

## BOOK REVIEWS

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GYÓRFI DÉNES, *Bibliotheca Universitatis Claudiopolitanae. Evoluția instituțională și practici ale lecturii în Clujul universitar (1872-1945)* [Bibliotheca Universitatis Claudiopolitanae. The institutional evolution and the reading practices of the Cluj university town (1872-1945)] (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2019)

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The volume *Bibliotheca Universitatis Claudiopolitanae. Evoluția instituțională și practici ale lecturii în Clujul universitar (1872-1945)* presents, in a historical succession, the main stages in the establishment, consolidation and means of functioning of the University Library of Cluj, beginning in 1875, until 1945. Thus, divided into four main chapters, Gyórfi Dénes traces the history of the library in the four distinctive stages of its functioning: the first stage, between 1872-1918, the second, covering the interwar period, 1919-1939, the third, which is shorter, covering the refuge taken in Sibiu between 1940-1945 and the last, approached in the form of a conclusion, only covering the period until 1945 and the library's return to Cluj.

Elaborated from a diachronic perspective, the present volume follows the development of the library, as well as its evolution, in correlation with the great historical events (World War I, The Great Union, The Dictate of Vienna and World War II), as well as with its confirmation as an educational institution which continuously increases its collections, constantly develops the services it offers its readers and which is in a permanent search for its own institutional identity, in relation with the academic life of the town and the of the country. As an academic institution, the University Library represented an important pillar for the Cluj education system and not merely an annex of the University, as those less interested in science and knowledge would be inclined to believe. As proven by the present book, the University Library was an institution that was consolidated together with the development of the academic education system of Cluj; however, through the diversity and the high value of the documentary collections acquired over the years, as well as its special collections, the library proved to also be a true treasure island of books, for all those who crossed its threshold, interested in their intellectual

formation and knowledge. Gyórfi Dénes's book, which is very well documented in this respect, by presenting the history of the library fully supports these statements.

As is the case of the history of Transylvania, the history of the institutions from this part of the country can reveal certain difficulties for the researchers inclined to express subjective, passionate or biased viewpoints in relation with the historical events that unfolded. Gyórfi Dénes manages to maintain a certain balance and, by focusing on the library as an institution, he also manages to substantiate his statements through documents, to support his hypotheses through verifiable information and to avoid rhetorical or tendentious speculations.

Built on the basis of his doctoral thesis and guided by the esteemed professor Csucsujá István and by the suggestions received from professor Doru Radosav, the book *Bibliotheca Universitatis Claudiopolitanae. Evoluția instituțională și practici ale lecturii în Clujul universitar (1872-1945)* [Bibliotheca Universitatis Claudiopolitanae. The institutional evolution and the reading practices of the Cluj university town (1872-1945)] fills certain bibliographical gaps regarding the history of the University Library, which had previously been approached by Hungarian and Romanian scholars separately, but in the absence of a continuity of its evolution. Both Eugen Barbul and Ion Mușlea, directors of the University Library, had written about the functioning and the collections of the library, in relation with the views of their epochs, but Gyórfi Dénes's book has the merit of presenting the evolutionary stages of the library's history in a unitary course, interconnecting them by unravelling the line interwoven within the canvas of documents.

The establishment of the Transylvanian Museum Society (1859), as well as the effective functioning of several higher colleges, entitle the important intellectuals in town to request the government from Budapest, during the meeting held on 24 February 1868, the passage of the bill to create a university in Cluj. The historical moment was favourable, since there were preparations made for the passage of the Law of Nationality (Act XLIV) and Act XLIII, which established the conditions for unifying Transylvania and Hungary. Thus, at the end of 1968, these laws were passed by Emperor Franz Joseph. In this historical context, which was favourable for the Hungarian nationality, the conditions for the establishment of the University seemed to be fulfilled. Four more years passed until baron Eötvös József, the minister of public instruction, visited the town<sup>1</sup> in order to make sure that there were true possibilities of supporting a university in the town crossed by the Someș River. Thus, the Parliament voted, on 12 October 1872, for the establishment and the rules of procedure of the four faculties of the University, to which they also

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<sup>1</sup> Gyórfi Dénes, *Bibliotheca Universitatis Claudiopolitanae. Evoluția instituțională și practici ale lecturii în Clujul universitar (1872-1945)* [Bibliotheca Universitatis Claudiopolitanae. The institutional evolution and the reading practices of the Cluj university town (1872-1945)] (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2019), 26.

allocated the budget for the initial organisation. Since it needed a library, the University requested the support of the Transylvanian Museum Society, which held an important collection of books and scholarly publications. Moreover, the Library also received other collective or private collections, which enriched its archival and documentary selection. The University Library thus held the collections of the Transylvanian Museum, the collections of the former Cluj Law Academy, the book collection of the Gubernatorial Archives, the collections of the former Medical-Surgical Institute of Cluj, as well as the Joseph Benigni Library. As such, during its first year of functioning, according to Győrfi Dénes, the University Library held approximately 18.000 volumes.<sup>2</sup>

The main task for the first library director, Szabó Károly (1872-1891), was to consolidate the library and to elevate it as a reputed institution among the other cultural institutions in town. Szabó Károly fulfilled his task thoroughly, but in order to truly consolidate the role played by the library in a university town, a library building was needed. Ferenczi Zoltán was appointed director in July 1891 and, as a director of both the Transylvanian Museum Library and the University Library, he focused on enriching the collections and augmenting the existing ones, thus filling the gaps where needed. However, one aspect worth mentioning was that library sections were built and organised within the University. Győrfi Dénes's book describes the library's early period, focusing on the book collections, the acquisition policies, the services offered to the readers. By conducting research in the library archives, it brings to light a series of documents (book request forms, reports, administration documents etc.) which it presents, in an attempt to reenact the library's daily life.

The building of the new library edifice took place between 1906-1909, and Győrfi Dénes emphasises the efforts made by Erdélyi Pál (1900-1919), the director at that time, in order to successfully carry out a task that was by no means an easy one and that included obtaining the land, organising the competition for the erection of the building, supervising and funding the construction works etc. Győrfi Dénes also approaches these aspects, bringing forth both archival documents, official and private correspondences, and Gheorghe Vais's excellent publication, dedicated to this period.<sup>3</sup>

Marked by two great European wars, the life of the institution was interrupted by the wars that threatened the integrity of its collections. Thus, in the case of World War I, the librarians, under the guidance of director Erdélyi Pál, prepared the consignments of crates containing the most valuable documents and collections, so that they would be shipped to Budapest. History repeated itself, in the opposite direction, during World War II when, after The Dictate of Vienna (1940),

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>3</sup> Gheorghe Vais, *Biblioteca Centrală Universitară Cluj 1906-1909* [The Central University Library of Cluj 1906-1909] (Cluj-Napoca: Alma Mater, 2006).

Cluj was once again placed under Hungarian administration, and the director at that time, Ion Muşlea, was compelled to organise the strategy for the library to take refuge in Sibiu. Together with the University, the Romanian administration staff of the library left town and ensured the security of the collections and their transfer to Sibiu.

The second chapter focuses on the library's fate during the interwar period (1919-1939). The directors Eugen Barbul (1920-1935) and Ion Muşlea (1935-1948) focused on enriching the collections of Romanian books, on developing services for the readers and on supporting the Romanian academic education system in Cluj. Particularly preoccupied by the fate of the library, Győrfi Dénes highlights the inner life of the institution, its acquisition policies, the staff movements, the hiring processes, the financial situations of the librarians and their working conditions. He pays particular attention to the Romanian Royal Family's visit to the library, which took place on 2 February 1920; he skilfully reconstructs<sup>4</sup> the most important moments of the meeting between King Ferdinand, Queen Mary, Princess Elisabeth and Crown Prince Carol, the librarians and the acting director, Gyulai Farkas. During their visit at the library, the Royal Family was accompanied by Sextil Puşcariu, the University rector, as well as by other political figures, among whom was Iuliu Maniu.

Based on his excellent professional training, Győrfi Dénes is able to extract, from the multitude of archival documents, the most useful information, managing to render the very precise statistical image of the library collections at that time and to correlate this information in order to describe the library's fate through statistics. No data regarding the acquisitions and organisation of the library collections is overlooked and Győrfi Dénes pays particular attention to the book donations that enriched the existing collections. The signal was given by the Romanian Academy, who offered the library a large part of its duplicates (9246 volumes).<sup>5</sup> Other impressive donations were also made, but the most important donation was the one made by boyar Gheorghe Sion (1855-1944) who, in 1922, donated no less than 4500 volumes, out of which 1051 were rare books.<sup>6</sup>

Győrfi Dénes also brings forth the relationship with the readers, taking an interest in the publication loans and the services offered by the library. In this sense, he analyses the loan flux, he studies the reports, the minutes and the statistics compiled by the library. He is preoccupied by the fate of the librarians, thus not only highlighting their professional abilities, but also, by analysing their social and financial situations, through accounting data, but also offering a fairly precise image of the staff mobility and of the profiles of the librarians who had also been affected by the institution's financial crisis during the great economic crisis (1929-1933). In

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<sup>4</sup> Dénes, 138-141.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

spite of all the material shortcomings, in the interwar period, the library, stimulated by the effervescence of the academic and scientific activities conducted in the University, became a modern institution and, in relation with the policies of collection development, it was always in favour of acquiring the latest Romanian and foreign publications, required by the research activities.

Chapter III presents the library's refuge in Sibiu, as well as the fate of the collections that had been left in Cluj. This fairly short chapter covers the efforts made by director Ion Muşlea to organise the publication transfer, as well as the endeavours made to safeguard the remaining collections. In this complicated context, Győrfi Dénes emphasises the collaboration between Ion Muşlea and Valentiny Antal, who had remained in Cluj, suggesting that, beyond the political divisions, the main preoccupation of the librarians of that time was the conservation and the integrity of the collections. Győrfi Dénes's attachment to the librarian profession also stands out from the presentation of this difficult period. The author offers conclusive examples for the professional relations between the Romanian and the Hungarian librarians, which were, first and foremost, based on the interests of the institution. This chapter ends with the impressive image given by director Monoki István, which opened the exhibition held on 11 October 1944, depicting a shell fired by a German cannon, which passed through the roof of the Town Hall tower and landed on the roof of the library deposit, thus making an immense crater,<sup>7</sup> the explosion causing 200 windows to shatter.

The final chapter succinctly presents the library's return to Cluj and the efforts made to reunify the collections. The life of the library slowly returned to normal in 1945, but it suffered a series of changes. The most important change, briefly presented by Győrfi Dénes at the end of his book, was the modification of the library's name. This change occurred due to the ministry's decision to compel the library to serve both the Ferdinand I University and the newly established Hungarian Bolyai University. Thus, beginning in 18 December 1945, the library bore the name of The University Library of Cluj. The name of the library changed twice more over the years, once during the communist period and the second time in 1992; however, the idea that the library serves the entire Cluj university centre was adopted and maintained to the present day.

Thoroughly documented, *Bibliotheca Universitatis Claudiopolitanae. Evoluția instituțională și practici ale lecturii în Clujul universitar (1872-1945)* [Bibliotheca Universitatis Claudiopolitanae. The institutional evolution and the reading practices of the Cluj university town (1872-1945)] honourably manages to achieve its set objectives, offering the readers an image from within, depicting the functioning of an institution which, due to the nature of the history of Transylvania, had such a complicated destiny. With no excessive emphasis on the historical

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 256.

contextualisation, in relation with its objectives, the volume *Bibliotheca Universitatis Claudiopolitanae. Evoluția instituțională și practici ale lecturii în Clujul universitar (1872-1945)* [Bibliotheca Universitatis Claudiopolitanae. The institutional evolution and the reading practices of the Cluj university town (1872-1945)] makes a moderate and well-balanced presentation of the fate of the Cluj library between 1872-1945. Following a historical course from within, as the less visible parts of the life of the library come to light, the readers can observe the inner functioning mechanism of this great academic and cultural institution.

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