

# 1. THE ANTECEDENTS OF THE MODERN UNIVERSITY IN CLUJ

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*Ioan Aurel Pop*

## 1.1. Historical Background

The Cluj University has its roots in the period that marked the end of the Middle Ages and the dawn of the modern world, that is in the time of the Renaissance, of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation or of the Catholic Reformation. The institution follows the old Central European tradition inaugurated in the 14<sup>th</sup> century with the creation of the Prague, Krakow and Vienna universities. In the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century new ideas begin to enter Central and Southeastern Europe, ideas related to the Greek and Latin classicism, to the heritage of antiquity and to the role of man in the universe, ideas regarding instruction and education, the communication between man and God etc.

Transylvania, Banat (until 1552) and Partium, which had become in 1541 an autonomous principality under Ottoman suzerainty, saw a time of great changes, also in terms of the conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism. The Protestants, supporting the direct access of the believer to the biblical text, laid considerable stress on the school, responsible for spreading literacy, for the production of scholars, translators, preachers, scientists, all in the service of the new ideas and all fighting the old Catholic "errors".

After the official triumph of the Reformation in the principality (1564-1572) there followed a Catholic struggle to regain the lost ground, struggle directed by the princes of the Bathory family, still faithful to the Roman Church. The best known member of this family was Stephen Bathory, who had become ruler of Transylvania in 1571 and who seemed extremely willing to fight the new denominations. The most efficient means to this end had been clearly set forth by the Council of Trento (1545-1563, with intermissions), and one of the tools used for their implementation was to be the Jesuit Order. One possible way of action was to offer superior training to the clergy and create valuable scholars, capable of firmly conveying the religious message through catechism and sermon, of efficiently fighting the "heretic" doctrines, of an eloquent and plausible argumentation of the Catholic truth. To this purpose, the schools and especially the universities founded by the Jesuits were to play an important role.

At that time, the city of Cluj was already a major cultural center, worthy of the title he bore as *civitas primaria* of Transylvania. The city which had in 1575-1600 something like 7500-8000 inhabitants was also the home of many intellectuals, ranging from doctors and pharmacists to professors, clergymen, lawyers and artists<sup>1</sup>. From an ethnic point of view, the

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<sup>1</sup> Ștefan Pascu, Viorica Marica, *Clujul medieval*, București, 1969, p. 54-55.

structure of the city had undergone considerable changes: if until the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century the German population had had the absolute majority in the city proper (like in all Hungarian and Transylvanian cities, in all Central European cities, for that matter), around 1450-1460 the number of Hungarians began to match that of the Germans; after this date, and especially starting with the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the number of Hungarians or of those who spoke Hungarian began to grow steadily; the Romanians couldn't usually settle *intra muros*, be it only because, as they belonged to a denomination deemed "schismatic", they were outcast and prevented from having their own churches in the city. Besides, the Romanians had long ceased to represent an estate (privileged group) or a nation, which seriously affected their status. Nevertheless, the Romanians were actively involved in the life of the city, offering cheap labor, local agricultural goods, products of the village crafts etc., since many villages around the city were mainly Romanian. On the other hand, in the time of the Renaissance and of humanism some Romanian personalities who had adopted the Catholic faith, like Matia Corvin or Nicolaus Olahus, became authentic scholars and patrons of the arts, founders of universities in Bratislava (Pojon, Pressburg), Buda and Trnava (Tirnavia).

The penetration of Protestant ideas seriously disturbed the life of Cluj city. Initially, the Lutheran teachings seemed to appeal to a great number of the city dwellers (German and Hungarian alike), but ultimately Calvinism (the Geneva denomination) became dominant and took the name of "the religion of Cluj" or that of "Hungarian religion". Shortly after, under the influence of some socinian refugees from Poland, anti-Trinitarian beliefs also began to appear, in the form of Unitarianism, which denied the Holy Trinity, the entire church tradition, the worship of saints etc. Cluj was to become the world center of the Unitarian faith. The supporters of these new trends, labeled "heresies" by the old church, were the local, that is Transylvanian, German intellectuals and preachers, people like Adrian Wolphard, Gaspar de Helta (Heltai) and Francisc David. The three were superintendents (bishops), scholars, orators, promoters of printing in the language of the people. They had a strong influence upon the Hungarian population of the city and of Transylvania in general. The actions taken by some of them are indeed surprising and defining for the new mentality. For instance, Francisc David, a Catholic turned Lutheran and then Calvinist, ended up as a fervent Unitarian and became the founder and the organizer - as bishop - of this radical denomination. Violent conflicts erupted against the background of such changes, and the assets of the Catholic Church were secularized, many monasteries were destroyed, their monks chased away and their icons and altars desecrated<sup>2</sup> etc. Finally, several decades later, in 1572 (while in the meantime most Germans and Hungarians had become Protestants), the Diet recognized, alongside the now weak Catholicism, the new denominations spawned by the Reformation: Lutheranism, Calvinism and Unitarianism. The three official nations - the Hungarian nobility, the Saxons and the Szeklers, amounting up to about one third of the total population - made thus official their turn from Catholicism to the Protestant denominations. Any innovation in the field of religion was forbidden from that moment on, and for the Orthodox Romanians this meant remaining in a state of inferiority, of discrimination.

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<sup>2</sup> Antonio Possevino, *Transilvania* (1584), in Veress Andras, *Fontes rerum Transylvanicarum*, Vol. III, Budapest, 1913, p. 91-92.

## 1.2. Projects and Successes: the First University \*

Prince John Sigismund, who had moved in his lifetime through all Protestant denominations and ended up as a Unitarian, intended to disseminate the new teaching by creating an institution of higher education. In 1565, the Diet convened in Cluj decided to create a Calvinist college, with professors brought from France and Switzerland. To organize the college and supervise its operation, they invited philosopher Petrus Ramus of Sorbonne, but he had to decline the invitation of the Transylvanian prince. Therefore, the latter turned to the Swiss professor Celi, of Basel, and wrote him about the planned "academy": *Cum auspice Deo optimo maximo, Academiam in hoc regno nostro instituere velimus, ut solidiora fundamenta literarium studiis iacere possimus, opera et consilio vestra uti statuimus*<sup>3</sup>. The political and military turmoil in the country, the conflict between the Ottoman and the Hapsburg Empires for the domination of Transylvania, the animosity between the various denominations, the Catholic offensive in the form of the Counter-Reformation, all prevented the successful outcome of these projects.

In 1571, the aforementioned Stephen Bathory became prince of Transylvania, being also appointed King of Poland in 1575. With this, his prestige and the influence of his family grew immensely. The conditions were thus favorable to a Catholic revival, supported by the temporal power in combination with the efficient measures taken by the Holy See. Consequently, the Jesuit monks, after receiving permission to settle at Cluj-Mănăştur (1579), in the old Benedictine church and later in the city proper (1581), became close councilors to the prince and to the members of his court. The Jesuits, arrived from Poland and from Rome, were given the old Franciscan monastery built in the time of King Matia Corvin near the Tailors' Tower and which was by then in ruins. From this privileged, *intra muros* location, the monks managed to regain for the Catholic faith something like 400 people<sup>4</sup>. During the Counter-Reformation, the Jesuits also brought with them a series of humanist ideas and formulae, applicable in the field of instruction, formulae stressed in the "tridentine profession of faith" issued by Pope Pius IV in 1564. Experienced as they were in the field, the prince entrusted them with the organization of a new university. On May 12, 1581, in Vilna (Vilnius), Stephen Bathory signed the document that founded the Cluj University. The institution had been designed according to the Western and Central European model, with the statutory right to award the known titles of *baccalaureus*, *magister artium* and *doctor*. In fact, the founding document clearly stipulated that "all those who have successfully gone through the beaux arts, Hebrew, Greek, Latin [...] and now master the complete science shall become baccalaureats, masters or doctors, and these degrees shall bring them the same rights, dignity, distinction and honor as those granted by Italian, French, Spanish or German academies"<sup>5</sup>. The university had the classical structure, with three colleges - theology, philosophy and law - and its rector was an Italian, Antonio Possevino. Outstanding diplomat, this monk had successfully completed several missions in Sweden and Russia on behalf of the

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<sup>3</sup> Onisifor Ghibu, *Universitatea Daciei Superioare*, Bucureşti, 1929, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Ştefan Pascu (ed.), *Istoria Clujului*, Cluj, 1974, p. 146.

<sup>5</sup> Veress Andras, *Fontes rerum Trasylovanicarum*, vol I, Cluj-Budapest-Veszprém, 1911, p. 127-132; Onisifor Ghibu, *op. cit.*, p.3.

Holy See, and he came to Cluj accompanied by 32 fellow monks, convinced of the importance of his new task. Starting with the year 1583, the university was accompanied by a *collegium-seminarium* for the low income students and by another one set up for the sons of noblemen, both organized like the similar institution from Bohemia, Poland and Germany<sup>6</sup>. In 1585, the Cluj University had more than 130 students, and its two-story building erected near the old Franciscan church (today a Reformed or Calvinist church) was one of the most impressive in the city. Antonio Possevino, in his book entitled *Transilvania* (1584), says that for the good functioning of the institution, it received the revenue of the Cluj-Mănăştur monastery, with six villages inhabited by 500 serf families<sup>7</sup>. To satisfy the needs of the university, but also in order to support the Catholic culture and faith, Prince Stephen Bathory also intended to create a printing shop in Cluj, for books in Latin, Hungarian and Romanian, chiefly catechisms - as decided by the Council of Trento - as a means to counteract the Reformation and draw the Romanians towards the Catholic faith.

An interesting fact, albeit uncertain, would be the short presence of Nicolae Pătraşcu, son of Prince Michael the Brave, as a student of the inferior level courses of the Cluj University; it is known that a document dated in August 1599 contains the recommendation made by Andrew Bathory that the Jesuits receive in their school the son of the Wallachian ruler<sup>8</sup>. In fact, after his conquest of Transylvania and his institution as prince, Michael the Brave offered his protection to the Cluj Jesuits, and on December 31, 1599, he confirmed their ownership over all buildings granted by the previous rulers<sup>9</sup>.

For more than two decades, the Catholic University was a major cultural presence in the life of the city and of the country, although the circumstances were not exactly favorable for its activity. There were few Catholics left in Transylvania, and proof of this is the fact that the Diet had begun to protest against the Jesuit presence as early as 1581. After the death of Michael the Brave (1601), the political and military struggle, combined with the decay of the Bathory family, led to serious consequences. Around the year 1603 the Jesuits were chased from the city and the university building, together with the ancillary constructions, was completely destroyed by the Protestant population<sup>10</sup>.

### **1.3. The Reconstruction of the University under the Hapsburgs**

Prior to the Hapsburg accession (1688), the 17<sup>th</sup> century had been dominated by the Protestant princes. Consequently, the Diet decided to create a Protestant college in Cluj, but instead Prince Gabriel Bethlen founded it in Alba-Iulia, his city of residence and old center of the now gone Catholic diocese. Reduced to the rank of a high school, in 1658 the Alba college moved to Aiud, where it successfully operated and turned out numerous classes of well trained intellectuals.

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<sup>6</sup> Ştefan Pascu (ed.), *Istoria învăţământului din România*, vol I, Bucureşti, 1983, p. 123.

<sup>7</sup> Antonio Possevino, *op. cit.*, p. 132; Ştefan Pascu, *Istoria Clujului...*, p. 147.

<sup>8</sup> See more in Damian Todîţa, *Pătraşcu cel Tânăr, fiul lui Mihai Viteazul*, Bucureşti, 1982, p. 23-25.

<sup>9</sup> Csiky Miklós, *A gyulafehérvári róm. kath. főgymnasium története*, Alba Iulia, 1896, p.12; Onisifor Ghibu, *op.cit.*, p.3.

<sup>10</sup> Ştefan Pascu, *Universitatea "Babeş-Bolyai" din Cluj*, Cluj, 1972, p. 9.

After decades of stagnation and decay of Catholic education, Cluj was to become once again a great academic center through the care of the Hapsburgs. They gave an important role to the Catholic Church, recreated the hierarchy and the old diocese of Alba and brought the Jesuits back to Transylvania (1693). These “soldiers of Jesus” were meant to contribute through religious, cultural and even political means to Transylvania’s return to the Catholic faith, almost completely lost by then in that country<sup>11</sup>. A means to achieve this goal was to be the university itself (named “Academia Societatis Jesu Claudiopolitana”) recreated by these Jesuits in 1698 in the old building of the Unitarian college of Cluj. The institution still had three colleges - of theology, philosophy and sciences (mathematics and natural sciences) - and the courses were designed according to the *Ratio atque Institutio Studiorum Societatis Jesu*, a Jesuit curriculum, as we can see<sup>12</sup>. The university college was led by a *rector academicus*, named *rector magnificus* starting with 1725, aided by a *cancelarius*. The latter supervised the curricula, which included disciplines such as metaphysics, theology or ethics. Among the most important professors we find Bokai Imre (author of the *Fondatores Academiae Transilvaniae*, 1713), Radnóti Iosef (interested in the Counter-Reformation and especially in persuading the Romanians to a religious union), Illia Andrei (author of a work called *Ortus at progressus variarum in Dacia gentium ac religionum*), Georg Daróczi (with a history of the Cluj college), Francisc Fassching (author of *Vetus Dacia*, 1725, and *Nova Dacia*, 1733), mathematicians Ioan Fridválszky, Maximilian Höll a.o.<sup>13</sup>. The college had two levels: gymnasium and the superior level. The faculty of theology or the “St Joseph” Roman-Catholic Seminar could also receive Romanian students, as stipulated in the decision made by the Transylvanian government on September 26, 1699: “As there are no schools for the Romanians, the aspiring priests must be ordained only after [the Romanian students] will have studied in the schools of that official denomination they adopted, that is the Catholic, Lutheran or Calvinist ones”<sup>14</sup>. The Romanians’ access to the college was nevertheless conditioned, at least formally, as we can see, by their rejection of the Orthodox faith in favor of the Catholic one or of one of the “accepted religions”. The rule was not always applied as such, but the exceptions were few.

The Union with the Church of Rome (1697-1701), outcome of Jesuit efforts, opened for many Romanians the gates of the schools and even of the Cluj college, without compelling them to give up on the essence of the traditional Eastern denomination. The university was not just a bastion of Catholic faith and of the Vienna court, it was also a supporter of Latin studies. The Uniate synod convened in Cluj in 1728 and chaired by the “pater theologian” and rector of the Jesuit college, George Regay, was quite restrictive and firm, demanding that no Uniate Romanian dare send his children to the “schismatic” or “heretic” schools, stipulating a

<sup>11</sup> Elemér Gyárfás, *L’Eglise catholique de Transsylvanie*, p. 7; Onisifor Ghibu, *op. cit.*, p.

<sup>12</sup> Ștefan Pascu, *Universitatea...*, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Erdély Károly, *A Kolozsvári róm. kath. főgymnasium története. 1759-1898*, Cluj, 1898, p. 62; Benkő József, *Transsilvania sive Magnus Transsilvaniae Principatus*, Voll. II, Vienna, 1778, p. 446-449; Ștefan Pascu (ed), *Istoria Clujului...*, p. 227-228.

<sup>14</sup> Nicolae Albu, *Istoria învățământului românesc din Transilvania până la 1800*, Blaj, 1944, p. 89.

fine of 24 florins for the archpriests and the priests and of 12 florins for the laymen; the same synod came up with the idea (which remained as a mere project) of a special seminar for the Greek-Catholics<sup>15</sup>. The first Romanian scholar was mentioned in the institution in 1719. Between 1725 and 1752, the records show that out of 335 graduates only 10 were Romanian, that is under 3%, and out of the total number of masters (candidates for a doctorate) only 8 were Romanian, that is less than 3.5%<sup>16</sup>. Some Romanians even became professors at the same college. Alongside the aforementioned Andrei Illia (probably of Romanian origin), we also have to mention the presence of people like Antonie Musca (author of *Heroes Daciae heroico carmine celebrati* and *Felices duorum Daciae Voivodarum adversus barbaros expeditiones*), George Buitul (he translated into Romanian and published in 1703 the *Catechismus szau Summa kredinczei Katolicsesti*, by Petrus Canisius), Vasile Dobra (teaching the poetry class and remarkable preacher), Ștefan More a.o.<sup>17</sup> In this academic and Jesuit environment we see the first attempts and examples of the Latin alphabet being used in Romanian writings.

In the second half 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the modernization of the society, we can also feel a new orientation in the educational system of Cluj city, shaped by the Enlightenment, by the Theresian and Josephite reformism, by the new regulations regarding the field of education (*Norma Regia* and *Ratio Educationis*). In 1753, the Jesuit college took the name of the "Academic University College", and its rector began to be officially called *Collegii Academici et Almae Universitatis Rector Magnificus*; the importance given to natural sciences grew considerably, the number of disciplines also increased, new publications appeared<sup>18</sup>. The number of students grew with every year that passed: 50 in 1703, 90 in 1706, 186 in 1711, 387 in 1747, 427 in 1753, 493 in 1771<sup>19</sup>. Before 1770, the school had managed to offer instruction to 20.487 young men, through the effort of 744 Jesuit professors<sup>20</sup>.

The affirmation of the modern national identities and the struggle for national emancipation brought culture, and especially the schools, in the service of national pride, for the progress of the various ethnic groups. Even if the language of teaching in the Cluj college was obviously Latin, the institution was nevertheless perceived as belonging to the Hungarian "nation" and to the Catholic denomination. Therefore, in 1761 Baron Samuel Brukenthal asked Empress Maria Theresa to create a German Lutheran university in Sibiu. Albeit tempting, the idea was not sanctioned by the Vienna court. The Jesuit college itself was meant to have a short life, as the Pope discontinued the order through a bull issued in 1773.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>16</sup> Remus Câmpeanu, *Intellectualitatea Română din Transilvania în veacul al XVIII-lea* (doctoral thesis), Cluj-Napoca, 1999, p. 364-365.

<sup>17</sup> Erdély Károly, *op. cit.*, p. 43, 65, 72; Onisifor Ghibu, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Ștefan Pascu (ed), *Istoria Clujului...*, p. 234-235.

<sup>19</sup> *Idem*, Universitatea "Babeș-Bolyai" ..., p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> Remus Câmpeanu, *op. cit.*, p. 369.

## 1.4. The Piarist Academic College

The educational activity was soon revived with the help of yet another religious order, that of the Piarists. In 1776, 20 Piarists arrived in Cluj, led by rector Stephen Pállya. The king appointed Count Dionisie Bánffi as director of the college. The structure of the Piarist college was the following: a theological faculty with six departments (it operated only for a limited period of time), one of philosophy, with professors of philosophy, mathematics, physics, history, natural sciences, a law school where they studied Roman law, natural law, penal and public law, administrative sciences, then mining and economic law, statistics, agricultural economy, Latin paleography; in 1775 the medical school was inaugurated, with disciplines like anatomy, surgery, obstetrics; later they also taught optometry, veterinarian medicine, physiology, chemistry, botanics<sup>21</sup>. In 1777, 346 students were enrolled in the gymnasium and in the superior level, being instructed by 5 professors of theology, 3 of law, 6 of philosophy, poetics and rhetoric and 4 of grammar<sup>22</sup>. During the reign of Joseph II, starting with the year 1786, the official ranking of the Cluj institution became that of “academic high school”, with a smaller number of students and teachers. The number of students was to rise later; for instance, in 1800 there were 265 students, 54 of them Romanian (20.3%). The students belonged to various social classes, but dominant were those of noble extraction. In the 1799/1800 academic year, the Orthodox Romanians represented 0.48% of the total number of students enrolled in the gymnasium and the superior level. Of the Piarist professors, the most important were Bolla Márton (author of a universal history and of a insulting answer to the *Supplex Libellus Valachorum*), Koppi Károly (historian), Gegö Adolf (astronomer and mathematician, professor of Gheorghe Lazăr), Körös Imre (influenced by some ideas of the French Revolution, also a professor of Gheorghe Lazăr). Cameral sciences were taught after the modern textbook published by Austrian minister J. Sonnenfels. In terms of optometry, worthy of mention is the Romanian professor Ioan Piuariu-Molnar, historian and man of the Enlightenment, supporter of some scientific methods regarding the anatomy and physiology of the human eye. The academic high school also had a boarding house and a seminar (for the interns), an astronomical observatory and a printing shop.

Alongside the Catholic institutions led by the Jesuits and later by the Piarists, Cluj also hosted some famous Protestant high schools. The students of the Cluj colleges, especially those of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, belonged to various nations and denominations, but obviously the official ones were dominant. In time, mainly from the Jesuit and then from the Piarist schools, outstanding Romanian personalities began to emerge, people like Gheorghe Sincai, Gheorghe Lazăr, Teodor Racoce, Vasile Colossi, Vasilie Popp, Vasile Moga, Dimitrie Caian and many others. In the inferior level, in 1794-1800 the Romanians which basically formed two-

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<sup>21</sup> See Bíró Venczel, *A Kolozsvári róm. kath. főgymnasium története*, in “Öreg diák visszanéz...”, ed. by György Lajos, Cluj, 1926; *Schematismus dicasteriorum et officialium Magni Principatus Transilvaniae pro anno 1796*; Bíró Venczel, *A Kolozsvári jeszuita egyetem szervezete és építkezesei a XVIII. Században*, in “Erdélyi Múzeum”, Cluj, 1945, nr. 1-2; Ștefan Pascu (ed) *Istoria Clujului...*, p. 235-237.

<sup>22</sup> Remus Câmpeanu, *op. cit.*, p. 369.

thirds of the entire population of the country represented an average 20% of the total number of students, which is quite remarkable if we consider the subordinate status of the Romanian nation in Transylvania. In the superior level, the percentage showing the Romanian presence is smaller (an average of 15%, between 1799 and 1800). The situation can be explained by the financial resources, a lot smaller with the Romanians than with the official nations<sup>23</sup>.

In the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the late Enlightenment came into contact with the pre-romantic trends, with the modern liberal and national ideas, the educational institutions of Cluj underwent a process aimed at imposing the national languages in the cultural activity. The Piarist academic high school, with its three faculties (law, philosophy and medicine, the theological one having been moved to Alba Iulia), was interested in renewal, in bringing famous professors, in adapting to the second *Ratio Educationis*. Thus, professor Carol Hager, member of the Mineralogy Association of Jena, was teaching chemistry, metallurgy and natural history here, professor Ladislau Vaida - penal law, "homeland law", criminal law -, professor Samuil Kovats - rural economy; other professors held courses of mathematics, history, philology, metaphysics, moral philosophy, physics, mechanics, natural and public law, "universal rights of the nations", civil law, cameral studies, special pathology, surgery, physiology etc. In 1841 there were 318 students in philosophy, law and medicine, in 1842 there were 327, in 1843 - 325, in 1844 - 315, in 1845-1846 - 287, and in 1847-1848 - 287<sup>24</sup>. In spite of a series of obstacles, the number of Romanians grew steadily, especially in the (Piarist) law school, where in 1843 their number was of 44. Among them, future personalities: Ioan Lemeni, Ștefan Moldovan, Ladislau Vaida (professor of law), Gheorghe Anghel, Ioan Bran, Iacob Bologna, Aron Pumnul, Alexandru Papiu Ilarian, Nicolae Popea, Avram Iancu, Gheorghe Barițiu, Ioan Mețianu, Mihai Gabriel, Simion Ramonțai, Alexandru Bătâneanu, Ilie Măcelariu, Ioan Maiorescu, Florian Porcius, Gabriel Munteanu, Florian Micaș, Ștefan Micle and many others. Papiu Ilarian and Nicolae Popea published here the students' magazine called *Aurora* or *Zorile* (The Dawn), with obvious romantic tendencies<sup>25</sup>.

In spite of the high prestige gained by the Piarist school, it came to continue a confessional and even medieval tradition which, in spite of all adaptations to the new times, could not meet the demands of a modern system of higher education. On the other hand, Latin, as a language of study, was an obstacle in front of modernization, and the imposition of Hungarian as official language in the principality (after 1842) was not bound to stimulate harmony and ecumenism, desired up to a certain point by the Vienna court for the sake of stability. Consequently, national cultural trends and movements began to gain momentum in Transylvania, promoting the idea of the modern universities, in the national languages. The idea of a Romanian academy or university began to appear more and more frequently after 1800.

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<sup>23</sup> Ștefan Pascu (ed) *Istoria Clujului...*, p.238-239.

<sup>24</sup> Remus Câmpeanu, *op. cit.*, p. 371.

<sup>25</sup> Ștefan Pascu (ed) *Istoria Clujului...*, p.243-244.



## **1.5. Considerations Regarding the Cluj Institutions of Higher Education Before 1848**

Between 1581 and 1848 the evolution of the Cluj institutions of higher education wasn't at all uniform and even saw periods of interruption. The nature of the "high" schools of Cluj, just like that of other similar institutions from the Central and South-East European region, has generated a series of debates which seem superfluous, up to a certain point. What could be called higher education in 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century Europe almost never represented an institution with precise, generally accepted rules. Yet, in 1581, the university that opened in Cluj was of European standing and rank, similar to its counterparts from the neighboring countries and from Europe in general. Later on, for more than 250 years, the university went through favorable or difficult times, was called university, then academy, then college, then high school, was closed and reopened, but it never ceased to be a privileged place, dedicated to learning and to higher education. During all this time, there were numerous elements that brought the Cluj school closer to the idea of a true university, and there were others that made it similar to the institutions of secondary education. Nevertheless, it is quite certain that, regardless of its name and ranking, almost always these school of Cluj were the most prestigious in Transylvania.

And there is one more thing that has to be pointed out. Just like any other similar institution, the Cluj university, apart from the central idea of instruction, also served to other purposes imposed by the powers that be, and namely denominational and political purposes, national ones etc. For instance, in 1581 the institution which was by then under the patronage of Stephen Báthory was serving the Counter-Reformation and was meant to strengthen the Catholic faith. The Reformed college that was supposed to be established in Cluj in 1622 was meant to fight Catholicism and strengthen Calvinism and the Calvinist principality. After 1698, the Vienna court saw in the university college an instrument it could use to consolidate its power by reviving Catholicism, cultivating loyalty towards the Empire, by forming good citizens and even by increasing the cultural influence of the German language. The Hungarian elite had begun to have divergent interests, as it saw in the institutes of higher education a means to cultivate a Transylvanian individuality dominated by the official "nations", a means to strengthen the Hungarian language and culture etc. The Saxons and the Romanians, when contemplating the possibility of a university for their "nations", had in mind their progress, the cultivation or the formation of their own elites, meant to serve the national ideals.

Beginning with the end of the Middle Ages, when the division of students and professors according to "national" lines becomes more and more poignant, the universities gradually became nuclei supporting the confessional and national interests. Obviously, this never prevented most of them from remaining essentially centers of authentic study, creators of unique cultural values which ensured the progress of mankind.