terms of advanced academic training.

However, the interwar period brought about a significant qualitative shift. There was a diversification of the universities attended, with intellectuals from this region having access not only to universities in Romania, such as those in Bucharest or Cluj, but also to prestigious institutions in Western Europe, such as those in Berlin or Paris. This openness helped connect the local elite to the European intellectual circuit and facilitated the adoption of modern academic models. Furthermore, there is a diversification of fields of specialization, which extend beyond the traditional

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<sup>100</sup> Ioan Lăcătușu (coord.), *Genealogia familiei Colan [The Colan Family's Genealogy]*, Sfântu Gheorghe, Eurocarpatica Publishing House, 2012, p. 152.

<sup>101</sup> Ioan Lăcătușu and Erich-Mihail Broanăr, *quoted work*, p. 681.

spheres of law and theology to include economics and medicine. This evolution reflects the transformations of interwar Romanian society and the need to train specialists capable of contributing to the modernization of the state.

Despite their small numbers, the academic elites educated during this period played a significant role in strengthening Romanian cultural and educational institutions in the region. Through their professional and public activities, these intellectuals contributed to the affirmation of national identity and the integration of Romanian communities in southeastern Transylvania into the structures of the modern Romanian state.

In the first issue of the “ASTRA Bulletin of the Central Branch of Trei-Scaune County”, PhD. Ioan Vintilă, president of the ASTRA Central County Branch, writes the “Foreword”, in which he states the publication’s purpose: “to keep alive the flame of Romanian consciousness and culture” in this “region so neglected in cultural terms”<sup>102</sup>.

He conveys the idea of a Romanian cultural mission in a predominantly Szekler area.

The Program sounds the alarm regarding the existence of Romanian-speaking people who have been Magyarized and proposes their re-Romanianization through culture, using the Hungarian language as a transitional element:

“In the villages of Chichiș, Ozun, Lisnău, Sântionlunca, Comălău, Dobolii de Jos, Micfalău, Bicsad, Aita-Seacă, Aita-Medie, Căpeni, and Belin, where the Romanian population does not speak Romanian, conferences on Romanian topics will be held, with explanations in Hungarian, accompanied by slide shows and films”<sup>103</sup>.

Also worth mentioning is the “National House” project, which involved the purchase of a building in Sf. Gheorghe; among its donors were: doctor Miron Crețu, PhD. Nicolae Crăciun (prefect), Lieutenant Valer Fenechiu, Captain PhD. C. Berbescu, Archpriest Aurel Nistor, Eugen Sibianu, and others. These figures point to the alliance between the state and culture, the cohesion of the administrative, ecclesiastical, and intellectual elites, as well as the institutionalization of cultural nationalism.

## 5. THE COMMUNIST ERA

The communist era marked a period of significant expansion of the Romanian academic elite in the areas that are now Covasna and Harghita counties, both in terms of numbers and structure. While the number of Doctor of Science was relatively low

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<sup>102</sup> „să întrețină vie flacăra conștiinței și culturii românești” în acest „ținut atât de neglijat sub raport cultural”, in \*\*\*, *Buletinul ASTRA [ASTRA Newsletter]*, Year I, No. 1, November 1929, p. 2.

<sup>103</sup> „În satele Chichiș, Ozun, Lisnău, Sântionlunca, Comălău, Dobolii de Jos, Micfalău, Bicsad, Aita-Seacă, Aita-Medie, Căpeni și Belin, unde populația română nu știe românește, se vor ține conferințe cu subiecte românești și cu explicația în limba maghiară însoțite de proiecțiuni și cinematograf.”, in *Ibidem*, p. 5.

in earlier periods, this period saw a substantial increase, with 24 Doctors of Science identified, reflecting the profound transformations in the educational system and state policies regarding professional training.

This development is closely linked to the expansion of the higher education system and to policies aimed at promoting access to education for broader segments of society. Universities in Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, and other academic centers across the country are becoming the primary institutions for doctoral training, given that international mobility is limited and studying abroad is more of an exception.

In terms of fields of specialization, there is a significant diversification compared to previous periods. In addition to traditional fields such as law and theology, the exact, technical, and economic sciences are gaining an increasingly important share. Thus, fields such as physics, mathematics, engineering, geography, sociology, and economics are represented, reflecting the communist regime's focus on industrial and technical-scientific development.

In the field of exact and technical sciences, notable figures include Ioan Maxim (physical sciences), Ioan Brânduș (physical and mathematical sciences), Horia Colan (metallurgy)<sup>104</sup>, Ion Mușcutariu (physics)<sup>105</sup>, Octavian Sasu (mathematics), as well as Ioan Roșca, author of research in the field of operator equations.

The field of technical and engineering sciences is represented by Horia Colan, through his studies in metallurgy; Mihai Rafiroiu, with his research in the field of transportation systems and management; as well as Ioan Păstrăv, Vasile Bejan, and Gheorghe Moldoveanu, who specialize in mechanical engineering.

In the field of the social sciences and humanities, notable figures include Petru Pânzaru (sociology), Constantin Stanca (public opinion), Ion Ciurea (history and socio-political thought)<sup>106</sup>, Pavel Mureșan (social psychology) and Alexandru Tohăneanu (philosophy and literature), whose contributions reflect a focus on analyzing society within the context of the era. Ștefan Vodă also falls within this humanistic tradition through his contributions to the field of philology.

The field of economic sciences is represented by Susana Geangalău and Alexandru Horia Munteanu, while geographical research is represented by Ioan Șandru, through his study on the Onești-Bacău depression.

Medicine and the biological sciences are represented by Maria Crețu's contribution, while the field of theology is represented by Gheorghe Papuc<sup>107</sup>. The field of law also continues to be represented by works such as that of Matei Basarab.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the contribution of Valeriu Kavruk, through his research in archaeology and ethnogenesis conducted at Moscow State University,

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<sup>104</sup> Ioan Lăcătușu, *quoted work*, 1998, p. 55.

<sup>105</sup>\*\*\*, *Profesioniștii noștri 38. Prof. univ. dr. Ioan Mușcutariu – Cercetător și Om de știință, Fizica și Tehnologia Materiei Condensate, Patriot Român [Our Professionals 38. Prof. Ioan Mușcutariu, Ph.D. – Researcher and Scientist, Physics and Technology of Condensed Matter, Romanian Patriot]*, Sfântu Gheorghe, Eurocarpatca Publishing House, 2023.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>107</sup> Ioan Lăcătușu, *quoted work*, 1998, pp. 113–116.

which also reflects the existence of international academic connections, even within the constraints of that period<sup>108</sup>.

Another important aspect is the integration of these intellectuals into the institutional structures of the state and the academic system. Many of them became university faculty members, researchers, or specialists in various fields of economics and administration, contributing to the development of Romania's scientific and educational infrastructure. At the same time, it must be emphasized that their professional development took place within a restrictive ideological context, which influenced the focus of their research and academic freedom.

At the local level, this generation of intellectuals played a vital role in strengthening educational and cultural institutions and in maintaining a Romanian academic presence in a region characterized by ethnic diversity. Through their teaching, scientific, and professional work, they contributed to the training of new generations of specialists and to the affirmation of Romanian cultural and scientific values.

## 6. THE POST-DECEMBER PERIOD

The post-December period marks the most significant phase of development for the Romanian academic elite in the areas that are now Covasna and Harghita counties, characterized by a significant increase in the number of Doctor of Science, the diversification of research fields, and integration into the international academic community. This evolution was facilitated by the liberalization of access to education, the expansion of the university network, and the opportunity to pursue doctoral studies both domestically and abroad.

In terms of fields of study, there has been an unprecedented diversification. In the fields of economics and law, notable figures include Nicolae Ciangă, Valer Dorneanu, Susana Geangalău (who continues her work), Alexandru Horia Munteanu, Laura Oltean, Lucian Bunghez, and Traian Chindea.

The exact and technical sciences have seen significant development thanks to the contributions of Alina Stancu (U.S.), Nicolae Cotfas (PhD.s from Bucharest and Grenoble), Felix Furtună, Mihai-Tiberiu Lateş, Ilie Pentelescu, and Raluca Lateş, as well as through interdisciplinary research in the fields of computer science, physics, and engineering<sup>109</sup>.

In the field of natural and biological sciences, Ion Micu, Elena Glodeanu, Luiza Mike, Cecilia Farcaş, Dan Ciobanu, and Ana Maria Lazăr stand out, whose research reflects a focus on the study of the environment and natural resources. Medicine is represented by Horaţiu Suciu, as well as by the applied research in public health conducted by Mihaela and Paul Nicolae Suceveanu.

The social sciences and humanities, as well as cultural fields, play an important role. In this regard, the contributions of Ioan Lăcătuşu and Codrina Şandru in

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<sup>108</sup> Ioan Lăcătuşu and Erich-Mihail Broanăr, *quoted work*, p. 682.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 683.

sociology, and those of Alexandru Popa, Marius Ciută, Liviu Boar, Iosif Marin Balog, Magdalena Ștefan, Ana Dobreanu, Dorel Marc, Nicoleta Ploșnea, Costel-Cristian Lazăr, and Sebastian Lucian Pârvu in history are particularly noteworthy.

The fields of philology and literary studies are represented by Nicolae Bucur, Florina Truță-Matei, Doina Biturcă, Luminița Cornea, Marianne Iliescu, Catinca Agache, Ramona Lazăr, Cristina Bucur, Viorica Macrina Lazăr, and Cristina Nemeș, while philosophy and theoretical reflection are represented by Alexandru Surdu and Marius Dudan.

The field of theology has also seen significant development, thanks to the contributions of figures such as His Eminence Ioan Selejan, His Grace Sofian Brașoveanu, His Grace Andrei Moldovan, His Grace Ignatie Trif, Romeo Negrea, Cristian Groza, Petru Căținean, and Laurențiu Gabriel Panciu, highlighting the Church's ongoing role in shaping the intellectual elite<sup>110</sup>.

Archaeology and ethnography are represented by Valeriu Kavruk (continuing his work), Dan Buzea, Victor Sibianu, Adela Kovács, and Nicoleta-Paula Mazăre, while the field of international relations and European studies is represented by Mihai Alexandru Croitor.

It is also worth noting the presence of interdisciplinary and applied research in the fields of public administration (Codrin Dumitru Munteanu), mass media and interethnic relations (Claudiu Bădescu), as well as urban and social policies (Gina Gheață).

A defining feature of this period is the internationalization of academic training, as evidenced by studies conducted at universities in the United States (Alina Stancu, Alin Adrian Stancu, Romeo Măciucă), France, Germany, Greece, and Israel, which indicates the integration of the local elite into the global scientific community.

At the same time, there is also a new generation emerging, represented by PhDs such as Nicu Lazăr, Marius Banciu, Cristina Hadâmbu, Andreea Popa, Marius Dudan, Tatiana Scurtu, and doctoral candidate Florentina Teacă, as well as researchers involved in academic and cultural activities, which indicates the continuity of the process of shaping the intellectual elite in the region<sup>111</sup>.

## **7. THE VITAL ROLE OF THE ACADEMIC ELITE IN STRENGTHENING THE CULTURAL AND NATIONAL IDENTITY OF ROMANIANS IN COVASNA AND HARGHITA**

This analysis draws on the findings of a broader study focusing on Romanian intellectuals in Covasna and Harghita counties, based on an updated version of a previous bibliography and studies published since 2012. The volumes published by

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 684.

<sup>111</sup> The database used in this study is not exhaustive; the information is being continuously supplemented and updated as new documentary sources are identified.

Eurocarpatica Publishing House and its partner publishers make a significant contribution to documenting the history and culture of Romanians in southeastern Transylvania, helping to fill a gap in local and regional historiography.

When analyzing the local elites in Covasna and Harghita, one must also consider the concept of “ethnic elites”, as the leaders of these institutions are, at the same time, representatives of the ethnic communities in the area. Sociological studies indicate a distinction between the elite level – where interethnic tensions may arise – and the general population, which is primarily concerned with socioeconomic issues. Through their scientific and cultural contributions, Romanian intellectuals in Covasna and Harghita counties are helping to build and strengthen a genuine “identity” for the Romanian community in southeastern Transylvania.

An analysis of the development of Doctor of Science from the present-day counties of Covasna and Harghita between 1871 and 2025 reveals a complex process of formation, consolidation, and diversification of the Romanian academic elite in a region characterized by distinct historical, social, and ethno-demographic particularities.

During the Austro-Hungarian period, the first core groups of this elite began to take shape, despite limited access to higher education and significant institutional constraints. The small number of Doctor of Science and their concentration in fields such as law, medicine, and theology reflect both the limited opportunities of the era and the fundamental role of these professions in the social and national affirmation of Romanians in Transylvania.

The interwar period brought about greater openness within the Romanian and European university systems, though this did not result in a significant increase in enrollment. Instead, there was a diversification of educational pathways and greater integration into the Western intellectual sphere, which gave the academic elite a more complex profile better suited to the needs of the modern nation-state.

The major transformation took place during the communist regime, when, against the backdrop of the expansion of higher education and policies aimed at democratizing access to education, there was a significant increase in the number of Doctor of Science. This phase marked the institutionalization of the academic elite and the diversification of fields of specialization, particularly through the development of the technical and exact sciences. At the same time, the evolution of this elite was influenced by the ideological constraints specific to the regime.

The post-1989 period represents the phase of maturity and peak expansion for the academic elite, characterized by rapid numerical growth, disciplinary diversification, and internationalization. Free access to academic mobility and integration into the European and global research landscape have enabled the emergence of a generation of intellectuals attuned to new scientific and cultural paradigms. At the same time, there is a continued interest in the study of the identity, culture, and history of Romanians in southeastern Transylvania.

Overall, the evolution of this academic elite reflects the transition from a small, select group – formed under difficult conditions and concentrated in traditional fields

– to a diverse elite that is well-integrated into institutions and connected to the international scientific community. In this sense, the intellectuals analyzed represent not only individual achievements but also the expression of a collective effort to assert and consolidate the Romanian community within a multi-ethnic space.

At the same time, the study confirms that academic elites played a vital role not only in scientific and professional development, but also in preserving and promoting cultural and national identity. Through their educational, scientific, and public activities, they contributed to the construction of a genuine “identity” for Romanians in Covasna and Harghita counties, ensuring the continuity of cultural values and their integration into the broader context of Romanian and European society.

An important aspect of the academic elite’s work is reflected in the topics of their doctoral dissertations, which highlight a consistent focus on the study of the Intra-Carpathian region and the historical, social, and cultural realities of the Romanians living there. In the field of history and archaeology, notable works include:

- *Stone Structures in the Sântana de Mureș–Cernjachov Cultural Area [Construcții de piatră din aria culturii Sântana de Mureș – Cernjachov]* (Alexandru Popa);
- *The Beginnings of the Early Neolithic in the Transylvanian Intra-Carpathian Region [Începuturile neoliticului timpuriu în spațiul intracarpatic transilvănean]* (Marius Ciută);
- *Romanians in the Ciuc, Giurgeu, and Cașin Districts in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century [Românii din scaunele Ciuc, Giurgeu și Cașin în secolul al XIX-lea]* (Liviu Boar);
- *Southeastern Transylvania (1900-1914): A Socio-Political Study [Sud-estul Transilvaniei (1900-1914). Studiu socio-politic]* (Ana Doboreanu).

Research in the field of geography and environmental studies includes studies such as:

- *Tourism in the Eastern Carpathians [Turismul în Carpații Orientali]* (Nicolae Ciangă) and
- *The Small Depressions in the Central Group of the Eastern Carpathians [Depresiunile mici din grupa centrală a Carpaților Orientali]* (George Bogdan Tofan);

while the field of sociology is represented by works such as:

- *Ethnic and Confessional Structures in Covasna and Harghita Counties [Structuri etnice și confesionale în județele Covasna și Harghita]* (Ioan Lăcătușu) and
- *Social Networks of Local Elites in Harghita and Covasna [Rețele sociale ale elitelor locale în Harghita și Covasna]* (Codrina Șandru).

Furthermore, research in the fields of cultural identity and ethnography is exemplified by works such as:

- *Ethnocultural Aspects Specific to the Toplița and Mureș Regions [Aspecte etnoculturale specifice zonei Topliței și Mureșului]* (Dorel Marc) or
- *Romanian Churches, Schools, and Rural Communities in Covasna and Harghita [Biserici, școli și comunități rurale românești din Covasna și Harghita]* (Nicoleta Ploșnea);

while theological and ecclesiastical history studies include topics such as:

- *The Romanian Orthodox Church in Eastern Transylvania after World War II [Biserica Ortodoxă Română din estul Transilvaniei după al Doilea Război Mondial]* (Costel-Cristian Lazăr) or
- *The Religious Life of Romanians in Northern Harghita County During the Horthy Occupation (1940-1944) [Viața religioasă a românilor din nordul județului Harghita în perioada ocupației horthyste (1940-1944)]* (Valentin Florin Vatamanu).

At the same time, the thematic diversity is illustrated by works in the fields of exact sciences, economics, and technology, such as:

- *Hochschild cohomology and derived categories [Cohomologie Hochschild și categorii derivate]* (Alin Adrian Stancu);
- *The Effectiveness of Promoting Technical Progress in the Food Industry [Eficiența promovării progresului tehnic în industria alimentară]* (Lucian Bunghez); or research on the optimization of technical and energy systems conducted in Romanian and international academic settings.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Looking ahead, this research remains open to further additions and in-depth analysis, given that the identification and analysis of academic elites is a dynamic process, dependent on access to new documentary sources and contemporary developments in the academic and scientific environment.

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