

THE RURAL LIBRARIES FROM ARAD DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD

Abstract: One of the most dynamic fields in the process of spreading literacy in the rural world during the interwar period was the establishment of libraries. Primarily, they were meant to help individuals stay in touch with the practice of reading after graduating from elementary schools or classes for adults. The setting up of new libraries and the enrichment of the existing ones was a dynamic phenomenon in the villages from Arad County. There was indeed a tradition of reading societies here, some operating with the choirs, and there were also popular *casinas* (cultural and political societies) with preoccupations in the field; however, the books were few, and they were unattractive for the members of the rural communities; this led to libraries becoming part of a cultural reconstruction plan which yielded genuine results. In 1933, there functioned 52 popular libraries and 245 school libraries, with a book fund of 80,000 volumes. There were also established libraries pertaining to the parishes and the parish offices, the works included there addressing pastoral and catechetical matters and providing arguments in support of the Orthodox faith. The establishment of libraries, which evinced a special attention granted to technical organisation and to adapting the content to the audience's expectations, was continued by the Romanian Cultural Foundation "Concordia." In 1938, the 15 libraries founded in villages throughout the county housed 5,455 books, a large part thereof having been donated to the Astra circles. The cultural activity that developed around them included conferences and public lectures, literary soirees, and farmers' schools. On the whole, beyond all difficulties, the establishment and development of rural libraries meant capturing the fluctuating interest of the public, a significant contribution to the spreading of literacy, as well as a way of raising the standard of living in the rural communities.

Keywords: interwar, rural, libraries, book, Arad.

The interwar years were coeval with consistent concerns for the enlightenment of the rural population, which represented the majority in terms of its share in the overall population and faced numerous problems. The actions undertaken towards the dissemination of culture were supported by cultural societies and associations, popular universities, libraries, farmers' schools, teachers' cultural circles, conferences, reading societies and choirs, with the involvement of the school and the church. The state encouraged such actions as the main stakes were helping elementary school graduates stay in touch with the practice of reading, as well as accomplishing the civic education of those who had become voters and landowners as a result of various reforms.

Amid the concerns for the dissemination of culture in the villages from Arad, the need to set up libraries that would give access to the widest categories of readers and to develop the existing libraries occupied an important place.

In several localities, there prevailed the tradition of the reading societies; during the years of the struggle for national rights and the preservation of cultural identity, these societies carried out their activity beside choirs, some of them organising libraries. In turn, the popular *casinas*, established after World War I, addressed the issue of the

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creation of libraries, an intention that materialised partly. Thus, for instance, the *Casina of Ineu* had set out its goal of “making political newspapers and literary and scientific journals available.”² *The Associations of the Romanian Women from Gurahonț and Radna, the Social Circle in Șiria, the Romanian Youth Society of Nădlac* and the *Casina and the Reading House of Șiclău* set up libraries.³ *The Casina of the Intellectuals from Hălmagiu* also owned a library.⁴ In 1923, *The Romanian Circle of Ineu* founded a library which had 472 volumes, while the *Craftsmen’s Club* in the same locality had 210 books.⁵ Libraries owned by mayors’ offices also existed at Berechiu, Gurba, and Chereluș.⁶

However, during the early years of the interwar period, the conditions of the rural libraries in Arad were precarious, both in terms of their endowment and their functional capacity. On his visit to several villages, Prefect Ion Georgescu encountered a difficult situation, which was marred by the realities of the past: poorly endowed, disorganised libraries, with obsolete collections comprising, for the most part, books in Hungarian. These findings led him to initiate steps for the establishment of rural libraries with books in Romanian. As part of this effort, he strove to obtain several thousand volumes, with the support of publishers in Bucharest: these were “instructive and literary books,” acquired with a view to setting up, initially, twenty libraries. At the same time, the sum of 100,000 lei was allocated for the purchase of books, the selection of the volumes being entrusted to a committee that included writers, journalists, and teachers.⁷

These concerns were integrated into a larger plan for cultural reconstruction that started to take effect: by the end of 1924, the foundations of 45 communal libraries had been laid down.⁸ Popular libraries were established in the localities Curtici, Chișineu-Criș, Sfânta Ana, Otlaca, Păuliș, Radna, Sebiș, Gurahonț, Șiria, Spineni, Nădlac, Semlac, Șeitin, Socodor, Șiclău, Nădab, Comlăuș, Ineu, and Pecica.⁹ A popular library began to operate in Radna in 1930.¹⁰

A remarkable development was registered by *school libraries*, whose number reached 245 in 1933.¹¹ In the first phase, the process was conducted in parallel with the construction of schools, which meant that by the end of 1925, 22 library rooms had been furnished.¹² In 1928, libraries were set up in the schools from Mocioni, Moroda, Seleuș, Covăsânt, Șilindia, Șofronea, Bonțești, Măgulicea, Vârfurile, while 225 copies were sent

² The National Archives of Romania. Arad County Branch (hereinafter A.N.R.S.J.A). *Fond Tribunalul Arad*, file 44/1919-1935, f. 71.

³ *Ibidem*, f. 114, 187, 107, 71.

⁴ Dan Demșea (ed.), *Momente din istoria lecturii publice în municipiul și județul Arad*, Arad: Editura Nigredo, 2006, p. 60.

⁵ A.N.R.S.J.A, *Fond Prefectura Județului Arad* (hereinafter P.J.A.), file 276/1938, f. 46.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ “Opera de progres în județul Arad,” in *Tribuna nouă* (Arad), I, no. 2 din 2 January 1924, p. 3.

⁸ “Începutul unei nouă opere culturale în cuprinsul județului,” in *Tribuna nouă*, I, no. 141 of 10 December 1924, p. 2.

⁹ A.N.R.S.J.A, *Fond P.J.A.*, file 276/1938, f. 214.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, f. 25.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, *Fond P.J.A.*, *acte administrative*, file 259/1933, f. 127.

¹² “Dl. ministru Angelescu vizitează școlile din județ,” in *Tribuna nouă*, II, no. 227 of 20 October 1925, p. 2.

to Ignești.¹³ Their establishment, which meant the fulfilment of older desiderata, brought real support to the educational process, its beneficiaries being both elementary school students and those who attended classes for adults. Their functioning was beset with great difficulties, and interest in them was minor. Thus, by the year 1938, the school library in Mocioni, equipped with 418 volumes, had been frequented by only 10 readers.¹⁴

The development of this important component of the enculturation process was also a matter of concern for policy makers at the highest level. In April 1932, the *Law for the Organisation of Communal Libraries and Museums* was passed; it stipulated that the municipalities and urban communes should establish a central library, while the urban communes that were not county seats and the rural communes were required to set up libraries in the community cultural centres.¹⁵ Subsequently, since this provision was not enforced, Minister Constantin Angelescu demanded that the Ministry of Interior should approve the allotment of budgets to the communes on condition that the latter allocated the necessary sums for the acquisition of books for these libraries.¹⁶

The legislative framework did not prove to be very helpful; however, local actions continued their course, so that by 1933, 52 popular libraries and 245 school libraries operated in the county, their collections amounting to 80,000 books.¹⁷ Having a diverse content, they largely fulfilled their purpose. As Octavian Lupaș - one of the most important cultural promoters in Arad - contended, there existed libraries (in some cases, still at an incipient stage) in almost every village, but the reading offer often barely corresponded to the expectations and level of understanding of the rural residents.¹⁸ In addition, there were settlements in the county that did not have a library, as was the case of half of the communes included in the Ineu *plasa* (administrative unit).¹⁹

Libraries were organised in some of the cultural centres Curtici (359 volumes), Sânnicolau Mic (160), Șofronea (500), Vărdia (400), Lupești (730) Buteni (183), Sebiș (200), Șiria (437).²⁰

Concerns for the endowment of libraries were consistently expressed by the Arad Branch of the Astra Society. Especially the collection entitled *Biblioteca poporală* (*The People's Library*), whose booklets included poems, folk narratives, practical advice, topics of history, religion and medicine, enjoyed widespread distribution in the Astra branch libraries, as did *Calendarul Astra* (*The Astra Almanac*). Thus, the Ineu Branch distributed 10 series of *Biblioteca poporală* to the communes Apateu, Bocsig, Cermei, Seleuș and Ineu. The library of the "Sava Brancovici" Gymnasium in Ineu was endowed, and books were given as prizes to secondary and elementary school students,

¹³ A.N.R.S.J.A, *Fond P.J.A., acte administrative*, file 259/1933, f. 217.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, *Fond P.J.A.*, file 276/1938, f. 26.

¹⁵ "Legea pentru organizarea bibliotecilor și muzeelor comunale," in *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 90 of 14 April 1932.

¹⁶ Octavian Lupaș, *Bibliotecile populare "Concordia" din județul Arad*, Arad, "Concordia", Institut de Arte Grafice și Editură S.A., 1938, p. 7.

¹⁷ A.N.R.S.J.A, *Fond P.J.A., acte administrative*, file 259/1933, f. 127.

¹⁸ Octavian Lupaș, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

¹⁹ A.N.R.S.J.A, *Fond P.J.A.*, file 276/1938, f. 46.

²⁰ Ioan Nichin, *Monografia administrativă a județului Arad. Realizările administrației românești dela Unire până în anul 1938*, Arad, 1939, p. 317.

as well as to apprentices.²¹ In the Șiria Branch, the organisation of conferences went hand in hand with the establishment of popular libraries. This happened at Galșa (the library, established in 1933, comprised 111 volumes), Seleuș (December 1934, 81 volumes), Măderat (51 volumes), Agriș and Pâncota. At the same time, the aforementioned branch contributed to the endowment of the libraries from the Covăsânț Cultural Centre (with 85 volumes) and the Elementary School from Șiria (with 18 volumes).²²

A unique situation in the rural world of Arad County was that of the library from Covăsânț, regarded as the main component of the “Podgoria” Cultural Centre. It was organised into three sections: intellectual, popular and educational, their administration being entrusted to an intellectual, a peasant and, respectively, a student. The library inventory was considerable: 880 volumes, to which were added subscriptions to eight magazines and newspapers. Over 50 members of the centre had subscriptions to the review *Albina*. The library was a living cultural entity, with over 160 annual readers, making its presence felt in the community. It organised *Book Day*, offering prizes in books. Through the efforts and initiative of the teacher Dumitru Dijmărescu, the director of the centre, in addition to library, a book store and a book binding service also began to function.²³

In turn, the library from Șeitin, founded by the Orthodox church choir in 1906, had 308 volumes in 1918. It was to become richer during the interwar years; remarkable, in this sense, was the donation that was made by the poet Constantin Argintaru, the director of the review *Hyperion* in Cluj, consisting of books and a two-year subscription to the review *Viața Românească*.²⁴

Mention should also be made of other situations in which rural libraries received book donations. The “Crișana” National Cultural Society from Cluj donated 154 volumes from “the literature of the Romanian people” to the people’s library in Vărădia.²⁵ The parish and the school libraries in Baia, with 320 and, respectively, 171 volumes, came into being on account of the donation made, in 1924, by the county prefect, Ion Georgescu.²⁶ Fr. Ioan Tomuția and Achim Lupuțiu, the cashier of “Victoria” Bank, donated their own libraries to the church and school from Lupești, which amounted to 235 volumes, while the number of readers was a mere 68.²⁷ Book donations were also made by cultural societies or individuals to several school libraries. It was the case of the school library from Hălmațiu, which was supported by “The Future” Society for Assistance and Culture in the village,²⁸ from Șepreuș, which was set

²¹ “Raportul general prezentat de comitetul central al ‘Asociației pentru literatura română și cultura poporului român,’ ‘Astra’ asupra lucrărilor sale și a situației acestei instituții în anul de gestiune 1924-25,” in *Transilvania* (Sibiu), 56, no. 9-10, September-October 1925, p. 386.

²² “Activitatea despărțămintelor,” in *Transilvania*, 67, no. 4, July-August 1936, p. 381.

²³ “Căminele Culturale și rolul învățătorilor în culturalizarea satelor. Bilanțul unui Cămin Cultural în Podgoria Aradului, pe anul 1935,” in *Știrea* (Arad), VI, no. 55 of 26 February 1936, p. 2.

²⁴ Ștefan Costea, Dumitru D. Costea, Șeitin. *O așezare românească milenară de pe Mureșul Inferior*, Arad: Editura Mirador, 1998, p. 192.

²⁵ “Corespondențe din județ. Vărădia,” in *Tribuna nouă*, II, no. 99 of 23 April 1925, p. 3.

²⁶ A.N.R.S.J.A., *Fond P.J.A.*, file 276/1938, f. 27.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ <http://www.darnick.com/halmagiu/societate.html>.

up thanks to a donation of 500 crowns made by the officer Nicolae Soare from Tîrgu-Jiu in 1919²⁹ and from Apateu (which received hundreds of books from collections, donations and money gathered at school celebrations).³⁰ In its turn, the school library from Radna benefited from an amount of 7,731 lei, which represented the proceeds from a concert held by the Orthodox church choir in the village and the appointment of a teacher.³¹

The minority population in the county also organised libraries, particularly through the efforts of cultural and confessional associations. Their stated goal was to “broaden the general knowledge through subscriptions to newspapers,” as well as through the creation and enrichment of libraries. This was the aim of the *Slovak Communal Association* in Nădlac, which operated between 1921 and 1950, and the *Slovak Cultural Society* in Nădlac, which was founded in 1924.³²

The German community in Arad was active in this respect. Thus, in Aradul Nou, there were libraries managed by the *Roman Catholic Youth Association* and the cultural association created by the Roman Catholic priest Johann Baptist Mayer. Founding another cultural society, Fr. Mayer donated his library of 6,000 volumes to it. The *Cultural Society in Engelsbrun* (Fântânele), which was active from 1925 to 1950, had a hired librarian, in the person of Iosif Burger. Towards the end of the first interwar decade, the library of the *German Roman Catholic Youth Association* in Șagul began its activity, as did those of the *German-Swabian Cultural Union* in Șiria and, respectively, of the *Roman Catholic Youth's Union* in Zădărlac, all of which had hired librarians.³³

An important role in the context of the overall efforts made for spreading literacy and strengthening the faith was that played by the establishment of new *parish libraries* and the endowment of the existing ones in every ecclesial commune. This was necessary with a view to “spreading the divine word ever more intensely in our Church” and supporting the priests in countering the action of sectarian propaganda.³⁴ The state of these libraries was modest, so much so that, almost a decade after the Union, one could notice their small number and meagre content: synodal and congress proceedings, official regulations, books devoid of theological value.³⁵ Religious literature was poorly represented in the few existing libraries, the highest percentage being that of national history books, which could be explained considering that in the period up to 1 December 1918, the church had been engaged in the struggle for defending the national consciousness.

As such, given the new conditions, consistent efforts were made to develop the parish libraries. Each parish office manager was required to provide an amount for book purchases in the annual budget. For better orientation in the acquisition of important works that were suitable for the endowment of parish libraries, the bibliophile priests

²⁹ “Pentru copiii lipsiți din Șepreuș. Darul unui căpitan român,” in *Românul* (Arad), VIII, no. 176 of 7 December 1919, p. 2.

³⁰ “Cerc învățătoresc. Biblioteca școlară,” in *Tribuna nouă*, II, no. 275 of 18 December 1925, p. 2.

³¹ “Corespondențe din județ,” in *Tribuna nouă*, II, no. 27 of 7 February 1925, p. 2.

³² Dan Demșea (coord.), *op. cit.*, p. 61.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ “Cărți primejdioase,” in *Biserica și școala* (Arad), LI, no. 25 of 19 June 1927, p. 2.

³⁵ “Biblioteci parohiale,” in *Biserica și școala*, L, no. 10 of 7 March 1926, p. 3.

were urged to write reviews for the latest publications and send them to the episcopal see.³⁶

Following these concerns, there functioned libraries of the parish offices and of the parishes, the latter being open to the faithful. As proof of the interest in this domain, the libraries of the parish offices had 2,436 volumes, while no less than 4,272 volumes were available to the faithful in the parishes.³⁷ For example, in Cladova there were a library of the Orthodox Parish, featuring 143 books, and a school library with 97 volumes.³⁸ At the same time, the parish library in Nădab had 150 volumes.³⁹ During the first interwar decade, the situation of the libraries belonging to the parish offices and, respectively, to the parishes in the deanery from Chişineu-Criş was the following: Vărşand (65 volumes), Şimand (50), Pîlu (30), Mişca (130), Chişineu-Criş (125), Sinteia Mare (25), while at Grăniceri there was no library.⁴⁰ Attendance was generally modest, as these libraries remained insufficiently endowed with literature for children and the youth.⁴¹ What also contributed to this was the fact that these libraries did not have a special place where they could facilitate access to the public, but were arranged in the rectory, sometimes under makeshift circumstances.

In 1931, the Eparchial Council approved a regulation governing the activity of archpresbyterial and parish libraries, containing, among others, a model for compiling the inventory of the library and the alphabetical index. According to the resolution of the Eparchial Council, parish libraries had to focus mainly on religious books, with a pronounced Orthodox character. It was recommended that books of general culture, however close to the Orthodox religious themes, could only come second in terms of the acquisitions made for these libraries. At the same time, as far as possible, the books had to be adapted to the age and level of understanding of the public, starting from the imperative that they should have an instructive, cautionary content and that they should develop the public taste for reading and for the beautiful. Given their importance and the preference expressed by the readers, these libraries had to include titles like *Lives of the Saints*, the *Akathist*, the *Psalter*, the *Horologion*, *Homilies*, and the *Small Octoechos*.⁴²

In an attempt to provide a solid support to religious-moral propaganda, to stimulate access to books and to popularise the teachings of the Gospel, Bishop Grigorie Comşa established the collection entitled *Biblioteca preotului ortodox* (*The Orthodox Priests' Library*) and he also developed the series *Biblioteca creştinului ortodox* (*The Orthodox Christians' Library*). In addition to addressing pastoral and catechetical problems, the aforementioned collections offered arguments in support of defending the

³⁶ "Instrucţiuni pentru punerea în aplicare a Regulamentului bibliotecilor protopopeşti şi parohiale din Eparhia Aradului," in *Biserica şi şcoala*, LIV, no. 4 of 26 January 1930, p. 9.

³⁷ *Episcopia Aradului în vremuri de răscruce istorică 1918-1948. Colecţie de documente*. Introductory studies by Vasile Popeangă, Vasile Pop, Arad: Editura Episcopiei Ortodoxe Române Arad, 2006, p. 412.

³⁸ A.N.R.S.J.A., *Fond Fundaţia Culturală Regală "Principele Carol"* (hereinafter *F.C.R.P.C.*), file 1/1938-1939, f.41.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, *Fond P.J.A.*, file 237 /1933, f. 65.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, *Fond Protopopiatul Ortodox-Român Chişineu-Criş*, file 31/1930, f. 116, 117, 119, 120, 122, 123, 125.

⁴¹ *Episcopia Aradului în vremuri de răscruce istorică 1918-1948...*, p. 412.

⁴² "Instrucţiuni pentru punerea în aplicare a Regulamentului bibliotecilor..."

Orthodox faith. The first collection was launched in 1929, aiming to assist in the training and activity of the priests. By 1935, six items had appeared, signed by Grigorie Comșa, Policarp Morușca and Orest Tarangul.⁴³ Aiming to approach topical problems pertaining to religious life, catechisation and missionarism, *Biblioteca preotului ortodox* occasioned the appearance of works such as *Pastorația individuală și colectivă* (*Individual and Collective Pastoral Care*), *Misiunile religioase pentru popor* (*Religious Missions for the People*), *Manual de catehizație* (*Catechisation Manual*) and others.⁴⁴

Supported from the “Bishop Grigore” Religious Propaganda Fund, the collection *Biblioteca creștinului ortodox* addressed a diverse range of topics (dogmatic, liturgical or issues of concern for the society of the time, such as cohabitation, divorce, alcoholism), and enjoyed the contribution of great personalities such as: Gala Galaction, Gheorghe Ciuhandu, Nicolae Popovici, Iustin Suciu, Policarp Morușca, Ilarion Felea. It was distributed free of charge to the parishes. By 1935, this collection had seen the publication of 123 issues, 52 of which had been written by Bishop Grigorie Comșa.⁴⁵ From among the pamphlets that were addressed to the clergy and the faithful alike, covering, in an accessible manner, both religious themes and propaganda for moral living, we shall mention the following: *Credința și botezul* (*Faith and Baptism*), *Pruncii trebuie botezați, dar numai odată* (*Infants Must Be Baptised, albeit Only Once*) by Grigorie Gh. Comșa, *Un neam și un suflet* (*One Nation and One Soul*), *Calea vieții și calea morții* (*The Path of Life and the Path of Death*) by Gheorghe Ciuhandu, *Despre păcatul beției* (*On the Sin of Drunkenness*) by N. Iorgovan, *Despre căsătorie* (*On Marriage*) by F. Codreanu, *Cinstiți, ascultați și iubiți biserica noastră strămoșească* (*Honour, Obey and Love Our Ancestral Church*) by Ștefan Cioroianu, *Legea ortodoxă în trecutul nostru* (*The Orthodox Law in Our History*) by Nicolae Popovici and others.⁴⁶ Some of these works were read by the priests in church, for example, *Concubinajul, divorțurile și scăderea populației* (*Cohabitation, Divorce and Population Decline*), drawing the readers’ attention to what, at the time, were considered to be threats against the family as the cornerstone of Christian life. In turn, the collection *Biblioteca preotului ortodox* ensured the publication, by 1931, of 92 issues, with a circulation of almost one million copies (20,000 copies being published that very year).⁴⁷

The Greek-Catholic believers were also committed to the establishment of libraries. The Library of St. Mary’s Association had 208 volumes, read by about 100 people annually.⁴⁸ There were also libraries of the Greek-Catholic parishes and of AGRU at Bocsig, Șimand and Sinte Mare.

Smaller scale undertakings, remaining generally at an early stage in the organisation of libraries, were made by the “Prince Carol” Royal Cultural Foundation. Concerns of this kind were sporadic and modest at the cultural centres from Tisa and

⁴³ Fr. Dr. Pavel Vesa, *Episcopii Aradului 1706-2006*, Arad: Editura Gutenberg Univers, 2007, p. 281.

⁴⁴ “Biblioteca Preotului Ortodox,” in *Biserica și școala*, LIV, no. 4 of 26 January 1930, p. 9.

⁴⁵ Fr. Dr. Pavel Vesa, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

⁴⁶ “Biblioteca creștinului ortodox,” in *Biserica și școala*, L, no. 30 of 25 July 1926, p. 7.

⁴⁷ “Viața spirituală pe granița de Vest. De vorbă cu P.S.S Episcopul Grigorie al Aradului despre activitatea din 1931 a eparhiei,” in *Biserica și școala*, year LV, no. 5 of 31 January 1931, p. 1.

⁴⁸ A.N.R.S.J.A., *Fond P.J.A.*, file 237 /1933, f. 96.

Gura Văii. The library from the “Gheorghe Lazăr” Cultural Centre in Cladova was disorganised, almost non-functional, having only seven books and a few magazines.⁴⁹ In 1938, the foundation offered a library to the Cultural Centre of Petriș, its value amounting to 45,000 lei.⁵⁰

The action of setting up libraries in the rural environment was to register, starting in 1932, systematic and consistent efforts, given the establishment of the “*Concordia*” Romanian Cultural Foundation, following the takeover of the assets and liabilities of the old printing institute of the same name. The purpose of the foundation was to promote culture among the “masses of people” in Arad through the establishment of libraries throughout the county, beginning in the most remote localities.⁵¹ The new libraries were designed to contribute to “the cultural elevation of the Romanian population in Arad County, through the dissemination of educational knowledge, in the national and Christian spirit.”⁵² Thus, an older ideal expressed by Vasile Goldiș could be implemented, in line with his notion that a library could be really useful only when “before all else, it contains books that are appropriate to the level of culture and the standard of living of those for which it is intended...”⁵³

Concerned to provide the urban dwellers with the opportunity to read “good and useful books,” the “Concordia” Society set up 15 popular libraries up until 1938, with a total of 5,455 books, in places like: Hălmagiu, Gurahonț, Săvârșin, Șofronea, Petriș, Tisa, Aradul Nou, Pleșcuța, Zimbru, Miniș, Gura Văii, Bonțești, Târnova, Vărădia de Mureș and Arad-Grădiște.⁵⁴ Of these libraries, which were equipped with the necessary furniture, enabling a rigorous management of the books, 10 were transferred to the Astra circles in those localities, 2 were entrusted to the cultural centres of the “Prince Carol” Foundation, and 3 were made available to other cultural societies.⁵⁵

Whether they were housed by school clubs, community centres and houses or the headquarters of certain societies, libraries benefited from the readers’ interest, as shown by the figures representing the volumes borrowed within a period of about one year and a half: 1,129 volumes (Hălmagiu), 952 (Săvârșin), 822 (Gurahonț), 536 (Tisa).⁵⁶ At the same time, the library from Vărădia de Mureș, hosted by the cultural centre, had 400 volumes and registered 200 readers within one year.⁵⁷ In terms of content, religious books had a share of 25%, agricultural topics accounted for 12%, literature - 33%, and works that provided useful knowledge - 30%. The preferences expressed by the readers - amongst whom the highest percentages were those of the peasants and the students - were oriented mainly to works of literature and to works providing useful knowledge.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, Fond F.C.R.P.C., file 1/1938-1939, f. 40.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, Fond P.J.A., file 276/1938, f. 27.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, Fond personal Ioan Suciu, file 2/1907, f. 137.

⁵² Octavian Lupaș, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

⁵³ Apud Dan Demșa (coord.), *op. cit.*, p. 27.

⁵⁴ Octavian Lupaș, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 32-36.

⁵⁷ A.N.R.S.J.A., Fond P.J.A., file 276/1938, f. 27.

Besides their actual purpose, the “Concordia” libraries had to develop cultural activity nuclei, offering various means to attract the public to reading books and seeking to convey more encompassing effects on the education thereof. The objectives that were set at the beginning of the action and were carried out accordingly included the organisation of cultural soirees, with readings from the library books, listening to the radio, the setting up of farmers’ schools, or the creation of a “book-selling office” next to the library, which allowed the readers to purchase books and newspapers. Of the 15 libraries, 9 were offered to the Astra circles on their very establishment, just like the libraries from Gurahonț and Săvârșin were founded simultaneously with the launching of the local farmers’ schools.⁵⁸ Also, thanks to collaboration with Astra and, often, with the Normal School in Arad, the inauguration of the “Concordia” libraries was made, in most cases, as part of cultural programs that rallied the participation of almost the entire village. One such moment (a cultural soiree, a cultural program of the Normal School students, with the participation of well-known personalities such as Caius Lepa, Ion Lipovan, Traian Mager) was held at Brusturi on 26 June 1938. On this occasion, a popular library was donated to the local Astra circle, established at that time. On the same day and under similar circumstances, popular libraries were inaugurated at Măgulicea and Aciuva.⁵⁹

The total cost of book acquisitions was 95,106 lei. To the funds provided by the society were added financial contributions from the National Bank of Romania (20,000 lei) and from the Arad Branch of *Banca Ardeleană* (2000 lei). Moreover, Astra donated 287 volumes, while the National Bank of Romania and the Ministry of Agriculture and Domains offered 242 and, respectively, 11 volumes.⁶⁰

Despite the difficulties encountered and the shortcomings pertaining to the organisation of the rural libraries in Arad, they and especially the libraries of “Concordia” Society represented one of the fundamental factors of enculturation. Along with schools, the church, cultural houses and centres, the women’s associations and other cultural societies, libraries exerted beneficial effects for the education of the individual and for the progress of society.

⁵⁸ Octavian Lupaș, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-36.

⁵⁹ “Note,” in *Înnoirea* (Arad), I, no. 20 of 1 July 1938, p. 8.

⁶⁰ Octavian Lupaș, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22.