

History and bibliography of Minerva from Cluj

The Minerva Institute of Literature and Printing in Cluj (Minerva Irodalmi és Nyomdai Műintézet Rt., Kolozsvár) was a multifarious institution for editing and printing, which operated in the capital town of Transylvania between 1920 and 1948, the primordial centre of creation of the Hungarian community in Romania in the interwar period. The history of this institution was closely linked to the history and culture of Cluj and the Transylvanian Hungarian community, but to a large extent to the history of the other ethnic communities of the city and of the region.

During the decades that have passed since the nationalization of the institute in 1948, the emergence of works dedicated to the activity carried out by Minerva Cluj was not possible, and this volume constitutes the first attempt to reconstruct the history of the Institute, based on a thorough scientific research of the sources available in archives, libraries and antique bookshops, supplemented by interviews with people who were connected with the institute.

Minerva was legally established on August 16, 1920 by 653 contributors, mostly ethnic Hungarians, who contributed to the foundation of the organization with a total amount of 750 thousand Romanian Lei (1.5 million Austrian-Hungarian Crowns). Their goal was to ensure in the new historical context of World War I, given that Transylvania became part of Greater Romania, the publishing of textbooks for the Hungarian community in Romania and to make possible the publication and dissemination of literary works, literature magazines, popular newspapers and possibly political newspapers necessary to the community.

The registration of the private legal entity was at the time possible only under commercial law, since the law on associations and foundations was developed in Romania only after adoption of the Constitution of 1923, respectively in 1924. However, with the name “institute of literature” the original founders signalled that it is a Community institution of culture, and not an enterprise aimed at making a profit. Accordingly, the profit achieved was invested in development and educational and cultural activities.

Start-up founders bought the typography and bookbinding of Jenő Stief, which they expanded with a zincography workshop and a printing cliché preparation department in 1921. In the period 1922-1924 the three Transylvanian Hungarian histor-



ic churches (Roman Catholic, Reformed/Calvinist and Unitarian) contributed substantially to the financial strengthening of the institute.

In 1923 Minerva managed to purchase the real estate located at 5 Sámuel Brassai Street (today no. 7) in Cluj, where in 1924 a modern building with three floors was erected. Also in 1923 Minerva became a shareholder of the Bolyai Institute of Literature in Târgu Mureş, respectively of the Erzsébet Târnăveni Book Typography. For the latter it later became sole owner, moving the printing press in 1928 to Cluj and completing thus with additional equipment its own section for typesetting in Cluj. In the same year, Minerva acquired three Linotype typesetting machines, with which it also increased its capacity. In 1929, the institute expanded again, buying the property in 5 Guttenberg Street (today 16 Tipografiei Street), on which it built a new house with two floors.

On its tenth anniversary, in 1930, Minerva occupied 45 rooms, already having a number of 115 specialized employees, 52 permanent officials and 15 external contractors. In the same year, Minerva acquired the embossing typography of Mór Újhegyi thereby further diversifying its technical possibilities.

The Great Economic Recession of 1929-1933 caused difficulties to Minerva as well. The Institute had to lay off some staff, and significantly reduce the salary of the preserved employees. In 1934, the Institute was forced to pay 60,000 Lei by way of loan to the state, and in 1939 1.2 million Lei as a contribution to preparations for war. However, in 1941, the Institute acquired the Concordia Printing & Publishing House and the Ardealul Printing House from Cluj, and in 1944 the property with access to two adjoining streets located on 5 Sámuel Brassai Street / 4 Ferenc Dávid.

On June 11, 1948, the Minerva Institute of Literature and Printing was confiscated and turned over to the Romanian Workers' Party Publishing House (Editura Partidului Muncitoresc Român), its estate being nationalized later in 1979.

Since its founding, Minerva edited numerous textbooks destined to Hungarian students in primary and middle schools as well as to high school students. A top place among the undertakings of the institute was the editing and publication of Romanian language and literature textbooks for schools teaching in Hungarian and the publication of dictionaries necessary for learning Romanian. Also, Minerva engaged in the translation of Romanian literature classics into Hungarian and published Romanian translations of Hungarian authors.

Starting with 1920, it published the magazine *Erdélyi Orvosi Lap* (Medical Magazine of Transylvania), the weekly newspaper *Közgazdaság* (Economy), the magazine *Erdélyi Gazda* (Transylvanian Farmer), the newspaper *Az Út* (The Way) of the Reformed/Calvinist Church, the literature and art magazine *Pásztortűz* (Shepherd's Fire), the weekly *Magyar Nép* (Hungarian People), the magazine *Református Szemle* (Reformed/Calvinist Chronicle), the *Keresztény Magvető* (Christian Sower), the *Méhészeti Közlöny* (Beekeepers Journal), children's magazine *Jóbarát* (Good Friend), literary magazines *Erdélyi Irodalmi Szemle* (Transylvanian Literary Chronicle) and *Erdélyi Helikon* (Transyl-

vanian Helicon), the daily newspapers *Ellenzék* (Opposition), *Esti Lap* (Evening Newspaper), *Keleti Újság* (Eastern Journal) and *Magyar Újság* (Hungarian News) and the scientific magazine *Múzeumi Füzetek* (Museum Notebooks).

After 1944, Minerva published the newspapers *Világosság* (Light), *Erdély* (Transylvania), *Erdélyi Szikra* (Transylvanian Sparkle), which later became *Igazság* (Truth), the weekly newspapers *Falvak Népe* (People of the Village), *Plugarii* (Ploughmen), *Népvédelem Lapja* (People's Defence Newspaper), *Egység* (Unity – weekly newspaper of the Jewish community), literary magazine *Utunk* (Our Way) and women's magazine *Dolgozó Nő* (Working Women).

Minerva also published a series of books edited by the institute's employees. Thus, starting with 1921 it published the 25 volumes of the series *Erdélyi Magyar Naptár* (Hungarian Almanac of Transylvania), and an entire series of volumes of fiction, history, culture, art etc. reunited in the series *Minerva Könyvtár* (Minerva Library) and *Minerva Népkönyvtár* (Popular Library Minerva), volumes edited by Sándor Tavaszy and Károly Rass.

At Minerva appeared the series of literature volumes generically entitled *Magyar Nép Könyvtára* (Hungarian's Library), *Magyar Ifjúság Könyvtára* (The Library of Hungarian Youth), *Pásztortűz Könyvtára* (Library of Magazine *Pásztortűz*), *Erdélyi Tudományos Füzetek* (Transylvanian Scientific Notebooks), *Erdélyi Ritkaságok* (Transylvanian Rarities) and others.

In 1930, Minerva published the *Grafikai Évkönyv* (Yearbook of Graphic Industry), written by Kálmán Krizsó, comprising the national statistics of graphic art in Romania, and in 1936 the volume of over 600 pages of Endre Nagy and Ferenc Szász, entitled *Gazdatudomány* (Farmer's Science).

Minerva edited and published a number of notable works in Romanian and other languages of communities living in Transylvania. One of the most important achievements of the institute was the reference work *Minerva – Enciclopedie Română* (Minerva – Romanian Encyclopedia), published in 1929, the first Romanian after the First World War with over 1000 photos and drawings, 100 black-and-white maps, 50 artistic drawings and a total of 10 colour maps. The Encyclopedia was developed by an editorial team led by de Alexandru Coriolan Pteancu, which included Augustin Maior, Ștefan Mețeș, Romulus Demetrescu, dr. Valeriu L. Bologa and others.

Among Romanian newspapers we mention the daily newspaper *România nouă* (New Romania) printed at Minerva between 1933 and 1938, a newspaper run and edited by the peasant party leaders Zaharia and Paul Boilă having at that time among its young reporters Corneliu Coposu, the future leader of the democratic opposition after the regime change of 1989. Romanian media history lists *România nouă* (New Romania) among the most important newspapers of the era. Another Romanian publication with an important echo at the time was *Plugarii* (Ploughmen), the honorary director of which was Petru Groza, Prime Minister of Romania after 1945.



Minerva also had its own distribution network. Thus, already in 1920 it acquired from János Stein the bookshop located in the Central Square of the city (now Union Square), which later became the centre for the dissemination of Minerva publications. Minerva held in the interwar period the main bookshop in Cluj, known today as the University Bookshop.

The balance sheet 25 years after the founding of the Institute of Literature and Printing Minerva shows that until 1944 the institute edited and published a number of 265 handbooks with a total circulation of 1,055,999 copies, 441 literature and science books in a total circulation of 936,376 copies and other publications in a total circulation of 2,226,477 copies. It can be estimated that in the 28 years of its existence, from 1920 to 1948, Minerva from Cluj edited and printed a number of over 2 million copies of books and the number of volumes printed for third parties amounted to 4.5-5 million copies. Thus, the total number of books of all kinds which came out of the gate of Minerva from Cluj amounted to about 7 million copies.

A combined balance of the titles emerged from the workshops of the institute shows that, between 1920 and 1940, 1563 books and 56 magazines appeared in total at Minerva, and during 1941-1948 a total of 841 books and 30 journals were published. Between 1920 and 1948, 274 titles of textbooks were published and printed by Minerva, which had, for years, Alexandru C. Pteancu, at that time general school inspector of Transylvania, as member of its Governing Board. The figures are particularly telling for those who know exactly how much work is required for the writing, preparation for printing and printing of a single book or of a magazine issue.

Minerva was a permanent promoter and patron of the arts in Transylvania. In the 1930s, the Institute also hosted the Szolnay-Szervátiusz school of painting and sculpture and on the panels of its exhibition hall the public of Cluj was surprised to encounter works of contemporary artists who marked the Transylvanian fine art. Many of these artists have in fact contributed to illustrate the publications of Minerva, elevating their aesthetic-qualitative level.

This volume presents the history of the Minerva Institute of Literature and Printing based on the data from local archives and libraries, including both a comprehensive bibliography of publications edited and printed by the institute during the 28 years of its existence. This bibliography is a veritable database for future research and evaluations of specialists, and also provides very interesting information to the public.

After 1989, the Hungarian community of Cluj has made great efforts to re-establish the Cluj-based Minerva and recover lost assets, as well as to resume the activity of editing books (literature, art and science) and quality press in Hungarian. The establishment in 1991 of the Minerva Cultural Association, its legal registration in 1992, and the designation of this organization as the successor and upholder of the work of its predecessor, the Minerva Institute of Literature and Printing, have served and serve the same purpose.