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FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY

**THE "TRANSYLVANIA" SOCIETY FOR THE SUPPORT OF ROMANIAN
STUDENTS FROM TRANSYLVANIA (1867–1940)**

PhD Thesis Abstract

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Cluj-Napoca,

2025

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Summary

Keywords: Transylvania Society; cultural-philanthropic associationalism; Alexandru Papiu Ilarian; August Treboniu Laurian; Alexandru Lupașcu; Gheorghe Missail; Gheorghe Adrian; Ioan Clinciu; Romanians; Austro-Hungarian Empire; university students; vocational students; cultural development; education; national struggle; Statutes of the Transylvania Society;

scholarships; intellectuals; progress; ideal; volunteerism; Transylvania; Bukovina; ASTRA; Alexandru Borza; Aurel Vlad; Iuliu Hațieganu.

Through this work, we aim to highlight the achievements of the Transylvania Society—a Romanian cultural-philanthropic association headquartered in Bucharest, founded in 1867 and active for over 70 years—by using previously unpublished data, analyzing and emphasizing its successes to understand the role and contribution of the Transylvania Society to the cultural and scientific progress of the Romanian people.

Therefore, the objective of this paper is to present a comprehensive image of the Transylvania Society's activities and its role in Romanian history, acknowledging the full extent of its merits. We consider the subject of this research to be of great importance, given the historically significant personalities whose development was, to varying degrees, supported by the Transylvania Society, as well as its involvement in key historical events of the time, including volunteer efforts such as sending aid to the wounded in Romania's War of Independence and assisting Romanian refugees from Transylvania during World War I.

The Society produced notable figures such as the renowned scientist and physician Victor Babeș; historian Ioan Lupaș; literary historian Gheorghe Bogdan-Duică; botanist Alexandru Borza; the brothers Iuliu and Emil Hațieganu, rectors of the interwar Cluj University; lawyer Aurel Vlad; painter Emil Maximilian; and engineer Nicolae Gallea, among others. The Transylvania Society trained individuals across various professions, contributing to the rise of the bourgeoisie, the intellectual elite, and the scholarly class among Romanians. As the Society's "sons" often held moral authority within their communities, many were selected as delegates to the Great National Assembly at Alba Iulia on December 1, 1918. Furthermore, some of these individuals took part in the leadership of Transylvania during its transition from Austro-Hungarian to Romanian governance. For example, Emil Hațieganu, Aurel Vlad, Onisifor Ghibu, and Octavian Goga served on the Governing Council of Transylvania.

This research falls within the socio-historical monographic genre, based on the analysis of primary and previously unpublished documents concerning historical events, a chronological description of facts, and a comprehensive title that encapsulates the work's subject. The paper

aligns with the field of cultural history, combining institutional analysis with socio-historical research. Cultural history not only reconstructs the chronology of institutions, events, and historical phenomena but also examines the prevailing mentalities and the broader social, political, cultural, spiritual, and ideological context of the studied period.

The trajectory of the Transylvania Society was complex and not confined to a single field of activity. We aim to enrich Romanian historiography by exploring a topic that has received limited attention in specialized literature. Moreover, the subject is significant because the Transylvania Society has not benefited from a comprehensive synthesis and is represented by a rather modest historiography. Thus, addressing these historiographical gaps is necessary. The mission of this work is to provide a thorough account of the Society's history, interpret its activities, and present a detailed analysis of its role in Romanian history, including its contributions to the national movement for the rights of Romanians in Austria-Hungary, the formation of Greater Romania, and the broader development of Romanian society.

The first chapter contextualizes the Transylvania Society and Romanian cultural-philanthropic associationalism within the broader historical developments. It reviews several historical events preceding and following the Society's founding that were linked to the associational phenomenon, tracing its evolution from its early 18th-century roots to the major wave of associationalism in the latter half of the 19th century. The Transylvania Society was established in 1867, during a time marked by rapid growth in Romanian cultural-philanthropic associationalism, which was closely tied to the national struggle and the education of the populace. While such associationalism had existed since the 18th century, it reached its peak in the second half of the 19th century. In the "century of nationalities," associationalism was a vital tool for ethnic communities under imperial rule to pursue their rights. Within the Habsburg Empire, in particular, cultural-philanthropic associationalism was a key instrument in the national struggle of these communities.

In the first half of the 1860s, the Habsburg Empire experienced a period of liberalization. This development, along with the Union of the Romanian Principalities in 1859, spurred Romanian associationalism, leading to the establishment of societies such as ASTRA

(1861), the Association for the Culture of the Romanian People of Maramureș (1861), the Arad National Association for the Culture and Preservation of the Romanian People (1862), and the Petru Maior Academic Society of Budapest (1862), among others. The objectives of these societies were primarily cultural and educational, aimed at strengthening national consciousness and fostering resilience and resistance against imperial domination.

This brief liberalization in the Habsburg Empire—during which Transylvanian Romanians began to gain more rights—ended abruptly. In 1867, the empire transformed into a dualist confederate monarchy, known as the Austro-Hungarian Empire. A defining feature of Romanian cultural-philanthropic associations at the time was Romanian ethnocultural nationalism and the pursuit of national emancipation through culture. It was in this context, following the establishment of the Austro-Hungarian dualist system, that the Transylvania Society was founded in Bucharest by a group of Romanian students from Transylvania studying at the University of Bucharest.

The second chapter presents the founding period of the Transylvania Society and its initiators. It describes the association's objectives and the strategies employed to achieve them. The Statutes of the Transylvania Society and its scholarship regulations are explained and analyzed. We also examine the mindset and ideological outlook of the Society's founders and representatives.

The Transylvania Society was founded by three groups: young Romanian students from Transylvania enrolled at the University of Bucharest; Romanian intellectuals and activists from Transylvania who had long been settled in Moldavia and Wallachia (later Romania); and Romanian intellectuals from the nascent Romanian state. The Society was officially established on May 3, 1867, at the initiative of Ion Tacit and other Romanian students gathered in Bucharest to commemorate the Romanian National Assembly held by the 1848 revolutionaries on the Blaj Plain. The Society's original name was *Constanția*. On the same day, a provisional committee was created with the task of drafting its Statutes. Several distinguished intellectuals, including former 1848 revolutionaries such as Alexandru Papiu Ilarian, August Treboniu Laurian, Aaron Florian, and Gheorghe Adrian, joined the student initiative. On July 23, 1867, the Society's first

permanent committee was formed, and its name was changed from *Constanția* to *Transylvania*. The first president of the Society was Alexandru Papiu Ilarian, a prominent philologist and historian, a key figure of the 1848 Romanian Revolution in Transylvania, and one of the organizers of the Great National Assembly on the Blaj Plain on May 3/15, 1848. The Society's dual identity—as both a cultural and charitable organization—was complementary: its leaders sought to promote Romanian culture through philanthropic activity.

The Statutes of the Transylvania Society, adopted on June 30, 1867, served as its fundamental regulatory document. They defined the Society's purpose, organizational structure (including financial management), the responsibilities of its governing bodies and members, and the procedures for electing officials. Within the Society, the Assembly functioned as the legislative authority, while the Committee operated as the executive body. The president presided over both the Committee and the Assembly. Typically, the president held office for life unless they resigned or were incapacitated by illness. Over time, several amendments were made to the Statutes, with the most significant revision occurring in 1878. This marked a shift in the Society's focus, expanding its support beyond university students to include vocational pupils. These changes did not alter the Society's core mission but rather adapted it to contemporary social needs. According to the Statutes, each member was required to contribute a minimum sum to the Society's fund.

The second most important regulatory document of the Transylvania Society, after its Statutes, was its scholarship regulation, approved by the Society's Assembly on May 14, 1868. This regulation clearly stipulated that scholarships were to be awarded to Romanian youths from Transylvania and Bukovina.

The vision of the Society's leadership emphasized the necessity of fostering Romanian national solidarity and cohesion among Romanians under imperial rule through cultural development and education. The Society's nationalism was ethnocultural in nature. The frequently repeated slogan—"Culture will save Romania!"—and the use of the term "Romania" to refer both to the political state and to the broader ethnic Romanian community in Transylvania and Bukovina, reveal a conception of Romania as a spiritual homeland transcending political

frontiers. All ethnic Romanians were treated as a unified cultural community. Transylvania, in particular, was regarded as the historical nucleus of Romanian identity; not coincidentally, President Alexandru Papiu Ilarian referred to it as “Romania beyond the Carpathians.”

The Transylvania Society was characterized by idealism and national messianism, yet its foundations lay in pressing social realities—chiefly the need for education and cultural advancement among Romanians under Habsburg rule, who were subject to state-sponsored discrimination. The Society’s first two presidents, the historians and philologists Alexandru Papiu Ilarian and August Treboniu Laurian, were strongly influenced by the ideology of the Transylvanian School. While the Society championed Romanian national ideals, it also attracted supporters and members from non-Romanian ethnic backgrounds. A notable example is Carol Davila, a Frenchman originally from the Duchy of Parma in Italy.

The third chapter presents the notable members and supporters of the Transylvania Society, including prominent figures such as August Treboniu Laurian, Aaron Florian, Vasile Alexandrescu Urechia, Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, General Gheorghe Adrian, Septimiu Albini, among others. The Society’s rapid rise—particularly in its early years—is examined, when, owing to the intense efforts of its members, it gained remarkable prestige. We highlight the extraordinary role of Alexandru Lupașcu—arguably the Society’s most devoted member—in advancing its development. This chapter also addresses the more difficult and contentious periods in the Society’s history, such as the public defamation campaign it faced beginning in the autumn of 1868. The chapter concludes with an overview of other contemporary Romanian cultural-philanthropic societies, offering a comparative analysis with the Transylvania Society and exploring the connections and commonalities among these associations.

The membership of the Transylvania Society was diverse in terms of profession: it included historians, researchers, writers, judges, engineers, clerics, and others. With members hailing from all historical Romanian provinces, the Society was perceived as a miniature homeland. The presidents of the Transylvania Society, listed in order of tenure, were: Alexandru Papiu Ilarian (1867–1874), August Treboniu Laurian (1874–1881), General Gheorghe Adrian

(1881–1888), Petre Cernovodeanu (1891–1893), Gheorghe Missail (1893–1906), Ion Bianu (1907–1918), Tiberiu Eremia (1919–1938), and Ioan Clinciu (1938–1940).

President Alexandru Papiu Ilarian conducted significant promotional work for the new association, primarily through the press. The Transylvania Society rapidly enhanced its prestige in its first year, largely due to the dedication of its members. As a result of its public visibility and outreach efforts, the Society quickly gained widespread support, attracted numerous donors, and received financial contributions from many county and local councils across Romania, particularly in its early years. It also received funding from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Instruction, and the Society's *Records*—which documented the minutes of its Assembly meetings—were printed at the state printing house.

The Transylvania Society was not exempt from adversity and challenges. From its inception, indications emerged that the authorities in Budapest viewed the development of the new association with apprehension. In Romania, the autumn of 1868 marked the beginning of a public defamation campaign against the Society, initiated by the conservative parliamentarian Christian Tell. Central to these accusations was the allegation that the Society was anti-dynastic, purportedly opposing the reign of Prince Carol I. At the time—only a few years after the abdication of Alexandru Ioan Cuza—an anti-dynastic movement was indeed present in Romania, with certain radical factions advancing separatist ideas. However, no evidence substantiates claims that the Transylvania Society endorsed such positions. On the contrary, the Society submitted petitions to Prince Carol I, which led to the official recognition of its Statutes by royal decree on 8 December 1867. Moreover, Alexandru Papiu Ilarian consistently expressed his esteem for the prince. The defamatory accusations were politically motivated, and the Society's representatives responded resolutely. Nonetheless, this episode contributed to a decline in the Society's public reputation.

Among the most devoted figures within the Society was Alexandru Lupașcu, who initially supported the organization during his tenure as prefect of Galați. Upon completing his term, he engaged in sustained fundraising efforts for the Society. Subsequently, he assumed the role of treasurer, serving voluntarily and without remuneration for approximately three decades.

His longstanding commitment and exceptional contributions earned him recognition as one of the Society's most esteemed members.

From its early years, the Transylvania Society cultivated strong connections with ASTRA, an already established institution of considerable moral authority. Numerous members of the Society's leadership were also affiliated with ASTRA. Furthermore, the Society's Statutes included a clause stipulating that, in the event of dissolution, its financial assets were to be transferred to ASTRA. The Society collaborated with various other associations and served as a model for subsequent Romanian cultural organizations, including the League for the Cultural Unity of All Romanians, established in 1891.

The fourth chapter analyses the Society's assemblies and its diverse cultural-educational initiatives—lectures, commemorations, and public speeches—which were conducted periodically. Two primary types of meetings were held: Assembly meetings and Committee meetings. While non-members were permitted to attend Assembly sessions, their votes were merely consultative. These meetings were open to the public and, particularly in 1867 and 1868, frequently attracted prominent figures. During the assemblies, reports on the Society's financial status were delivered, decisions concerning budgetary allocations were made, lectures were presented, and information on scholarship recipients and upcoming activities was disseminated. Debates were followed by voting, and additional decisions were made during the smaller-scale Committee meetings. Initially, Assembly meetings occurred every three months; however, participation declined in subsequent years, reducing the frequency to approximately twice annually. Despite these fluctuations, the Society's sustained commitment to the education of Romanian youth over more than seven decades remains a noteworthy and commendable achievement.

Amendments to the Statutes required the approval of two-thirds of the Assembly members present. Initially, the Committee was re-elected every three months; later, this interval was extended to one year. Similarly, financial reports, which had initially been published quarterly, became annual publications. These procedural modifications reflected the decreased

regularity of Assembly meetings. According to archival minutes, the sessions were conducted in a composed and respectful atmosphere.

Traditionally, Assembly meetings included lectures with educational content. Intellectuals addressed topics pertaining to national history, the Romanian national struggle, and broader cultural themes. Initially, one member was required to deliver a pre-approved lecture at each meeting. The Society also organized commemorative events, particularly in observance of 3/15 May 1848—the date of the Great National Assembly at Blaj. These events attracted substantial public attendance and featured patriotic speeches, folk music, and traditional dances. The purpose of these activities was to reinforce national cohesion. This tradition, however, diminished a few years after the Society’s founding and was only revived in the late 1890s.

Chapter five provides a detailed analysis of the charitable activities undertaken by the Transylvania Society, primarily directed toward students and pupils. As outlined in the Society’s Statutes, its mission was to support young Romanian students from Austria-Hungary who lacked the financial means to pursue university education. Over time, the Society expanded its scope of assistance: beginning in 1878, it also began supporting the vocational training of Romanian pupils from Austria-Hungary. Other notable initiatives throughout its history included: providing aid to the wounded during Romania’s War of Independence; assisting Romanian refugees from Transylvania during the First World War; offering financial support to other cultural-philanthropic societies and boarding schools; and contributing to the construction of the Romanian Athenaeum and the Romanian Orthodox Cathedral in Sibiu. Guided by the motto “Culture will save Romania!”, the Society sought to foster Romanian national cohesion through education.

Following an initial period during which the Romanian Academic Society awarded scholarships, this responsibility was delegated to the Transylvania Society in 1868. Given the limited nature of its financial resources, the Society granted scholarships selectively, based on academic performance and financial need. Special emphasis was placed on sending students to Latin countries (such as Italy, France, and Belgium), although scholarships were also awarded for studies in German-speaking regions. The preference for Latin countries reflected the ideological leanings of the Society’s founders, particularly their attachment to Latinity. Both

Alexandru Papiu Ilarian and August Treboniu Laurian were prominent advocates of the Latinist linguistic movement. They also believed that Romanians from Austria-Hungary were excessively influenced by German culture, in contrast to Romanians in the Kingdom of Romania, who gravitated toward French culture.

The scholarship regulations required recipients to submit progress reports to the Society's Committee during the course of their studies. Students were encouraged to return to their regions of origin—Transylvania or Bukovina—upon graduation, rather than settling in the Kingdom of Romania, in line with the Society's mission of educating Romanians under foreign domination and enhancing their national resilience. While this expectation was not binding, it reflected the strong convictions of the Society's leadership. Nevertheless, certain scholarship recipients ultimately chose or were compelled to remain in Romania due to personal or professional circumstances.

By 1871, the Society had begun to witness the fruits of its efforts: scholarship recipient Alexandru Lapedatu obtained a doctoral degree in philosophy and was appointed professor at the Romanian high school in Braşov, while Ioachim Drăgescu defended a doctoral thesis in medicine. Over the course of its existence, the Society awarded 45 university scholarships.

The Transylvania Society primarily provided three types of assistance to Romanian youth: (1) full university scholarships; (2) occasional, non-scholarship financial support for university students; and (3) aid for vocational pupils. University scholarships typically covered the full duration of academic studies, whereas non-scholarship assistance consisted of occasional financial aid provided upon request and did not extend to the entire study period. Although initially discouraged, this ad hoc assistance became increasingly common. Throughout its activity, the Society granted 229 non-scholarship financial supports to university and secondary school students. A significant innovation introduced under the presidency of August Treboniu Laurian, the successor to Papiu Ilarian, was the coordination of vocational training, beginning in 1878. The Society offered financial assistance, secured instructors, and monitored pupils' academic progress. Its involvement continued even after graduation, providing employment

support when necessary. By 1923, over 1,000 individuals had completed vocational training with the Society's assistance.

Chapter six presents a synthesis of the Society's trajectory from the onset of the First World War to the end of the interwar period. Despite proposals to dissolve the Society—on the grounds that its mission had been fulfilled following the Great Union—its activities persisted throughout the interwar years. Documentation regarding this period is scarce, as no Assembly minutes were published. However, the Society's final president, Ioan Clinciu, made a significant contribution through his monograph *From the Past of the "Transylvania" Society. 1867–1939*, which traces the Society's remarkable development and offers valuable unpublished details, partially compensating for the lack of official records from the interwar period.

Chapter seven offers an overview of the outcomes of the Society's efforts, highlighting the achievements of individuals who benefited from its financial support. It reviews the professional paths of those who contributed to Romanian society in fields corresponding to their studies. In doing so, it seeks to demonstrate the positive impact of this Bucharest-based association on the broader history of Romania. Particularly noteworthy is the Society's longevity—73 years of continuous operation—which was exceptional for its time. Through its sustained efforts, the Transylvania Society contributed, to varying degrees, to major historical developments and consistently maintained the concerns of Romanians from Austria-Hungary on the Romanian state's public agenda.

A significant number of prominent Romanian intellectuals benefited, in various capacities, from the support of the Transylvania Society during their student years. Among them were the historian Ioan Lupaș; literary historian Gheorghe Bogdan-Duică; botanist Alexandru Borza; physician and researcher Iuliu Hațieganu; bacteriologist Victor Babeș; physician Ioachim Drăgescu; Octavian Blasianu; engineers Nicolae Gallea and Nicolae Făgărășanu; historian Ioan Sârbu; and poet and publicist Ioan Borcea. Many of these former beneficiaries contributed, in diverse ways, to the realization of the Great Union of 1918. Four individuals who had received educational support from the Transylvania Society—Emil Hațieganu, Aurel Vlad, Onisifor Ghibu, and Octavian Goga—became members of the Governing Council of Transylvania, an

administrative body composed of 15 members. These figures, along with other former students and members of the Society, played a significant role in advancing the national ideal of Greater Romania. During the interwar period, many of them distinguished themselves as public officials, ministers, university professors, rectors, researchers, and cultural figures. Through its sustained support of education, the Transylvania Society contributed decisively to the formation of Romania's intellectual elite. Its former students—often referred to as its “sons”—constituted a cohesive and influential nucleus within the country's academic and scientific spheres.

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