

Alba Iulia between the World Wars. Identity reconstruction

The research titled *Alba Iulia between the World Wars. Identity reconstruction*, that I created during my 3-year PHD, aimed at better understanding the history of this city, based on archived documents. The intent was to understand and discover more about the efforts of the new ruling Romanian elite and the local administration took during the period between the World Wars, so that Alba Iulia, a small town without many economic and cultural ambitions, can rise to the level of historical prestige of being a symbol of the Romanian national unification. Being about the research of the community as a whole between 1920 and 1940, it took considerable effort to capture the realities of the period.

From the first moment I considered this research as relevant not only to the local history, but also to the economic and social history, as well as the ideas and culture related to it because it opens later topics for detailed studies on each segment as well as an approach to the issue from the perspective of comparative history. I also considered important to approach these problems using generally known knowledge, enriched by the results of the latest research and new data from the archives about the nationally important events organized in Alba Iulia between the World Wars that contributed to the city becoming a Romanian symbol of unity.

Even if previous works about the events described in this research in Alba Iulia between 1920 and 1940 have been written, this purpose of this paper could be to fill gaps and bring the information back to date regarding the local administration, public health, the economic life, agriculture, trading, institutional dynamics, deviancy, habits, leisure, the role of women etc. as these topics have hardly been touched, with information being sporadic, not properly documented, even only mentioned. These pieces of information create a whole image of the city known as the city of *Unification* or *Coronation* or the *spiritual capital of the Romanian people*.

Even if it doesn't bring new ideas, I chose to include in the paper a short, several page retrospective, of historical nature regarding the city considered throughout history as a multiethnic and multicultural space. I did this so the reader could better understand the realities of the symbolic place and community that is Alba Iulia after the Unification of Romania in 1918, a goal pursued by Romanians throughout the centuries.

In the end, the paper is structured as follows: Introduction; I. Historical coordinates of the city of Alba Iulia; II. The realities of the local administration. The Alba Iulia town hall. The city and the problems of the citizens of Alba Iulia; III. The realities of the economic backbone. Companies, businesses, banks, entrepreneurs; IV. Public health in Alba Iulia between the World Wars; V. The police of Alba Iulia; VI. Alba Iulia, symbol of Romanian unity; Conclusions; Bibliography; Annexes.

Each chapter comes with answers to questions that motivated me to pursue this topic for three years. To name some of the questions: What were the realities of the city of Alba Iulia after the people took power and until the abolition of the royal residences? How did the new administrative bodies organize themselves and how did they function? Who were the new administrative workers, what kind of education did they have and what was their social background? Were there any women on these new positions and if so on which ones? What kind of problems did the community of Alba Iulia face between the World Wars? How did the authorities try to tackle these problems? What were the relations between the Romanian citizens and the minorities of the city, knowing what kind of privileges some ethnic groups enjoyed before 1918? How did the economic revival start? What kind of business was conducted in the city? What impact had the agrarian reform have on the citizens? What was the local public health system like? How many specialized doctors did it have? What impact did crime have on the city? How did big events organized in Alba Iulia contribute to the development of the city?

Apart from these questions, which were the main motivator behind writing this paper, it was important for me as a historian adopted by this city, to discover other lesser-known aspects of life, like the regular day of a simple citizen, which is not unlike than which we live today, with the differences being of course, nuanced.

The following paper tries to capture the realities of the time as I discovered and understood them by looking at thousands of documents kept at the National Archival Service of the Alba County, the National Unification Museum of Alba Iulia, the „Lucian Blaga” Central University Library of Cluj Napoca and at the „Mihai Eminescu” Central University Library of Iași. Will it, at least partially, meet the demands of those seeking answers about the city's past, urging them to new exploration? Without the hope of a positive answer the effort of the historian would be in vain.