

THE HISTORY OF A HISTORY: CORIOLAN SUCIU AND HIS HISTORICAL DICTIONARY OF TRANSYLVANIAN PLACE-NAMES

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The refinding of Coriolan Suciú in the history of Romanian historiography is undoubtedly supported by his activity and work.¹ The recent reconstruction of this researchers' biography or the following of the destiny of his doctorate thesis presented in 1921 and revised then in a few lines are the first signs of such a reconsideration.

Professor and pedagogue *par excellence* as well as a researcher in the field of history, C. Suciú wrote mainly studies of medievalism in his second youth. Employed in 1949 at the Historical Institute of Cluj he became a member of the collective which undertook the elaboration of the corpus of Latin documents. Here he came into contact with a fruitful field of research. His contact with medieval documents is illustrated by papers and articles (his contribution to studying the portrait of Hunyadi János in Hungarian historiography, a detailed excursion which catalogues the writings of Hungarian historians from cronic to the last approach of that subject, that of L. Elekes) and last but not least by his main work, *Dicționarul istoric al localităților din Transilvania (The Historical Dictionary of Transylvanian Place-Names)*. Addressed first of all to specialists, historians and men of letters, C. Suciú's Dictionary remains, two decades after its publication, a work of historical geography, unique in Romanian historiography. There are at least two reasons for this. On the one hand, the conception of such instruments of work requires a good mastering of the “equipment” of the historian, doubled on the other hand by an impressive perspicacity. C. Suciú, who was educated in Hungarian schools before 1918, an expert of German language, a graduate of History-Latin, and having a PhD in History (1921), was able to assume such a tentative. Beyond the professional support his perseverance originated in his understanding of the importance of his work. A statement in a letter addressed to Professor Al. Graur in 1961 proves to be relevant in this respect: “I can hardly wait for the end of this work which has compelled me into intense labour, similar to that of other authors of far-reaching dictionaries. I am referring to the statements of Candrea and Adamescu from Bucharest in their Prefaces to the encyclopaedic

¹ *Enciclopedia istoriografiei românești (The Encyclopedia of Romanian Historiography)*, București, 1978, p.306.

dictionary *Cartea Românească (Romanian Book)* or the revelations of M. Sadoveanu in *Mărturisiri (Confessions)* (p.193.) regarding the extraordinary work of Al. Philippide from Iași in his Dictionary of Romanian Language supported by the Academy.² The comparison made by Suciū in this excerpt quoted is justified.

Every excursion in the intellectual biography of this researcher is useful but his book is the most qualified for recommending this.³

The present study does not aim to test the “laboratory” of the historian; it does this only to the extent the relation between manuscript and printing permits and requires. In other words, the present excursion begins at the point where the historian’s work ends and the fight for publication begins. It is over this long period, almost a decade, during which the work is forever changing its form and content.

The *Dictionary* belongs to the line of certain contributors to Transylvanian historiography (Hungarian, German, Romanian), preoccupied mainly with the compilation of reference works. It is modelled on the research of Hungarian historians (Csánki) and is synchronous with other approaches from the same cultural space (Györffy). The closeness is not just formally linked to similar works; it is apparent in the problems of approach, the mode of conceiving of past events as well as in the perspective of the organisation of historical material. These convergences are circumscribed to an intellectual space of Central Europe with common reference resources.

The horizon of Suciū’s *Dictionary* is recomposed on the basis of Suciū’s correspondence from which a number of 60 letters refer to the work mentioned above. Those who wrote to Suciū or received letters from him (he always wrote a draft first or kept a copy of the letter) were either directly involved in the publishing of the work (Al. Graur, V. Curtipăceanu, Hilda Mazilu) or they had been asked to assist in its publication (E. Petrovici, Șt. Pascu). The study of this correspondence opens a new perspective into the approach to C. Suciū’s book. More stages can thus be identified in the evolution of the manuscript from the “laboratory” of the researcher to the approval of publishing.

² “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library, Cluj. Special Collections. Coriolan Suciū Collection, letter on 17 April 1961.

³ The Dictionary (in two volumes) was compiled on the basis of the documentary toponymical material, offered by the edition of the corpus of medieval Transylvanian documents, containing existing and disappeared places, beginning with their first appearance in documents until the edition of this dictionary.

Part I contains the names of places according to the indices in 1956 and the various Romanian, Hungarian and German names followed by the explanations according to the administrative division in 1960. This information was completed with names taken from documents in chronological order.

In Part II, dedicated to disappeared places, settlements are mentioned in alphabetic order, the starting point being the oldest form in which they appear in documents.

Our first discovery is that the period between 1957-1959 was a time of probing, searching for a publishing house. The discussions with Alexandru Vasile from the Scientific Publishing House and his two submissions to this publishing house, both rejected, are evident. After a recommendation from Professor Emil Petrovici, the Academy Publishing House showed interest in his work.

The list of explanations⁴ which accompanied the offer in 1957, proves the fact that subsequent political regimes in Transylvania changed the names of places if they were dissatisfied with the resonance of names, therefore it has become more difficult to promptly identify places.

The work published in Sibiu at the beginning of the century by Silvestru Moldovan and Nicolae Togan contains only the old names. Similarly, the writing of Martinovici and Istrate, published in Cluj contains old Romanian names and only the new Hungarian ones.

The other indices and lists of entries (1930, 1932, 1954, 1956) refer to contemporary names only. These facts cause inaccuracies as they put into circulation an often erroneous nomenclature.

Coriolan Suciu proposed to “remedy these anomalies” with his *Dictionary*. It was necessary that his work contained three sections: 1) General section with actual and old names 2) Romanian-Hungarian section with Hungarian names and the current Romanian name 3) Romanian section.

The volume contains approximately 14 million names at the time of the edition; it is compiled up to the letter H. The author wanted to finish it by the end of 1958.

His methodology of research did not get the desired attention of the institution he addressed himself to. In the answer of the publishing house in November 1957 it is stated laconically that the work “cannot be contracted”. They suggest to the author that the Academy Publishing House might be interested in publishing it.⁵

In March 1959 C. Suciu is again advised to apply to the Scientific Publishing House.⁶ The time lapse between the previous action brought changes to the composition of the book. The researcher now mentioned four parts to his work, containing almost 17.000 names which would have meant approximately 40 printed sheets. This time C. Suciu insisted that the work did not become part of the research plan of the History Institute where he had been employed part-time.

Once again the answer of the Publishing House was negative: the work does not comply with the “editorial profile”. Again contact with the Publishing House of the Academy was discussed.⁷

⁴ “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library. Cited collection, Cluj, 12 September 1957

⁵ *Ibidem*, București, 11 November 1957

⁶ *Ibidem*. Cluj, 31 March 1959

⁷ *Ibidem*, București, 9 April 1959

The intention of Suciu to address himself to the Academy can be seen from a letter to Professor Emil Petrovici in April 1959⁸. Suciu says that he has almost finished his work: he has had to trace disappeared places from “the former Iimiş county”.

The Academy Publishing House asked for a “detailed draft” which described the “content of the work, the bibliography and the submission date”⁹. This request tells us that the historian was not in contact with the special institution of the Academy. The editors knew Suciu’s work only vaguely, from verbal recommendations. They called it “toponymical repertory for Transylvania in the Middle Ages.”

In comparison with the previous description, the July 1959 draft¹⁰ mentions a fourth part which contains disappeared places. The bibliography presented then is completed by the volumes of the *Documente privind istoria României* (*Documents Regarding the History of Romania*) and other collections of documents to which he makes reference only and specifies in a letter the following year: “I did not stop at the year 1350, the date to which our collection of 6 volumes of printed documents goes back, but I have used and am using for the villages in Fundus Regius those four volumes of *Urkundenbuch* of the Zimmermann collection which goes back to 1347, the four volumes of *Székely Oklevéltár* (up to 1695) for villages in Seklerland and, in addition to the three volumes of Csánki, the monographs of counties (Petri, Kádár, Jakó, Maksai, Pesty, Márki, Lotreanu, Filipaşcu, Bélay, etc.), some of which go back to the 19th century¹¹, for villages from counties.” The deadline for finishing the work is three months after the conclusion of the contract. The date proposed initially (7 November 1959) could not be undertaken because of the typewriting service.

In the same month the Academy Publishing House took an interest in his work; it considered “interesting and useful” the problems addressed by the work. However, because of certain “editorial schemes” the publishing house could not conclude the contract over the next 8 months and suggested its conclusion “after the presentation of the manuscript”¹².

Interested in the publication of the work, the publishing house frequently inquired about the typing of the work. In order to prevent mistakes C.Suciu began to type his work by himself. In December 1959 the author writes: “Part II (disappeared places) is typed, 448 pages; Part III (Hungarian-Romanian), 206 pages; Part III (German-Romanian), 31 pages and 179 pages from Part I (existing places - letters A and B).” The author estimates the edition of further 600-700

⁸Ibidem, Cluj, 27 April 1959

⁹Ibidem, Bucureşti, 8 July 1959

¹⁰Ibidem, Cluj, 31 July 1959

¹¹Ibidem, Cluj, 3 March 1959

¹²Ibidem, Bucureşti, 18 July 1959

pages: "I hope that at the end of March 1960 I can finish this difficult and fastidious work which has worried me for almost a decade now and which has tried me in the last years."¹³

The elaboration of the work brought even surprises to Suciú. We find out from a letter that although he had added 500 pages to those from 29 December 1959, arriving at the letter G, "there will be some hundreds of pages until the letter Z". The work is becoming a real historical dictionary, a small encyclopedia of Transylvanian place-names."¹⁴

The next account of the *Dictionary* dates from the beginning of 1961. According to this, the typing of the work is considered finished and the manuscript in the possession of the publishing house. The addressee of this letter warned Suciú that the Historical Institute in Cluj has displayed reticence "which means that the manuscript cannot be published in the present form"¹⁵. In response to these objections, the author contacted Professor C. Daicoviciu, Director of the Historical Institute in Cluj and together they established certain "modifications, completions and reductions" necessary for the correction of the manuscript. The modifications were presented by Suciú in a letter on 6 February 1961: "1. the modifications brought about by the new administrative law on 24 December 1960 will be taken into consideration; 2. in Part I there will be references to the contemporary denominations of places; 3. Part III and IV will be merged with Part I; 4. the exposition of events linked to documentary dates will be omitted."¹⁶ If there were motivations for points 2,3 and 4, Suciú himself insisted on the first one in a letter addressed to the Director of the Academy Publishing House. Receiving the manuscript so that he could edit it, he asked for a copy of the *Indicator alfabetic al localitãþilor din RPR (Alphabetic Index of places in the Popular Republic of Romania)*, because his references were based on the *Buletinul oficial (Official Gazette)* which published the distribution of villages into voting sections.¹⁷ Making these modifications meant in fact a re-discussion of the structure, the formal aspects as well as the mode of presentation of the information and the content. From a history of Transylvanian places, as Suciú enthusiastically presented it in March 1960, it had become a schematic dictionary, not without value, however.

C.Suciú wanted to conclude the contract with the publishing house, therefore he informed them about the length of the work, approximately 1800-2000 typewritten pages in his estimation, and the date when it would be ready in the new form, that is, May 1961¹⁸.

¹³Ibidem, Cluj, 22 December 1959

¹⁴Ibidem, Cluj, 3 March 1960

¹⁵Ibidem, Bucureþti, 11 January 1961

¹⁶Ibidem, Cluj, 6 February 1961

¹⁷Ibidem, Cluj, 17 April 1961

¹⁸Ibidem, Cluj, 18 February 1961

This work of “longue haleine” which compelled the researcher “to intense labour” was ready in its new form at the end of July. Therefore, on 2 August 1961 C. Suciú was able to present the manuscript to the Academy Publishing House under the recommendation of Professor C. Daicoviciu¹⁹.

However, handing over the manuscript did not mean the conclusion of the contract which was dragged out. Because of the lack of money at the beginning, then Professor Al. Graur’s visit to France, whose signature was necessary for validating the contract, the contract was not completed. C. Suciú was thus compelled to inquire about its fate in a letter addressed to Vasile Curtipăceanu, Chief of the History Department of the Academy Publishing House²⁰.

Suciú found out from unofficial sources in December that his work had been accepted by the History Department of the Academy and consequently the contract could not be postponed for long²¹. He received it in Cluj on 9 February 1962²². According to this, the work had 45 printed sheets and would bring the author an income of 18.000 lei, in two instalments: the first would be 80Î of the total sum, paid at the acceptance of the manuscript; the remainder would be paid when the first copies were handed over for distribution. The rights of the author decreed that he should receive 30 free copies. The contract established a provisional circulation of 3000 copies and the appointment of the publishing house to publish the book until 1964. The distinction between *delivery* and *acceptance* is interesting in the contract. The acceptance takes place if after 120 days there was no refusal or proposal of modifications, which conditions the date of publishing as well. In spite of the positive notification of the Academy, Suciú’s work was submitted to a further control: Șt. Pascu and Zs. Jakó in the fall of 1962²³. They concluded that the *Dictionary* was very useful “on account of the important documentary material it contains and its publication is therefore necessary.” Alongside these compliments they made some suggestions to the author (regarding the bibliography, the merging of the two parts: existing and disappeared places, following all the places up to a certain date, indicating the official name of places in the 19th century and the interwar period, eliminating certain redundant information, indicating the administrative division to which the place in question belonged at the date mentioned). These observations were brought to Suciú’s knowledge directly and he presented his point of view in written form. He accepted the revision of the mode of presenting the bibliography but did not agree with merging the two parts which had already been discussed with Daicoviciu and accepted by the publishing house. Similarly, he did not mention the administrative

¹⁹Ibidem, Cluj, 2 August 1961

²⁰Ibidem, Cluj, 20 November 1961

²¹Ibidem, București, 11 December 1961

²²Ibidem, București, 9 February 1962

²³Ibidem.

division when a place was mentioned, because this would have been difficult and lengthy, "given the many changes occurring in the administrative division in the last three centuries..."²⁴ The rewritten work was again read by the two professors in the fall of 1963. They found that C.Suciu had taken into consideration "most of the observations contained in the report including those from the marginal notes." The reviewers recommended its publication "as soon as possible" as it was adequate from a scientific point of view and it was an indispensable instrument for historical research and men of letters²⁵.

It was also in this period of time that the work was completed with data supplied by specialist works published at Budapest, namely the work of Györffy György on the historical geography of Hungary in the age of the Arpadians²⁶.

The work had to be included in the editorial plan of 1964 and C.Suciu's approaches can be read in a letter to the President of the RPR's Academy, Professor Ilie Murgulescu, whose approval was necessary. He explained the evolution of the work and his perseverance and solicited the "due approval"²⁷ for the sake of science. It seems that his insistence did not have the anticipated effect and for a year there was no reference at all to the *Dictionary*. It is only mentioned again in February 1965, in a letter addressed to V. Curtipăceanu²⁸. C. Suciu's relation to time is significant to this epoch. If he had previously omitted numerals ("for ten years", "for a decade", "for dozens of years"), in 1965 he used the phrase "for such a long time".

Events took again another turn. Although Șt. Pascu also confirmed the inclusion of the dictionary in the editorial plan of 1965²⁹, this plan still needed the approval of the President of the Academy. Only two months later, a close relative of Suciu wrote him that during a discussion with V. Curtipăceanu he found out that the work had been proposed for publication for the presidium of the Academy only in 1966³⁰.

Reintegrated in the exorcising time of people ("for more than a decade"), almost 70 years old, Suciu hesitated until the end of June when he decided to address himself to Professor Al. Graur³¹. The presentation of his case was completed with an attempt to rendering Professor Al. Graur intellectually sensitive. Therefore the Dictionary becomes a *finis coronat opus*. Instead of appealing to the authority of Professor Emil Petrovici and Andrei Oțetea, the first one colleague with Suciu at the Sorbonne in 1922, the second one an acquaintance from Paris

²⁴ Ibidem

²⁵ Ibidem

²⁶ Ibidem, Cluj, 17 October 1960

²⁷ Ibidem, Cluj, 20 February 1964

²⁸ Ibidem, Cluj, 20 February 1965

²⁹ Ibidem, Cluj, 28 March 1965

³⁰ Ibidem, București, 7 May 1965

³¹ Ibidem, Cluj, 25 June 1965

("at the time when we had dinner together at the Marmorosch-Bkank restaurant in Paris"), the researcher chooses the direct address of Al. Graur, who "attended the same course rooms in the old University founded in 1257 by Robert de Sorbon, perhaps a little later, than us". After five days only, The Publishing House of the Academy announced Suciu officially that his work was part of the editorial plan of the 1966 year³².

In September the *Dictionary* was revised again for the sake of concord with the new names used by the 1964 catalogue. In November Suciu reduced the text to those 45 sheets foreseen previously³³.

The first volume of the book (letters A-N) was returned to the author in March 1966 with the suggestion that he should underline in the preface the special situation in Transylvania, the method of composition and its relevance for Romanian historiography³⁴. The revised manuscript was sent back to the publishing house in April, the other parts of the work, too, the last one arriving at Cluj in June. A new contract was signed in summer, as there were two volumes instead of one, as it was agreed initially³⁵. In order to obtain the financial rights that belonged to him, Suciu had to prove that his work had not been part of the research plan of the Institute of History in Cluj, presenting a declaration and a certificate, in June 1966³⁶. From then on, Suciu had to confront problems of formal nature before the publication of his work (letters, page setup, etc.)

Another problem arised in autumn, at the end of September. The copy of the work, which was sent to Cluj with the original in order to obtain the scientific approval, remained at the Institute of History, as the editor of the *Dictionary*, Hilda Mazilu wrote³⁷. Therefore, following the destiny of the manuscript, from 1962, Suciu points out that he had not seen that second copy, the original of which was in the possession of the Publishing House of the Academy³⁸.

The work was printed at the middle of October, but the proofreading was coming along with difficulty as V. Curtipăceanu said, because the author was not in Bucharest³⁹.

The long-awaited *Dictionary* was published in 1967, its second volume in 1968, but its author was already dead at that time.

The close view of the destiny of Suciu's work calls our attention to certain important stages in the printing of a manuscript.

³²Ibidem, București, 1 July 1965

³³Ibidem, București, 29 Septembr 1965

³⁴Ibidem, București, 22 March 1966

³⁵Ibidem, București, 9 June 1966

³⁶Ibidem, Cluj, 18 June 1966

³⁷Ibidem, București, 1 October 1966

³⁸Ibidem, Cluj, 5 October 1966

³⁹Ibidem, București, 15 October 1966

A first stage would be the 1957-1959 period, a time of probing, of looking for a publishing house. There were two offers to the Scientific Publishing House, both of them rejected, and, finally, the Publishing House of the Academy took interest in such a work.

Another stage was marked by the acceptance of the offer by the Publishing House of the Academy and the conclusion of the contract as well as the acceptance of the manuscript (1963). These were years of restructuring the architecture as well as the content of the book. There were two decisive interventions in the initial form of the manuscript, one under the guidance of C. Daicoviciu, the other after the suggestions of Professor Jakó and Pascu, reviewers at the Publishing House of the Academy.

The last stage was that between 1963 and the inclusion of the Dictionary in the editorial plan of 1966, a time marked by uneasiness and effective intellectual steps.

Finally, the understanding of the importance of such an instrument of work was the moral support and comfort in those nine years of wait. Relevant is one of Suciu's letters in which he writes: "Professor Emil Petrovici showed me a letter from a Professor of the Humboldt University in Berlin, who was asking for a dictionary which could help in identifying Transylvanian places."⁴⁰ We find the same idea in a letter addressed to V. Curtipăceanu in 1965: "A typewritten copy of the first edition of my work, placed at your disposal in May last year at the request of my colleagues from the Institute of History, is already tatters, as Sabin Belu told me, so many times had it been turned over."⁴¹

At the end of these summary remarks attention is drawn on the fact that, withdrawing from the perspective of the sensational, the correspondence round Suciu's book presents an exemplary intellectual destiny, that of the scholar.

⁴⁰Ibidem, Cluj, 20 November 1963

⁴¹Ibidem, Cluj, 20 February 1965