

Mircea Popa: Andrei VERESS – a Hungarian bibliographer, friend of Romanians

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Mircea Popa's book introduces us to the fascinating historical and literary world of the late Hungarian historian, erudite and bibliographer, Andrei Veress, who "lived his entire life in the spirit of Romanian–Hungarian collaboration". It begins with a foreword – or as the author calls it: *Clarifying Foreword* –, which describes attractively the city of Budapest with its remarkable architecture and history, a place the author knew from his journeys and different writings. Budapest is a special location, ideal for study, meditation and writing, where the author spent some time as a recipient of a scholarship. He recalls that: here "I did not consider myself a stranger, on the contrary, I was accompanied by my ancestors, I invited them to take part, together with me, in their victory through time, due to that miraculous metempsychosis by which we can – at least in our imagination – live several lives at the same time". The discovery of Andrei Veress' manuscript and letter collection was a real revelation for the Romanian researcher, for the Hungarian historian was a man as close to Romanians as to his own nation. Surely you must be a well educated and intelligent person to be able to approach with such an open and generous heart your fellow creatures irrespective of nationality, religion or colour. Similarly, it is remarkable that Mircea Popa, following the footsteps of his predecessor, praises the good relationships – such as they ought to be – between different nations and ethnicities. These friendly relationships must be encouraged for they are the firm basis of collaboration, peaceful coexistence, understanding and progress. Without opening, without understanding other people's wishes and needs, without tolerance one cannot go on/towards the road of European culture.

The portrait of the Hungarian scholar holds the key to friendly relationships, profitable both for Romanians and Hungarians. This exemplary attitude is present in the entire book. We shall see Veress'

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views regarding this issue mirrored by his life and the valuable work he left to us. After we have become acquainted with Andrei Veress' life and work we pass on to the rich correspondence he had with important personalities of his age. This large and laborious correspondence helped him in accomplishing his life work, but, through it, he as well helped others and established many lifelong friendships.

I am very puzzled by the fact that, though the volume was first given to Kriterion Publishing House, nevertheless, after "three full years" had passed – as the author Mircea Popa says –, the publishing house did not really seemed interested in publishing it. The astonishment, the surprise is caused by the fact that this publishing house is a "Hungarian" one and the work itself discusses a scholar of the same nationality, about whom not a Hungarian, but a Romanian writes beautifully this time. I wonder therefore why this lack of interest? Was it not up-to-date? Was the book not sufficiently saleable? Was the person "discussed" too attached to people having other political views or belonging to another nation?! Was it a form of censorship? The questions and suppositions can continue, but the essential fact is, it was published by another publishing house.

Putting aside the difficulties regarding the publication of the book, we have before us a valuable work presenting important cultural, historical and library science data. The uninitiated get acquainted with Andrei Veress' life work, while, for those who are familiar with this, it is both a rememoration and the source of further information.

I am completely in accord with Mircea Popa who says: "may the example of this historian serve as a guideline for the present day relationship between Romanians and Hungarians, so that these may regain their former value and nobility. With this hope I offer this book today to my fellow men of any nationality, religion and political party."

The book therefore also wishes to bring closer together the two nations, Romanians and Hungarians in the field of culture, history and civilization. It consists of six chapters to which a bibliography of Andrei Veress' work is added, and, as an appendix, letters from his correspondence with different men of culture.

In Chapter I – *Bibliographical Reference Points* – we are offered a general view on the late historian and scholar, Andrei Veress' biography. He was born on February 15, 1868 in Békés, in Hungary as Alexandru Veress' son. The father was a railway and hydraulic engineer and a surveyor who studied in Debrecen and Vienna and participated in the Revolution of 1848–49. He was one of the Hungarian emigrants to

the Orient. He went at first to London (in 1858), then to Paris where he finished his technical studies. Afterwards he settled in Bucharest where he lived for 25 years. Here he became the chronicler of the emigrants with his work: *A magyar emigráció a keleten* (The Hungarian Emigrants in the Orient).

Andrei Veress went to a German elementary school, and then studied at the Romanian Dimitrie Cantemir Gymnasium in Bucharest and at the Faculty of Letters of the Cluj University. Having graduated, in 1894, he was sent for speciality studies to Vienna receiving the scholarship of the Institute of Palaeography. He had begun his career as a writer and researcher beside his father during his studies in Bucharest within the Hungarian Cultural Society in Bucharest and continued it in Deva and Cluj.

In Vienna he attended history courses and worked in the old archives. Which assisted him in his final choice of studying history. Having returned to Transylvania, in 1898, he was appointed Professor of history and geography. Here he made systematic research work in the archives which resulted in reference works. In 1902 he made investigations in the archives of Rome. In 1903 he became archivist and librarian at the University Library of Cluj where he had extensive research activity. In 1905 he married Mária Méhelyi from Kis-Apsa, Maramureş County, who bore him two sons. In 1905 he moved to Budapest where he worked as a professor and an archivist, and then he became Councillor at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and at the Ministry of Culture.

He performed extensive research in European archives in: Bohemia, Italy, Poland, Russia, Germany, Austria, Netherlands, England, Spain etc. He was interested in everything related to Transylvania, Moldova and Walachia in the 16–18th centuries.

His was a remarkable activity which was noticed by the great personalities of his age, such as: N. Iorga, I. Bianu – his lifelong friend –, Z. Pâclişanu as well as numerous Transylvanian intellectuals.

In 1911, Andrei Veress elaborated a scientific project in order to publish the series *Fontes Rerum Transylvanicarum*. In 1919 he was appointed Chief Rapporteur for Romania to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Budapest. He opened a private translation agency, being named an official Romanian interpreter at Budapest Court. On July 1, 1922 he retired.

The works he left behind are unusual both quantitatively and for their scientific, historical and cultural value. In this abundant

informational flow there are two works of great complexity, renown and value. We refer to *Documente privitoare la istoria Ardealului, Moldovei și Țării Românești* (Documents Regarding the History of Transylvania, Moldova and Walachia), of which 11 volumes were published and *Bibliografia româno-ungară. Românii în literatura ungară și ungurii în literatură română* (Romanian–Hungarian Bibliography. Romanians in Hungarian Literature and Hungarians in Romanian Literature), in 3 volumes.

In his whole life, Andrei Veress served with all his ability, expertise, dedication, work, human qualities and professionalism the cause of Romanian history, historical truth, collaboration, good understanding and relationship between Romanians and Hungarians. He was a real friend for all who needed him, even if he was sometimes criticized by both parties because of his nature and actions. He was not a member of any Academy. He died in Pécs on November 24, 1953, in the 85th year of his life. This first chapter of the book is admirable for the great amount of data and information it gives.

Chapter II entitled *Preocupări de istorie românească* (Studies of Romanian History) refers to a valuable and important documentary amalgam which reveals the fact that Andrei Veress' main preoccupation was directed both to the Romanians and the Hungarians, as their history and spirituality became inseparable in this cultural and historical tumult. Andrei Veress offered us an example of openness toward the good relationship and understanding and peaceful coexistence.

The author, Mircea Popa speaks about Andrei Veress' "nostalgia for the cultural environment of Bucharest" where his education began and where he was attracted to history and the investigation of the common cultural past. He had been attracted by the history of the two communities and peoples since his youth. History can be a unifying or a destabilizing factor, it can make us better, more tolerant, wiser, more respectful towards the others, or, on the contrary, more contemptuous, false, more unreasonable, more intransigent. I would like to cite in this sense the author of the book who says extremely naturally: "for if history separates us, it also brings us together and the heritage of the past should not be an impediment, nor an obstacle on the way of collaboration, on the contrary, it should be a road towards understanding and it should help to surpass the present state of things."

The 11 volumes of *Documents...* refer to a long historical period and offers new data, information and new perspectives, very valuable for our history. It was a huge and laborious work to compile these volumes

and it required collaboration with numerous “partners”. Andrei Veress collaborated with a series of periodicals too, writing articles, studies and memorials for them. Mircea Popa refers to these in this chapter.

We must also mention Andrei Veress’ contribution to Nerva Hodoș’s and Ioan Bianu’s exceptional *Bibliografia românească veche* (Old Romanian Bibliography).

His manuscript and posthumous works, the following part of the book, presents us the complex and extensive preoccupations and projects of the historian and bibliographer, Andrei Veress, “a researcher open to the multiplicity of the historical phenomenon”. The impressive amount of letters kept in the Andrei Veress Collection of the archives in Budapest and in the manuscript collection of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Library is really useful as it documents Veress’ research activity. All these letters complete and illustrate yet another time his field of interests and his particular inclination to promote the Romanian–Hungarian relationships.

A significant part of this chapter refers to his work on the history of the Printing House of Buda, a book compiling 563 documents in Latin, Hungarian, German and Romanian, unfortunately not published directly under Andrei Veress’ name. Mircea Popa presents a great number of illustrious names of the literary and cultural life who addressed the Publishing House of Buda, collaborated with it or published their works here. From among these names we can mention the leaders of the Transylvanian School. We receive other interesting information from this source regarding the practices of censorship applied in the case of some works, how the publication and promotion of Romanian book was postponed. We must also mention the collaboration between the Publishing House of Buda and the Romanian publishing houses of Moldova and Walachia.

There were also several projects which Andrei Veress could not finish. We have a series of manuscripts ready for printing which were not published in his lifetime and which offer us data on history, the political and economic life, diplomacy, genealogy, heraldry, and representative personalities. He published studies written in Romanian, in a series of scientific journals; such as: *Analele Academiei Române* (Annals of the Romanian Academy), *Revista Arhivelor* (The Journal of Archives), *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie din Cluj* (Yearbook of the Historical Institute in Cluj), *Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice* (Bulletin of the Commission of Historical Monuments), *Revista istorică română* (Romanian Historical Review), *Noua revistă istorică română* (New

Romanian Historical Review), *Academia Română* (Romanian Academy). He even had the idea to edit a series which would have contained the Romanian translation of the most important Hungarian literary masterpieces.

The present work must contain, of course, a chapter dedicated to Andrei Veress' main work, *Bibliografia Româno-Maghiară* (Romanian–Hungarian Bibliography), an exceptionally valuable book in three volumes and a very useful instrument of work for researchers.

The extensive preoccupations of the historian are aimed at the history of Transylvania in the 16–17th centuries and her relations with Moldova and Walachia. This work brings a new and warm light to the history of the cultural and political relationships between Romanians and Hungarians.

An essential element is the collaboration, friendship and extensive correspondence with the representative personalities and institutions of the age. Therefore Chapter V, dedicated to this correspondence, is, I dare say, a cross-section of Andrei Veress' personality and psychology. According to Mircea Popa's characterization his Romanian was good, he was popular in the scientific and cultural circles, admired and appreciated, an erudite historian with extensive knowledge, objective, elegant in handling delicate problems, well educated, having a normal and attentive behaviour, generous when asked for different information and data.

The list of his correspondents includes thousands of persons, Italians, French, Germans, Czechs, Polish, English, Belgians, Spanish, Hungarians and Romanians. It is sufficient to mention only the following in order to realize the wide range of his correspondents: Ioan Bianu, Nicolae Iorga, Z. Pâclișanu, Ioachim Crăciun, P. P. Panaitescu, Elie Dăianu, Iorgu Iordan, Zsigmond Móricz, Mihály Babits, Kálmán Mikszáth, Zsigmond Jakó and many, many others.

"His entire activity devoted to the service of two cultures and peoples unfurled under this noble emblem of friendship. It is not easy to find such a model of confraternity, to illustrate better the idea of collaboration and sincere devotion to the common scientific progress."

The last chapter of Mircea Popa's book, entitled *Portret în timp sau între acceptare și contestare* (Portrait in time or acceptance and contestation) refers to different aspects of Andrei Veress' life and activity which was often severely criticized, censured, suspected, ostracized by people he considered his friends and to whom he dedicated his entire work, moreover, his entire life. In other stages of his exceptional life he

was praised, his deeds approved and his many competences, his erudition, skill and laborious work acknowledged.

We must acknowledge, that such an exceptional historical, cultural and biographical contribution requires many “investments”. But, finally, all he accomplished was and is in the interest of both Romanians and Hungarians. He always felt that he belonged to both peoples and cultures he studied, and, in this context, it seems that he imposed on himself voluntarily some imperative rules: truth, good faith and the service of science.

In order to confirm what we have said above it is enough to mention episodes related to Andrei Veress and the great historian Nicolae Iorga. Iorga appreciated so much Veress’ work and efforts that he offered him the membership of the Romanian Academy, but Veress refused this unique opportunity. The same Iorga in another situation criticized him and accused him of historical partiality, intervening for this reason with the Academy to suspend the publication of the *Documents...*

One thing is certain, that Andrei Veress contributed greatly, even historically, to the cause of Romanian–Hungarian friendship.

The six chapters of the volume are completed by a biography comprising Andrei Veress’ huge oeuvre, divided into Romanian works, Hungarian works as well as writings about him. The book ends with letters from Veress’ extensive correspondence with important personalities of his age discussing different problems, belonging to different domains, a correspondence which greatly contributed to his imposing achievements. This last part of the book reveals that he had correspondents such as: D. Bodin, Gr. Conduratu, I. C. Filitti, C. Marinescu, V. Papacostea, I. Sârbu, D. Şandru, Ilie Bărbulescu, Gh. I. Brătianu, R. Cădea, M. Costăchescu, I. Iordan, S. Ştefănescu, M. Ştefănescu, I. Ursu. But the most valuable is the correspondence between Andrei Veress and Ioan Bianu because of the human warmth and friendship it emits.

I cannot leave unsaid what I observed when I read this book, namely the unpardonably great number of typographic errors, an element to which any publishing house with self-respect must pay attention. The errors I found, fortunately, do not tarnish the message sent to the reader, and the text can be understood in spite of these mistakes.

Mircea Popa turned with sympathy and passion to the life and activity of this Hungarian historian and bibliographer, following the example of him who never hesitated when he could tie, bind, rebind and

ennoble warm and natural sentiments and human feelings. The book presents us the ardour and work of a man who put his destiny, his work and his knowledge to the service of the people he really loved: Romanians and Hungarians side by side. This book, I dare say, is the “investigation” of the way in which historical reality can be seen – a new point of view, a new perspective, beyond passions, hate, political wanderings, rancour, the repression and disapproval of all that violates good faith.

Translated by Ágnes Korondi

The Buildings of Cluj or the Silent Witnesses

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The National Theatre and the Romanian Opera, the Clinical Hospitals, the Hungarian Theatre and Opera, the Franciscan Church and Monastery, the Calvinist Church, the Saint Michael Church, the Bánffy Palace, the Taylors’ Bastion, the Neolog Synagogue, the Palace of Justice, the National Historical Museum of Transylvania, the Main Building of the Babeş-Bolyai University, the Central University Library are like some silent witnesses, indifferent to the hurried passer-by bored and tired of the unchanging scenery, revealing the local history and the history of mentalities for those who want to see “in them” more than simple buildings.

The Central University Library of Cluj is such a witness, and the volume bearing the same title, published by the Alma Mater Publishing House, signed by the architect Gheorghe Vais,² captures the attention of any person for whom the building situated on the western side of the former Arany János Square, placed at the intersection of Clinicilor and Babeş Streets, is not a unknown or tourist object, monument, but, on the contrary, an element of students’ life, of memories, an “information” which must be given value.

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² Gheorghe Vais, *Biblioteca Centrală Universitară Cluj 1906–1909* (The Cluj Central University Library 1906–1909), Cluj-Napoca, Editura Alma Mater, 2006.