BABEŞ BOLYAI UNIVERSITY

ACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

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SUMMARY

THE INTELLECTUAL TECHNICAL ELITES OF TIMISOARA

1920 - 1947

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Summary

The research of the evolution of the university system in the Romanian historiographic space has imposed itself quite hard as an autonomous field. Considered for many years as a "secondary topic"¹, the history of the universities has been treated rather monographically, occasioned by the moment of an anniversary. Inevitably, as any anniversary implies rather a celebration, at times of balance, and the "Polytechnic University" of Timişoara were dedicated works and volumes, but the way of approaching the criterion of historical reconstruction of the school was the classic one, in a triumphalistic manner. Therefore, the lack of solid studies on the history of the Polytechnic in Timisoara, its structural development, the role of the technical elites in animating the academic life represented arguments to make me approach the subject regarding this school of tradition and its academics. To this determination also contributed the fact that "higher education institutions have always been a field of investigation (...) and not accidentally, over time, this space has caught the attention of specialists, we could say obstinately (...)"². The doctoral thesis is an inquiry into university life³. The perspectives contained in this approach regard Polytechnics at the same time as an academic, political and social institution, the University being part of a power system. The activity of the technical elites within the Polytechnics, the public positions taken by the professors in the university, public or social environment were the starting points of our approach.

It is necessary to mention that the idea of polytechnics was accelerated in the Europe of the XIX-XX centuries by the first industrial revolution between 1769-1872. If impressive constructions were made in the Middle Ages, the most famous being the cathedrals of Western and Central Europe and tools were used to solve and respond to the momentary needs of mankind

¹ Gh. Iacob, *University of Iasi. From the French model to the Bologna system*, in Gh. Iacob (coord.) University of Iași. From the French model to the Bologna system, Iași, 2007, p. 9.

² Lucian Nastasă, "Sovereigns" of the Romanian Universities. Mechanisms of selection and promotion of the intellectual elite, Edit. Limes, Cluj Napoca, 2007, p. 7

³ In the background of our research was the premise from which Professor Florea Ioncioaia built his study on the history of the university as a problem, that the university professors must be studied within the history of the university (Florea Ioncioaia, Universitarii și istoria..., p. 414)

(Guttenberg's pattern), these were not the result the work of people with a scientific-technical training carried out in an organized education system. The process of setting up higher education institutions of engineering profile in Europe was influenced by the inventions and innovations of the industrial revolution that contributed to the emergence of a new vision, but also of a new mentality regarding the role of applied sciences in society, manifesting a strong interest in organizing higher technical education. After the establishment of technical high schools in Paris in 1747, Berlin (Charlottenburg) in 1779, Budapest (1782), Vienna (1797); in the first half of the 19th century, more and more such university establishments will be set up in Prague in 1803, in Naples in Italy in 1811, Karlsruhe, Munich, Dresden, Stuttgart between 1820 and 1830, in London in 1840, under the name of *School of engineers*. In Switzerland, in Zürich in 1855, the *Polytechnic School* is established, one of the most important technical universities in the world if we refer to the large number of graduates of this polytechnic who were awarded the Nobel prize.

If in Western Europe the establishment of the technical higher schools was the result of the development of the industry, of the inventions and the technical innovations that determined the industrial revolution at the end of the 18th century, in Moldova and in the Romanian Country, the emergence of these schools traces the directions of socio-economic development that were to be followed by the society in full process of affirmation and emancipation. In the Romanian countries, the technical university education did not reach the size of that of Central and Western Europe, but it has been tried to establish higher education institutions that fit the European teaching system. The beginnings of the technical-scientific education are linked to the names of two personalities of the Romanian culture: Gheorghe Lazar in the Romanian Country and Gheorghe Asachi in Moldova, who according to Nicolae Iorga were guided by the idea that "the future of education lies in the sciences and these sciences can be made attractive, interesting for the needs of the country, giving as a result their decision-making engineers whose name appears as a French innovation at the end of the 18th century"⁴.

In Banat, the conquest of Timişoara by the imperial troops of Count Eugeniu de Savoya in 1716 and the establishment of the Hasburgic rule represented for Timisoara the beginning of an economic, demographic development and, not least, the inauguration of a new stage in the educational system. These development directions brought to the attention of the local elites the

⁴ Nicolae Iorga, Introducing the sciences in higher education, București, 1919, p. 27

necessity of establishing a higher education institution that would ensure the continued training of the young graduates of the gymnasiums and seminars. However, with the exception of the Seminary Cleri Juniores Diocesis Csanadiensis (Higher Theological Seminary), an institution that prepared Catholic priests for the parishes of the Diocese of Cenad established in 1806⁵ and of the University Institute of Philosophy and Law which only worked for a few years (1845-1850), until the establishment of the Polytechnic School, the capital of Banat was deprived of the existence of a higher education institution.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Timisoara fulfilled all the material, social and cultural conditions for the establishment of an educational institution that would stimulate the development of the area, issues also noticed by the city officials who intensified the initiatives towards the decision-making authorities in Budapest for the establishment of a higher education institution. , but the evolution of the steps to establish the Polytechnics were interrupted for a short period by the events caused by the Great War. After the end of World War I, the intellectual elites from Banat will continue the efforts to establish the Polytechnic in Timişoara, this time to the Romanian authorities.

In the Romanian society, concerns regarding the reorganization of the technical education have existed since the first decade of the 20th century, determined by the numerous scientific discoveries that led to solving the problems generated by the industry of the time. Professor Dragomir Hurmuzescu in 1901, following the example of Germany and France, insisted on the organization of "more practical" education, that is "our university education organized with a view to the theoretical and practical purpose, would yield the most beautiful and most useful fruits". The intellectual development is not incompatible with the debate in the practical works, but on the contrary there are two qualities that complement each other"⁶. Before the First World War, but also in the immediate period of its conclusion, in Romania there were two points of view regarding the reorganization and development of higher technical education. On the one hand, it was the conception of the professors from the institutes of applied sciences from the Universities who considered that in Romania it was necessary to set up technical university institutes, according to the French model, "with certain changes required by the technical knowledge and precision that they entail. such an education "⁷. The role of these

⁵ Vasile Rămneanțu, Activity of Timișoara City Hall between 1919 - 1940, ed. Mega, Cluj Napoca, 2015, p 465

⁶ Apud, Dr. Hurmuzescu, in Mihai Dorin (coord), *Iasi's polytechnics in the dynamics of modernization of Romania*, ed. Stef, Iaşi, 2006, p. 96

⁷ Apud Stavri Cunescu, in Mihai Dorin (coord.), Iasi's polytechnics in the dynamics of modernization of Romania,

technical university institutes was to train industrial engineers with a serious technical education capable of forming "an element of initiative and energy for the economic progress of the country"⁸.

Unlike the professors of the faculties of applied sciences within the universities, the polytechnic engineers had a different vision regarding the restructuring of the higher technical education system. Their point of view was to concentrate technical education in polytechnics, however, considering that universities can retain the competencies to take general courses in the field of applied sciences, but they cannot also worry about their transposition into practice. Thus, they introduced the educational concept of "polytechnics" as implemented in similar institutions in Europe, being a new approach in the field of education and technical training, because in addition to the principle of theoretical training, the emphasis was also placed on the practical training of future engineers.

Finally, on June 10, 1920, the Decree - Law no. 2521 of June 10, 1920 was issued, following a project of the polytechnic professor Nicolae Vasilescu-Karpen, who stipulated that the technical higher education is reorganized through polytechnic schools, so that the National School of Bridges and Roads is transformed into the Polytechnic School of Bucharest, but within the act normatively it was stated that "other polytechnic schools could be established in other cities of the country and will be organized in a similar way to that of Bucharest, taking into account local circumstances and needs".

The context of the Decree of June 10, 1920, combined with the sustained actions of the Timisoara officials led to the issuance of the Decree - Law no. 4822 signed by King Ferdinand I on November 11, 1920, which "approves the establishment on November 15, 1920 of a Polytechnic School in Timisoara", which will operate in accordance with the provisions of the Decree - Law no. 2521 of June 10, 1920, regarding the organization of the higher technical education in Romania⁹. The establishment of the Polytechnic School in Timişoara constituted, on the one hand, an old desire of the local elites, and on the other hand (together with the reorganization of the National School of Bridges and Roads in Bucharest) the response to the new requirement of the society after 1918, namely " the need for engineers "who were to be the

ed. Stef, Iași, 2006, p. 126

⁸ Ibidem, p. 127

⁹ Official Monitor no. 61 of June 19, 1920 pp. 2111 - 2115. The decree was initially published in the Official Monitor no. 57 of the respective year, but "by erroring in the Official Monitor no. 57 is published again" in the Official Monitor no. 61

trigger for the reconstruction of society and the country after the war and not least for the recovery of the economy from the" hands of foreigners". In the inter-war period, the State wanted to create a new technical elite to replace in the provinces united with the old Kingdom the elites of national minorities and the Romanian economy, by placing in companies the new engineers trained in the Romanian schools.

As for the Polytechnic School in Timisoara, it started its activity with the following "dowries": 83 students¹⁰, 9 teachers appointed by a decision of the Ministry of Public Works, 1 million lei representing expenses of "personnel and necessary materials up to on March 31, 1921 ", credit opened on the account of the Ministry of Public Works¹² and two sections of mechanics and electricity, respectively of mine and metallurgy. At the opening of the courses from the academic year 1921-1922, Traian Lalescu stated that "we have limited ourselves to only two sections because of the difficulties that today's times produce, the development of a program too large". The two types of difficulties identified by Professor Lalescu were those "materials produced by the simultaneous establishment of too many laboratories and the difficulties encountered by the judicious recruitment of a staff of specialists from so many different branches"¹¹. The consequence was that in the first years of operation, the Polytechnic School of Timisoara faced a great dynamic of personnel, numerous candidates applying for the positions of university assistants, heads of works or laboratory. Of these, many considered the appointment in a position of university teacher, "a trampoline" for the promotion of better paid administrative functions and thus they resigned after only a few months after the appointment. After the first graduation promotion, the management of the school oriented that, among the students with very good results, in parallel with the technical activity from the units to which they were assigned, they should also be involved in the teaching staff.

For the higher education system in Romania, as well as for the whole society, the interwar period was characterized by instability and uncertainty. The proof is that, from a political perspective, between 1920 and 1940 Romania was ruled by no less than 20 governments (councils of ministers). Exception was not made by the "University", which faced with large

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, f. 72

¹² *Ibidem*, f. 84

¹¹ Yearbook of the Timişoara Polytechnic School, year II, 1921-1922, Institute of Graphic Arts "Romanian Book", Timişoara branch, 1922, p. 25

student movements and protests, as well as with multiple reorganizations of the educational system reflected in the normative acts issued in this regard.

During this period, the two polytechnic schools from Timisoara and Bucharest (less the one from Iasi, which was founded between 1937-1938) were strongly influenced by the laws that established and guided their activity. The Decree-Law of 1920 regulating the reorganization and functioning of higher technical education placed polytechnic schools under the tutelage of the Ministry of Public Works, so that in the first stage, they were considered higher institutions of professional training. The result was that for an important period of nearly two decades the body of academics from "humanitarian" universities was reluctant to recognize the exclusive right of polytechnics to issue engineering degrees. The great economic depression of 1929-1933 led to a landscape marked by the decrease of the standard of living and the impossibility of the state to provide jobs for the young engineers, which caused the teachers of the Polytechnics of Timisoara to look for solutions for adapting the school to the new realities by establishing new faculties and by introducing study disciplines that correspond to the economic context. The economic crisis has also contributed to the idea that only the development of higher technical education can produce the economic recovery of Romania. Nicolae Vasilescu Karpen in the symposium "Week of rationalized culture", November 1930, considered that the adjustment of the economic status of the country could be achieved only through the development of industry, given that the Romanian economy could not be concentrated mainly in agriculture, because this state was equivalent to a perpetual inferiority and dependence on other countries, and in perspective it meant "ruin"¹². In the second half of the third decade of the twentieth century, more and more intellectual elites admitted that between the modernization of the national economy and the progress of higher technical education there was an inseparable connection, Professor Constantin C. Teodorescu considering that the involvement of the technical specialists in the life of the nation was " an imperative of existence"¹³.

From 1937 the diplomas of engineer will be granted exclusively to the graduates of the polytechnics, however with a dispensation granted to the universities that could confer the title of "engineer" until November 1938. The hesitation of the "humanist" academics to give full credit to the technical universities in the issuing of engineering diplomas, can be explained by

¹² Mihai Dorin (coord.), op. cit., p. 24

¹³ Constantin C. Teodorescu, Between school and life, in the AGIR Bulletin, nr. XIX, 1937, p. 366

the fact that at the beginning of the interwar period the population of Romania was little professionalized, agriculture continuing to be the basic branch of the economy, and the number of inhabitants who worked in this branch was the majority. The agrarian reform initiated after the First World War had the effect of "peasantization" of agriculture, because a transfer of the land from the property of the big estates to the small farms was made¹⁴. The result was that despite the dynamism and the impressive growth of many branches of industry¹⁵ the economic and social structure of Romania did not undergo major changes: in 1939, 78% of the country's active population continued to work in agriculture and only 10% was engaged in industrial production. Therefore, the reluctance of the academics was not determined by the mistrust of the preparation and the value of the body of the technical academics, but rather by the lack of a coherent program of economic development of Romania and implicitly of changing the structure of the society.

Established on February 10, 1938, the regime of "royal dictatorship" of Carol II had as an objective the remodeling of the Romanian society and the professionalization of the administrative apparatus of the state. Among the institutions that had to adapt to the new regime in which the "work and merit" to receive were the universities. By the Law of 1938 on the rationalization of higher education, for the most judicious recruitment of teachers, it was introduced in higher education institutions as a method of occupying a chair the "contest". This new method of recruiting teachers also aimed a "more serious" preparation of students. In June 1940, following a project of the politician Radu Orange, *the Code of Civil Servants*¹⁶ was adopted, one of the last measures taken by the regime of Carol II. Among the objectives of this law was the harmonization of wages and the reduction of the number of civil servants, who in 1940 represented just over 2% of the country's population. This normative act introduced the notion of specialist, that person "who graduated a specialized school in direct connection with the function having also works or activity of the specialty of the function"¹⁷. "The specialist" could be named "in the higher hierarchy directly up to the rank of chief of service"¹⁸. The

¹⁴ See in this regard the analyzes of Virgil Madgearu, in *Agrarianism, capitalism, imperialism. Contributions to the study of Romanian social evolution*, ed. Economist S.A, republished in 1999 by ed. Dacia from Cluj Napoca

¹⁵ Between 1924 and 1928, the increase in mining production was 189%, and in the processing industry 188%, in the oil industry the production increased from 968,000 tonnes in 1918 to 5800000 in 1930. For further data see also Bărbulescu Mihai, Deletant Dennis, Hitchins Keith, Papacostea Şerban, Pompiliu Teodor, *History of Romania*, ed. Corint, Bucharest, 2007, p. 361

¹⁶ The Official Monitor of Romania, part I, no. 131 of June 8, 1940

¹⁷ Ibidem, p.2779

¹⁸ Ibidem

purpose of this law was to eliminate the "political sinecure" and to promote the professionals in the bureaucratic apparatus of the state.

The student life during the period between the two major world conflagrations was also influenced by the changes brought by the "Great War" and by the educational policies that the State considered to implement. Although political vocations are fewer and more inconsistent among polytechnic students, they have not been absent, with student strikes, disturbances and attitudes against students of Jewish origin, riots and claims. The protests erupted at the end of 1922 will compromise the academic year 1922-1923 and will contribute to the establishment of the National Union of Christian Students (UNSCR), an association with a strong nationalist character. The role of this body for defending student interests will increase after the organization of the first student congresses in Iasi in 1926 and Oradea in 1927. After the latter congress, in conjunction with the establishment of the Archangel Michael's Legion, student associations will be increasingly seized by nationalist and anti-semitic political movements. Although after the student strike from the end of 1922 a regulation on the order and discipline of the students was adopted, only in 1932 with the adoption of *the Iorga Law* was paid special attention to the student associations, stipulating that the University Senate is the only body that authorizes the formation of "student associations".

The outbreak of the economic crisis of 1929 led to a decrease in the standard of living both at the level of the students as a result of the increase of the student body in universities, as well as that of the graduates, because they faced a strong "intellectual unemployment". This context created the premises favorable to the ascent of the Iron Guard, which in the 1930s will gain more followers among the students of the Polytechnic School in Timisoara. The prohibition of the students to belong to political parties and associations, to participate in actions and events of a political nature provided in *the Law on the completion of certain provisions of the law of university education* of 1937, is a proof that the students became a distinct political force in the landscape of the Romanian society, but also that the legionary movement had largely monopolized this important segment of the university fortress. After the establishment of the regime of monarchic authority, King Carol II sought to adopt measures that would lead to disciplining students. In this direction, the Law for the establishment of the Social Service of October 1938 is promulgated following a project of the sociologist Dimitrie Gusti and his followers Henri H. Sthal and Octavian Neamţu, who instituted the obligation of "graduates of both sexes, universities, schools and higher institutes or special to provide ,a cultural work

placement in villages ", and "the duration of the Social Service could not exceed one year"¹⁹²⁰. This initiative aimed in the alternative to annihilate the legionary ideas among the student youth, but it had the opposite effect, as it was found that the royal labor camps had turned into nurseries for the dissemination of legionary political doctrine, which led to the suspension of the Social Service after only a year²¹. The Law of the Social Service was followed on November 1, 1938 by the promulgation of the *Law for amending and supplementing the laws regarding higher education and especially in view of the rationalization* which represented in its turn a desire to remove the student body from the influence of legionaries. But the social engineering project initiated after 1938 by Carol II will end in September 1940 with its abdication, but the legionary experience will not last until the end of January 1941.

After 1944, the university and academic world was one of the first ones concerned with the so-called reforms of the new political and social regime that is being introduced in Romania. For the subordination of the elites, laws were issued that allowed the removal from the teaching staff of teachers who confirmed at the chair. The decision to rationalize the education of May 27, 1947 allowed the "retirement" of valuable teachers who had not reached the retirement age. In this way, the polytechnic teachers Ovidiu Tino, Dion Mardan, Coloman Bakonyi and Ilie Popescu were retired. It is no less true that such precedents also existed during the interwar period, some normative acts allowing "selection" on political criteria. In 1937 the authorities banned the students from any political activity and the student organizations / associations have outlawed, including the expulsion of some legionary and communist young people from university. The "revenge" of those who embraced the legionary beliefs came shortly after, in November 1940, when the law of adapting higher education to the structure of the National Legionary State was adopted. This law triggered a new purification action to remove from the universities those teachers who were hostile to the Legionary Movement, the key word being "teachers must be re-educated by their own students", so that after the defeat of the legionary rebellion from the beginning of 1941 to produce new dismissals and expulsions among teachers and students.

 ¹⁹ Constantin Hamangiu, *General Code of Romania*, vol. XXVI, vol. II, 19382, Central Printing Office, Bucharest,
²⁰, p. 2003

²¹ Dragoş Sdrobiş, *The limits of meritocracy in an agrarian society: intellectual unemployment and political radicalization of youth in inter-war Romania*, Iaşi, Ed. Polirom, 2015, p. 232

Since 1945 the regime of "popular democracy" has understood to make full use of the levers at his disposal to change the composition of the teaching staff and the conditions of access to education. Starting with 1947, the offensive that targeted the teachers and students, materialized by "compressing or suppressing jobs and people", the result being that over 500 academics lost their jobs, and the education system in Romania entered half a century of totalitarian regime.

The sources used to make this thesis were mainly the archive documents, because I did not have many bibliographic sources focused strictly on my research topic. I had the chance that the archival fund of the Polytechnic School of Timisoara, which is in the deposits of the National Archives of Timisoara, will be kept in decent conditions from the point of view of the quantity of the archival units, of the quality and diversity of the information contained in the respective documents, being the basis of our whole approach, being the primary tools of the investigation on the body of academics and student life. At the same time, the documents from the mentioned archival fund gave us a comprehensive picture regarding the development and structural evolution of the Polytechnic. The documents from the archive holdings, held by the National Archives of Romania were of real use to me in completing my research. The funds of the Ministry of Public Works and the Ministry of Cults and Public Instruction contain the documents of correspondence between the central forum and the Timisoara institution. Thus, I realized the overall image, the official one, of the coordinating Ministries, on the higher technical education, and in particular the relationship they maintained with the Polytechnic University of Timisoara. Last but not least, the archival funds created by public order and security institutions gave me an overview of how militant students and teachers were being monitored for safety.

Also the edited sources, the memorialistic ones and the inter-war press represented another chapter of my documentation, as well as the Collection of the Official Monitor of Romania, that guided me in my researches regarding the normative acts that regulated and influenced the higher technical education.

Finally, we consider that through the founding of the Polytechnic School, the scientific life in Timişoara and throughout Banat, from 1920-1947 was coagulated around this higher education institution, constituting the nucleus of formation of the intellectual elites, especially the technical ones. From this point of view, our scientific inquiry has approached both the acadmic body, as well as the students who attended during our approach the Polytechnic School. The option for this type of approach came naturally, because "basically, the quality of the latter (n.n. of the students) is indissolubly linked to the quality of the academics and the institutional

structures. And as with any gear, it is appropriate to see not only what is coming in, but also what is coming out, as well as how the crucibles in which the elite is built are functioning²².

Despite the fact that lately Romanian historiography has been enriched with sufficient studies, papers and volumes that have dealt with the university field, the thesis is also a proposal for historical analysis of the intellectual profession or of the professional intellectuals in interwar Romania, because a history of the technical higher education system is still needed.

²² Lucian Nastasă, "Sovereigns" of the Romanian Universities. Mechanisms of selection and promotion of the intellectual elite, ed. Limes, Cluj Napoca, 2007, p. 11

Content

1. INTRODUCTION	6
1.1 Historiography	7
1.2 Sources of the work	14
2. THE TECHNICAL HIGHER EDUCATION - THE IDEA OF "POLYTECHNICS" IN EU	ROPE
SEC. XIX-XX	
2.1. The need for technical education. Models of Polytechnic Schools in Europe	17
2.2. Incursion on technical education in the Romanian Countries	22
3. POLYTECHNICS IN TIMIŞOARA - THE BIRTH OF A HIGHER-RANGE INSTITUTIO	ON 26
3.1. Tests on the establishment of a higher education institution in Timisoara from the 18th to	the 19th
centuries	
3.2. Approaches regarding the establishment of the Polytechnic School in Timisoara	
3.3. The birth of a higher ranking institution in Timisoara	
4. LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK - IMPLICATIONS ON HIGHER TECHNICAL EDUCA	TION.
POLITEHNICA VERSUS UNIVERSITY	42
4.1. Inter-war legislative landmarks	42
4.2. Initiatives for the reform of the higher technical education. Decree Law for the organizati	on of
Polytechnic Schools	43
4.3. Polytechnic versus University. Delimitation of educational competences	48
5. DEVELOPMENT OF POLITEHNICS FROM A STRUCTURAL POINT OF VIEW	
(ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE, EVOLUTION, UNIVERSITY CAMPUS)	66
5.1. The beginnings of the activity. The mechanical pavilion and the student dormitory	66
5.2. Laboratories	76
5.3. Attempts to establish new faculties	81
5.4. Polytechnic of Timisoara and Polytechnic of Bucharest. Contradictory positions on minir	ıg
and metallurgical higher education	89
6.4. PROFESSIONAL BODY OF THE POLYTECHNICAL SCHOOL IN TIMIŞOARA	92
6.1. Mechanisms for the selection of teachers at the Polytechnic School in Timisoara	92
6.2. Recruitment of teachers. Usages	
6.3. Reputational elites. Teachers and scientific activity	132

6.3.1 Scientific publications of the Polytechnic School in Timisoara	132
6.3.2. Teachers - the elites of technical intellectuality	134
7. STUDENT LIFE	166
7.1. Students, graduates, their activity and their evolution	166
7.2. The disciplines of study. Their dynamics and evolution	185
7.2.1 The great economic depression and the influences on the higher technical education	191
7.3 Preparatory year. Student practice	195
7.4. Student organizations and associations	. 198
7.3 Student protests and movements in Timisoara	201
7.4.1 Students and the Legionary Movement	214
8. CONCLUSION	. 228
9. REFERENCES	234