

LITERACY EFFORTS OF TRANSYLVANIAN SOCIETY IN THE YEARS BEFORE THE GREAT WAR. THE CASE OF TRANSYLVANIAN SOLDIERS ENLISTED IN THE AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN ARMED UNITS

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Abstract

The beginning of the 20th century found the Romanian nation with a literacy rate that placed it among the least educated ones in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. With almost no initiative to educate the masses of illiterate adults registered in its divisions in the period 1900–1906, the year 1907, with its national-political implications, determined ASTRA to speed up the organization of literacy courses in all its territorial sectors of those who have reached maturity. Started with high hopes, the results were quite modest, although ASTRA tried to motivate the teachers with prizes and to attract, in the organization of school classes, the support of the bishops of the two Romanian churches. Subsequently, as ASTRA intervened annually with a circular to mobilize the responsible factors, the results began to improve. In addition, in order to ease the task of the organizers, ASTRA also established a contest for the editing of the most skilful *ABC*, from which it distributed, as support material, free of charge to the departments in order to support the development of the courses in optimal conditions. From the category of those who benefited from the attention of some occasional teachers and, later, of ASTRA, were also the Romanian soldiers recruited in the units of the Austro-Hungarian army. Started at the initiative of the leadership of the imperial army, at the head of the primary training program of illiterate soldiers were comrades, with experience in pedagogical activities, officers or military priests. If in the first years of the twentieth century, various textbooks were used for their primary instruction, after the publication of the *ABC* signed by teacher Ioan Bota, ASTRA became the main supplier of support material and for learning to read and write by illiterate Romanian soldiers.

Keywords: education, literacy, classes, ASTRA, ABCs, soldiers.

The present study aims to bring the reader's attention to the literacy initiatives of the mass of Transylvanian adults that have been undertaken or supported by ASTRA in the early twentieth century, preceding the Great War. Structured in three parts, this research – which is based on publicist sources of the time and archival documents – first tried to capture the evolution of primary education courses conducted by ASTRA's divisions for illiterate adults, from the foremost private approaches to those conducted in an organized manner. The second section of this paper considers the

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efforts and initiatives involved in the development of a study support material for the uniform use of adult students. Last but not least, the present research also discusses some of the pedagogical training initiatives of the Romanian soldiers recruited in the Austro-Hungarian Imperial Army.

The significance and use of the “written word” determined ASTRA to establish, as a strategy for achieving its cultural objective, the spread of Romanian publications in all corners of the country inhabited by the “sons of the nation”. However, the main obstacle to achieving this goal was the large number of people that did not have the bare minimum of primary education. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the magazine *Țara noastră*¹ offered some statistical landmarks which attributed to the Romanian nation literacy percentages between 13% and 21%, a numerical interval that placed it in a dishonorable position among the people of the monarchy. The main cause of illiteracy, according to the journalist, was the lack of information of the peasants, from the community leaders, on the benefits of education,² advantages that became tangible with the improvement of the social status.³

If, for the period 1900–1906, a single initiative related to the primary education of adults was recorded in the publications of the Transylvanian Association for its divisions,⁴ the entry into force of the Apponyi Law, in 1907,⁵ was a decisive moment in the fight against illiteracy by initiating, in all territorial departments, of courses for uneducated adults. For this purpose, as school instructors, an attempt was made to recruit and motivate priests and teachers, as well as to award prizes for the creation of ABCs appropriate to the level of understanding of the addressees.⁶

¹ “The official sheet of ASTRA” (1907)/“Political and cultural magazine” (1908–1909), with Sunday issues, in Sibiu, between 1907–1909 and post-war, published especially to increase the interest of the reading public in the villages for learning and the institution of ASTRA (cf. *Annals of the Association for Romanian Literature and Culture of the Romanian People* no. 3 (July–September 1907): 72).

² According to 1910 data: 13% (*Țara noastră* no. 26 (June 24, 1907): 436), 20% (*Țara noastră* no. 48 (November 25, 1907): 775–776) and 21% (*Țara noastră* no. 11 (March 9/22 1908): 90–91). The low percentages were considered, by Romanian columnist, “exaggerations” of the official statistics, which, in many cases, considered as literate only those who knew Hungarian, and those who learned only the Romanian, as illiterate (*Țara noastră* no. 6 (February 3/16, 1908): 45).

³ Literacy entailed greater chances of getting jobs and settling in urban areas, and those in such positions wanted higher status for their children (*Țara noastră* no. 1 (January 1, 1907): 3–4).

⁴ In November 1906 Cluj department decided to organize winter courses for illiterate adults in Cluj, Feleac and Feneș (*Analele Asociațiunii pentru literatura română și cultura poporului român* no. 5–6, (September–December 1906): 228).

⁵ Which intended to Hungarianize the schools of other nationalities, as well as granting the right to vote only to the literate ones; Mihai Sofronie, *Aspecte ale activității Asociațiunii transilvane ASTRA până la 1918* (Sibiu: Editura Caleidoscop, 1996), 61.

⁶ Ion Agârbiceanu, *Asociațiunea transilvană pentru literatura și cultura poporului român – Astra. Ce a fost? Ce este? Ce vrea să fie?* (Sibiu: Tipografia Dacia Traiană, 1936), 6; *Transilvania* no. 5–6 (September–December 1911): 770; *Calendarul Asociațiunii pe anul Mântuirii 1919* 8, no. 48: 152.

Towards the end of 1907, teachers of Brad division took the first step and, since November, they have organized primary education courses for the benefit of illiterate adults, events that have managed to gather several dozen people at each meeting.⁷ In the middle of the following year, at the proposal of the leader of the Beiuș district,⁸ the Association approved the courses for the illiterate in all its departments and encouraged their directors and the dioceses of the two Romanian Churches to send circulars to priests and teachers to spark their interest for that formative project. At the same time, beyond the moral incentive, ASTRA put into play five prizes of 50 crowns⁹ each for the teachers who proved to be the most diligent instructors.¹⁰ By the end of that year, some of the bishops had published their consistorial circulars issued to the protopresbyterial, parish offices and district teachers.¹¹

Scheduled to take place during the annual break from agricultural work, between November and February, the centralized exercise of the first courses for the illiterate in the winter of 1908/1909 was considered to have a satisfactory outcome, even if approx. 25% of the 51 divisions had concrete results. With the involvement of teachers, priests and primary school professors, 35 courses were organized in the districts of Abrud-Câmpeni, Aiud-Teiuș, Alba-Iulia, Blaj, Brad, Cluj, Gherla, Hida-Huedin, Lăpușul-unguresc, Mercurea, Sătmăr-Ugocia and Șimleu, after which 555 participants passed the final examination. Without giving precise data regarding the results obtained, some of the reports sent by the directors of the departments mentioned the development of similar educational activities in Șimleu and Turda districts as well. For those who stood out through the results obtained, some divisions offered cash rewards, coming from contributions of banks or other private entities.¹² As promised, the Transylvanian Association rewarded

⁷ The courses lasted approx. one hour and took place every Sunday. The first “school reunion” was attended by 30 people aged 17–50, see *Țara noastră* no. 50 (December 9, 1907): 820; *Transilvania* no. 2 (April–July 1908): 155.

⁸ During the second ordinary general meeting of the Transylvanian Association, which took place in Șimleu on August 8th 1908, Nicolae Fabian proposed to the Central Committee the establishment of schools for adults and literacy courses in all departments, see *Transilvania* no. 3 (August–September 1908): 177–179.

⁹ Official currency at that time.

¹⁰ The main selection criteria for candidates was the number of literate ones, see *Transilvania* no. 4 (October–December 1908): 218–219.

¹¹ On November 20, 1908, the Orthodox Archbishop and Metropolitan, Ioan Mețianu, signed circular no. 1247 addressed to all presbyterial, parish and confessional offices in the archdiocese of Transylvania; On December 15, 1908, Victor Mihályi, the Greek Catholic Archbishop and Metropolitan of Alba-Iulia and Făgăraș, signed circular no. 8608 addressed to the archdiocesan clergy; On December 4/17, 1908, the Orthodox Bishop John I. Papp signed circular no. 1240 addressed to all the protopresbyterial, parish offices and teachers of the Arad consistorial district; *Transilvania* no. 4 (October–December 1908): 224–228.

¹² For the winter of 1908/1909, *Transilvania* magazine presented two statistics on literacy courses. In the middle of 1909, the involvement of 13 divisions and a number of 682 graduates was mentioned. Because, in this case, only a part of the divisions had submitted the annual reports to the

the most prolific teachers: fifty crowns each were offered to Vasile Dumitraș, teacher in Sân-Mihaiu (Hida-Huedin department), for the 27 graduates, to George Lungu, teacher in Fildul de jos (Hida-Huedin dep.), for 38 graduates, to the priest Ieronim Man and to the teacher Emil Cheșcheș, both from Băgău, (Uioara dep.), for 23 graduates, and to Nicolae Nistor, teacher in Săcalul-de-pădure (Reghin dep.), for 45 graduates. The last prize was distributed between teachers Nicolae Pop from Hidig (Șimleu dep.) and Vasile Oarcea from Tălagiu (Hălmagiu dep.), who managed to prepare in writing-reading 30 and 16 adults.¹³

In that winter, with reference to the divisions of Bistrița, Brașov, Lugoj, Săliște, Sibiu and Zărnești, but also in the following sessions, their directors excused the lack of results either by the fact that such educational events were banned by the state authorities, due to that it would represent veiled forms of schooling, or that the organizers failed to mobilize a sufficient number of adult students. There were also situations in which the classes were abandoned along the way due to the lack of interest shown by the “people”.¹⁴ The priests involved in the pedagogical activity also mentioned, in the reports issued to the archdioceses, that the didactic activity in the territory was difficult, and it seemed that the people’s concern for learning occupied a less important place in daily activities. In addition,

central committee, we chose to present the second version, outlined next year, in the hope that the additional amount of information will be given more accurately). Thus, in the Abrud-Câmpeni department, teachers Avram Sârbu from Câmpeni and George Narița from Vidra de sus helped 25 participants to graduate the two primary education courses, for which they were awarded by the governance of the department. In Aiud-Teiuș, 53 graduates were registered following the ten courses organized by the involvement of teachers Augustin Ocean and Basil Groze from Căcova, C. Domșia from Poiana, Emil Kecskes from Băgău, as well as priests Augustin Marcu from Ciumbrud and Ieronim Man from Băgău; in Alba-Iulia, seven graduates, due to teachers Aurel Pop and Enea P. Bota from Șard; in Blaj, 66 graduates, with the help of teachers George Spătăcian from Benic and Traian Șuteu from Morlaca, as well as the priest Valer Maior from Șoroștin, all rewarded with prizes from the division; in Brad, 41 graduates, due to teachers I. Radu, I. German, Tr. Suci, V. Boneu and M. Stoia from Brad, teachers P. Rusu from Cebea and I. Fodor from Curechiu, as well as the parish priest M. Popovici from Mihăleni; in Hida-Huedin, 181 graduates, thanks to the teachers Vasile Dumitrașiu from Sânmihaiul-deșert, George Lazăr from Cubleșul-român, Toma Cociș from Fildul de jos and George Lung from Fildul de jos, all awarded by the management of the department and the economic institute “Vlădeasa”. In the departments of Cluj, Gherla and Sătmăr-Ugocia, following a training course, organized with the help of the priest Ioan Mureșan from Lona and the teacher Aurel Popan from Borlești, 27, 25 and 30 graduates were registered. In the departments of Lăpușul-unguresc, Mercurea and Șimleu, 13, 37 and 50 illiterate adults were trained following two courses organized with the help of teachers Ștefan Bărbos from Borcut and Grigorie Roman from Lăschia, Ieronim Puia and Matei Scorobeț from Mercurea, Ioan Dăian from Sângătin and Nicolae Pop from Hidig; *Transilvania*, no. 3 (July–September 1909): 201–204; *Transilvania*, no. 4, (October–December 1909): 211, 256–260, 262, 264–265, 267–268; *Transilvania*, no. 4 (July–August 1910): 199–200, 249–261.

¹³ *Transilvania*, no. 3 (July–September 1909), 203; *Transilvania*, no. 4 (July–August 1910): 249, 255.

¹⁴ *Transilvania*, no. 4 (October–December 1909): 211, 256–268; *Transilvania*, no. 4 (July–August 1910): 200.

deficiencies in ensuring adequate learning spaces and teaching staff, lack of compulsory education or high rates of dropping out of school followed by a relapse into illiteracy were other factors that contributed to the modest results.¹⁵

Although started with high hopes of amplification, the project of adult literacy registered a setback in the winter of 1909/1910, at least at the level of graduates and territorial sections involved. The 23 courses led by teachers and priests in the departments of Becicherecul-mare, Cluj, Diciosânmărtin, Gherla, Ibaşfalău, Lăpuşul-unguresc, Mercurea, Murăş-Ludoş and Sibiu, produced concrete results manifested in the lives of 236 adults. The modest results, mainly explained by the invocation of the two reasons mentioned above, did not discourage the members of the Central Committee who continued to urge the teachers and directors of the 60 divisions to a sustained and consistent effort.¹⁶

Also, during the winter of 1910/1911, some of the 67 divisions continued their mission of educating illiterate adults, and with 430 graduates, the numbers of graduates were almost doubled compared to those obtained in the previous session. Although the territorial reports mentioned educational activities in Beiuş, Blaj, Cluj, Deva, Dobra, Gherla, Lăpuşul-unguresc, Măhaciu, Mociu, Murăş-Ludoş, Murăş-Uioara, Panciova, Sălişte, Sebeş, Sibiu, Sighişoara and Teaca, only eight of these departments reported accurate results. In other cases, the outcomes were either negligible or unknown, or the attempts to mobilize the people for classes were in vain.¹⁷

¹⁵ The Bihor County Service of the National Archives, *Oradea Orthodox Episcopate Fund*, file no. 343/1911–1918, f. 371, 377, 389, 412, 414, 425, 467, 474–476.

¹⁶ In the department of Becicherecul-mare, the teachers from Ecica-română helped 18 adults to graduate the primary education courses; in Cluj, the teachers Ioan Copârdean from Lacul-superior, Filip Pârnu from Măcicaşul-unguresc and Ioachim Pop from Feneşul-săsesc, 31 adults; in Diciosânmărtin, Alexandru Macarie from Vidrasău, 14 adults; in Gherla, the priests Ioan Murăşan from Lona and Ambrosiu Plăian from Hăşdate, 65 adults; in Ibaşfalău, Ales. Sichişorean from Valchid, 7 adults; in Lăpuşul-unguresc, the teachers Grigorie Roman from Lăschia and Ştefan Bărbos from Costeni; in Mercurea, the teachers Ieronim Puia and Matei Scorobeţ, 10 adults; in Murăş-Ludoş, the teachers from Lechinţa de Murăş, Murăş-Ludoş, Căpuşul de Câmpie, Iclânzal and Murăş-Dateş, 76 adults; in Sibiu, Traian Petrişor from Guşteriţa, 17 adults; *Transilvania*, no. 4 (July–August 1911): 490–491, 555–592.

¹⁷ In Blaj division, 50 illiterate adults were trained in primary education in Bia; in Deva, 30 adults, in the localities of Deva, Sântindrieş and Vălişoara; in Dobra, 8–10 adults, in the village of Mihăieşti; in Gherla, 99 adults, in the communes of Bârlea, Hăşdate and Teolturi, with the involvement of teachers Virgil Pop, Ambrosiu Plăian and Alexandru Mureşan; in Lăpuşul-unguresc, 35 adults, in Rohia with the help of the teacher Ştefan Bărbos; in Măhaciu, 22 adults, in the village of Măhaciu, due to the teacher Atanasiu Gardoşiu; in Murăş-Ludoş, 55 adults, with the help of the priests from Cicud and Cheţa; in Sibiu, 22, in the communes of Rusciori and Hambas; in Sighişoara, 28 adults, in Sighişoara and Şaeş commune, through the involvement of the director Ambrosie Stoicovici and the parish priest Ion Cristea; in Teaca, 83 adults, in the communes of Budurlău, Vişuia and Ormenişul de Câmpie, with the help of the teachers Octavian Frăţilă and Izidor Cergit, and of the priest Laurian Vodă; *Transilvania*, no. 3 (May–June 1911): 314; *Transilvania*, no. 5 (September–October 1912): 303, 391–405.

At the end of 1911, because of the balance sheet below expectations, the leadership of the Transylvanian Association issued a new circular to the divisions, in which the secretary Octavian Tăslăuanu mentioned once again the dishonorable position occupied by Romanians in the literacy rankings of nations within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the importance of scholar instruction, the objective of the courses for illiterates and the legality of these educational approaches according to the statutes of the Association. Through departments officials, teachers and priests were again called upon to persevere in attending school meetings of as many uneducated people as possible, to offer, among graduates, and to be themselves living examples of the benefits of education. Ten prizes of 50 crowns were prepared, from the Central Committee of ASTRA, for the teachers who, even in the winter of 1911/1912, proved that they had trained most illiterates in writing and reading.¹⁸ The official address of the Central Committee managed to achieve its motivational goal, because in the winter of 1911/1912, courses were held in 46 communes, from 23 divisions, through which teachers, priests, church singers and various officials brought the contribution to literacy of 890 adults.¹⁹ As promised, the Central Committee of the Transylvanian Association used the “Gh. Barițiu” fund to offer prizes of 50 crowns to the teachers

¹⁸ Circular no. 1881, December 11, 1911; *Transilvania*, no. 5–6 (September–December 1911): 789, 801–802; *Transilvania*, no. 5 (September–October 1912): 303; *Transilvania*, no. 6 (November–December 1912): 567. In another article from 1911, the same secretary of ASTRA established a causal link between education and social status: education attracted wisdom, and the last one showed the way to prosperity; *Calendarul Asociațiunii pe anul de la Christos 1912*, no. 11: 71–72.

¹⁹ In the Beclean division, at Uifalău-Chechișului, the teacher Iuliu Todoran trained 7 illiterate adults; in Beiuș, at Pocola, the teacher Efreș Țigu and the priest E. Papp, 19 adults; in Brad, at Scroafa, the priest G. Simedrea, 25 adults; in Buziaș, at Chevereșul-mare, the teacher Gh. Pârnu, 34 adults; in Ciachi-Gârbău, in Fizeș, teachers I. Cierchizan and Teodor Groza, 40 adults; in Cluj, the teacher Andrei Pora, 60 adults; in Deva, in Biscarea, the priest Adam Lula, 15 adults, and in Deva, the teacher Nicolae Ignea, 4 ones; in Diciosânmărtin, in Feisa, Saroșul-unguresc and Velț, the teachers Constantin Frâncu, (?) Abușan and (?) Pleșa, 53, 40 and 40 adults, and in Giuluș, the priest Basil Folea, 26 ones; in the department of Dobra, in Baștea, Bărești and Mihăiești, the priests Part. Stoica, 12 adults, Oct. Albani, 20 adults, and A. Opreanu, 14 ones; in Hațeg, at Valea Lupului, teacher Șerban, 30 adults; in Ibașfalău, at Valhid, A. Sighișoreanu, 4 adults; in Indol, at Măgura, the teacher Augustin Pop, 59 adults; in Lăpușul-unguresc department, in Borcut, the teacher Gavril Cristea, 32 adults, in Rohia, the teacher Ștefan Bărbos, 35 adults, in Leschia, the teacher Grig. Roman, 8 adults, at Poiana-porcului, the priest Nicolae Tegean and the teacher Proc. Cotuțiu, 12 adults, at Trestia, Ștefan Danciu, 4 adults, at Sălcița, priest Ioan Roman, 20 adults, and at Masca, priest Ioan Dobre, 12 ones; in Măhaciu department, at Măhaciu, the teacher Ioan Pop, 25 adults; in Mercurea, at Sângătin, the priest I. Dăianu, 8 adults; in Murăș-Ludoș, at Cheța and Cicud, the church singers, 25 and 30 adults; in Murăș-Oșorhei department, in Niraștău, the priest Vic. Tofan and teacher Emil Drăgan, 12 adults; in Sălciua, at Ofenbaia, the teacher Nic. Todorean, 7 adults, and, at Ponor, the priest Vasile Bocșa, 2 ones; in Sălciștea, in Sibiel, the teachers Ioan Dobrotă and Nic. Bembea, 7; in Sătmăr-Ugocia, in Borlești, the teacher Aurel Popan, 7 adults; in Sibiu, the teacher from Rusciori, 8 adults; in Sighișoara department, at Sighișoara, Ambr. Stoicovici, 15 adults; in Teaca division, in Miloșul-mare, teacher Petre Radu, 51 adults, in Logig, teacher Emil Macaveiu, 18, in Teaca, E. Birtolon, bank clerk, 40; *Transilvania*, no. 1–2 (January–April 1912): 164; *Transilvania*, no. 5 (September–October 1912): 475; *Transilvania*, no. 4–5 (July–October 1913): 200–201, 283–284.

Ștefan Bărbos from Rohia (Lăpușul unguresc department), Augustin Pop from Măgura (Indol dep.), Efrem Țiga from Pocola (Beiuș dep.), Andreiu Pora from Cluj (Cluj dep.) and to the priest Gavril Simedrea from Scroafa (Brad dep.), for the instruction of 35, 59, 24, 60 and respectively 40 illiterates. For the same purpose, Aurel Popan, teacher in Borlești (Sătmar-Ugocia dep.), was rewarded with 25 crowns for the 7 graduates of his primary education classes.²⁰ The annual reports recorded similar activities in the districts of Abrud-Câmpeni, Aiud-Teiuș, Blaj, Brașov, Dej, Nocrichiu, Reghin, Săliște and Sebeș, but in these cases, either the courses were abandoned or banned by the authorities, or the results remained unknown.²¹

The Association's divisions showed attention to the primary education of the adults in the 1912/1913 "schooling" session, encouraged by a new circular addressed to the directors from the territory at the beginning of the winter of 1912/1913.²² At the same time, due to the intervention of the Maramureș division's leader, the Diocesan Ordinary from Gherla also issued circular no. 10557/1912 urging clergymen and teachers to sign up as ASTRA members and hold classes for the illiterate.²³ Following the pedagogical activities carried out in 73 communes from 28 divisions, 1,089 adults were trained, this number marking the highest number of registered graduates since the beginning of the primary education campaign.²⁴ In that session also, the priest Aurel

²⁰ *Transilvania*, no. 5 (September–October 1912): 481; *Transilvania*, no. 4–5 (July–October 1913): 200–201.

²¹ *Transilvania*, no. 4–5 (July–October 1913): 283–284.

²² Circulars no. 1831, November 23, 1912; *Transilvania*, no. 6 (November–December 1912): 569–571.

²³ *Transilvania*, no. 5 (November–December 1912): 543.

²⁴ In Abrud-Câmpeni division, Basil Barbu, in Abrud, trained 60 illiterate adults; in Alba Iulia, the priest V. Stanciu and the teacher Ion Gligorescu in Straja, the priest S. Bran and teacher N. Oiuca in Drâmbariu and the priest Aurel Marcu in Dumitra, held primary education courses with 20, 22 and 26 adults; in Beclean, teacher Ioan Mândraș from Beud, priests Teofil Bocoș from Enciu and Vasile Mitilean from Bidiu, with 14, and 20 participants each; in Brad, the priest N. Florea from Rîșca, with 28; in Ciachi-Gârbău, teacher I. Cerghizan and the theologian Teodor Groza, with 48 adults; in Deva, teacher Nicolae Igna from Deva and the parish priest Adam Lula from Biscaria with 4 and 20 adults; in Diciosânmărtin, teacher Constantin Frâncu from Feisa, with 42 participants; in Gherla, the priest Valeriu Popescu and teacher Iuliu Todoran from Dârja, and the parish priest Paul Saivan and teacher Gavril Papiu from Ciaba, with 50 and 40 adults; in Huedin, the theologian Teodor Groza from Fizeș, with 38 adults; in Indol, teacher Augustin Pop, 30 adults; in Jibou, teacher Ioan C. Micu from Lupoia, with 15 participants; in Lăpușul unguresc, teachers Gavril Criste from Borcut, Nicolae Man from Libotin, Ștefan Bărbos from Rohia and Gr. Roman from Leschia, and priests Ioan Dobre from Masca and Alexiu Latiș from Plopiș, with 38, 16, 17, 15, 3 and 14 adults; in Marghita, 30 adults trained in Sarcău; in Mercurea, the priests Ioan Dăian from Sângătin, Nicolae Crăciun from Doștat and I. Becicheri from Boz, with 6, 10 and 8 graduates; in Mociu, the priests Octavian Florian from Țăgșor and Ioan Pop from Țagul-mare, with 1 and 25 participants; in Murăș-Ludoș, the church singers from Cheța and Cicad, with 20 and 10 adults. In Murăș-Oșorhei, twelve illiterates learned to read and write in the commune of Nirăștău, and

Marcu from Dumitra (Alba Iulia department), the teacher Cornel Domșa and the priest Basiliu Morariu from Poiana-Aiudului (Aiud-Teiuș dep.), the priest Pavel Beșa and the teachers Ioan Duca and Macedon Pop from Borgo-Medeni (Bistrița dep.), the priest Nicolae Florea from Rișca (Brad dep.), the teacher Constantin Frâncu from Feișa (Diciosânmărtin dep.), the teacher Iuliu Todoran from Dârja (Gherla dep.), the teacher Augustin Pop from Măgura (Indol dep.), the priests Vasile Tătar from Chebelea-sântioana and Alexandru Brumariu from Ceauș (Murăș-Oșorhei dep.) and the teacher Petru Radu from Miloșul-mare (Teaca dep.) stood out and were awarded by ASTRA for the results obtained with 17, 50, 15, 28, 14, 50, 18, 12, 17 and respectively 44 adults.²⁵ In other territorial sections of the Association the results of the courses remained unknown, and only in the Indol department there were reports that some of the meetings had been banned by the authorities.²⁶

For the last “schooling session” before the Great War, the Association issued another circular, similar to the previous one, meant to motivate the departments’ directors and the teachers to organize courses with the illiterates.²⁷ Published at the end of the second year of war, the report written by ASTRA’s Central Committee mentioned only in passing the literacy session of the winter of 1913/1914²⁸ and was limited only to name those who, for special involvement, were awarded in the middle of 1914. Prizes of 50 crowns each were awarded to teachers Demetriu Lazăr Todoran from Căpâlna (Diciosânmărtin department) who taught 36 adults, Teodor Fizeșan from Venter-Rogoz (Ceica dep.), for 27 ones, Emil Murășan from Petridul de sus (Turda dep.), for 51 adults, the priest Ioan Pop from Țagul-mare (Mociu dep.), for 20 adults, and Ioan Ban, church singer in Hărănglab (Diciosânmărtin dep.) for the 22 graduates.²⁹ Other prizes of 25 crowns were offered to teachers Ioan Cioban and Teodor Corbean from Gâlgău, Ioan Micu from Lupoia, Emil Sîrb from Chechiș and Iulian Barzu from

the priests V. Tătar from Chibelea, Alex. Brumariu from Ceauș held courses for 12 and 26 ones; in Murăș-Uioara, the priest Aug. Trif from Cecălaca, priest Iuliu Bucur and teacher Dionisie Negrea from Gâmbuț with 14 and 40 graduates; in Râciu, the teacher Teodor Bad from Râciu, with 5 adult-students; in Săliște, teachers N. Bembea and I. Dobrota from Sibiel, with 7; in Teaca, the teachers Ioan Butnar from Archiud, Octavian Frățilă from Budurlău, Petru Radu from Mîlașul-mare and Alexandru Morar from Sântu, the priests Toma Furdul from Logig and Laurian Voda from Ormenișul-de-Câmpie, as well as, from Uifalău, the priest Onoriu Savu and teacher Alex. Demian, with 5, 10, 48, 42, 5, 6 and 18 adults; *Transilvania*, no. 1–2 (January–April 1913): 85, 88; *Transilvania*, no. 6 (November–December 1913): 429; *Transilvania*, no. 7–9 (September 1914): 244, 252–288.

²⁵ *Transilvania*, no. 3 (May–June 1913): 181–183.

²⁶ *Transilvania*, no. 7–9 (September 1914): 244.

²⁷ Circular no. 1751, October 16, 1913; *Transilvania*, no. 6 (November–December 1913): 446.

²⁸ A brief mention referred to the fact that some divisions also conducted courses for the illiterate in the winter of 1913/1914. More accurate results were obtained in the Ceica district, where teacher Teodor Fizeșan, from Venter-Rogoz, commune trained 27 adults, and in Gherla department, where 13 participants from Seplac successfully passed the exam with the director of the department as “the main witness”; *Transilvania*, no. 7–12 (December 1915): 104, 116–139.

²⁹ *Transilvania*, no. 6 (June 1914): 240.

Petriș, while priests Augustin Podoabă from Gălgău and Demetriu Murășian from Chechiș received messages of recognition for the scholar activity they have submitted.³⁰

Then came the difficult years of the war with massive mobilizations of troops among men, therefore educational activities could not be systematically continued.³¹

The *ABCs*, seen as the main study support manual for beginners, represented an absolute necessity that also entered among the preoccupations of the Transylvanian Association for the most suitable editions for the education of the illiterates. The first two reports, taken from the pages of ASTRA's publications, dated at the end of 1907 and the beginning of the next one, when the work of school-teacher Anton Domide, *Abecedarul pentru copii și adulți* was awarded³² and the school section of the Association analyzed the proposal to publish an illustrated *ABC*, considered more appropriate for the learning of primary knowledge by students.³³ As for the actual practice, until the middle of 1908, the private education initiatives were based on various textbooks existing at the time, as was the case of the work of teacher Iuliu Vuia, used for literacy courses held at the end of 1907 in the Brad department.³⁴

Once the decision to organize courses for the illiterate in its departments was taken, the Association decided to support their good development by making available to the participants, free of charge, the support manuals. In order to accomplish this task, the Sibiu Central Committee published, in the pages of *Transilvania* magazine, a contest that rewarded with 100 crowns the most skillful rendition of an adult *ABC*.³⁵ Out of the 11 works entered in the competition,³⁶ the

³⁰ *Transilvania*, no. 10–12 (December 1914): 509; *Transilvania*, no. 7–12 (December 1915): 104.

³¹ *Transilvania*, no. 7–12 (December 1915): 105; *Transilvania*, no. 7–12 (December 1916): 102; *Transilvania*, no. 7–12 (December 1917): 102.

³² The textbook was awarded 25 crowns by the director of the Cluj department; *Analele Asociațiunii pentru literatura română și cultura poporului român*, no. 3 (July–September 1907): 191.

³³ Notary I. Corbu from Bistrița also proposed the publication of a reading book, and that both works be part of the “Biblioteca Poporală a Asociațiunii”; *Transilvania*, no. 1 (January–March 1908): 15.

³⁴ It was about the textbook Iuliu Vuia, *Abecedar, pentru clasa primară a școlii primare, pe baza metodei sunetelor vii a lui I. Gabel* (Arad: Tipografia diecezană, 1906); *Țara noastră*, no. 50 (December 9, 1907): 820; *Foaia Diecezană*, no. 37 (September 13/26, 1915): 7–8; Biblioteca Academiei Române, *Bibliografia Românească Modernă, litera “V”*, 42. Accessed January 16, 2022 <https://biblacad.ro/bnr/brmautori.php?aut=v&page=820&&limit=20>.

³⁵ *Transilvania*, no. 4 (October–December 1908): 218–219.

³⁶ 1. *Abecedar vorbitor pentru necărturari (analfabeți) cu ilustrațiuni*; 2. *Micul Abecedar ilustrat în uzul școlilor primare*, part I&II by Ioan Tuducescu; 3. *Abecedar ilustrat*, for illiterate adults and for 1st and 2nd grade primary school-students; 4. *Abecedar pentru învățarea oamenilor adulți neștiutori de carte*; 5. *Metodul scris-cetitului în școlile de copii și adulți analfabeți pe baza obiectelor pipăibile, reale*; 6. *Abecedar pentru adulți*, cu Motto: “Speak and write Romanian for God”; 7. *Abecedar de părete* by V. Gr. Borgovanu and Al. Odobescu; 8. *Abecedar pentru adulți sau Cartea plugarului român pentru scris și cetit*; 9. *Abecedarul pentru adulți* by F. Anderlici, translated from Serbian by Teodor Filipescu; 10. *Abecedar pentru analfabeți* by Nicolae Micu; 11. *Proiect de*

censorship commission stopped on two of them and which, once recorrected, as winners were proposed: the textbook of the teacher Nicolae Iosif from Aciliu (Sibiu), which was to be printed as a number from “Biblioteca poporală a Asociațiunii” series, and the work of the teacher Ioan Bota from Cetea (Alba), who received the 100 crowns as an aid for the printing expenses, following that the Association would recommend it for use in its departments.³⁷ If the editing of the first paper was postponed because of the high costs,³⁸ the textbook of teacher Ioan Bota, with the help promised by the Association, was printed and sent later, free of charge, for the use of departments, depending on the number of participants in primary education courses.³⁹ In this way, more than two thousand copies arrived, by the beginning of 1913, in several territorial sections, such as Șercaia, Aiud-Teiuș or Vârșeț,⁴⁰ so that, at the beginning of 1914, the 6,500 copies of the first edition of the *ABC* signed by the teacher from Cetea, were already exhausted as a result of the deliveries between December 26, 1911 – December 20, 1913.⁴¹ The two requests addressed to Astra, in January 1914, as an offer to print the second edition, and four months later, in support of the dissolution and recommendation, they were hit by the refusal of the Sibiu office, determined to grant credit only to the awarded version of the teacher Nicolae Iosif.⁴² And, because divisive literacy sessions almost ceased during the Great War, the sending of *ABCs* aid to civilians was done only in a few cases of express requests.⁴³

The Association did not neglect also the literacy needs of the soldiers, part of the poorly literate Romanian nation, its representatives in the Austro-Hungarian Army. Even if they were less involved in the literacy courses

Abeedar by I. Corbu; 12. *Soarele* by P. Hădan. A later report stated that the work no. 7 was not sent to the Sibiu office to enter the competition, but for guidance; *Transilvania*, no. 2 (April–June 1909): 118; *Transilvania*, no. 3 (July–September 1909): 196.

³⁷ *Transilvania*, no. 4 (October–December 1909): 211, 303; *Transilvania*, no. 5 (October–December 1909): 439–440.

³⁸ 5,000 copies cost 1,428.50 crowns; *Transilvania*, no. 3 (May–June 1910): 142. Almost three years later, another proposal was to edit the textbook and sell it to bookstores and ASTRA’s departments. However, because the first stage involved a financial effort of 2,800 crowns for 15,000 printed copies, the initiative was abandoned; *Transilvania*, no. 1–2 (January–April 1913): 83.

³⁹ *Transilvania*, no. 3 (May–June 1910): 142; *Transilvania*, no. 4 (July–August 1910): 303, 490–491; *Transilvania*, no. 5–6 (September–December 1911): 801–802.

⁴⁰ *Transilvania*, no. 5 (September–December 1912): 303; *Transilvania*, no. 4–5 (July–October 1913): 200–201; *Transilvania*, no. 1–2 (January–April 1913): 86; *Transilvania*, no. 6 (November–December 1913): 434; *Transilvania*, no. 7–9 (September 1914): 244.

⁴¹ According to a payment note of 2,080 crowns submitted to the Association by the Archdiocesan Bookstore from Sibiu [The Sibiu County Service of the National Archives (noted below A.N.S.J.Sb.), *ASTRA* Fund, file 201/1914, f. 1; *Transilvania*, no. 4 (April 1914): 160].

⁴² A.N.S.J.Sb., *ASTRA* Fund, file 120/1914, f. 1–4; A.N.S.J.Sb., *ASTRA* Fund, file 1084/1914, f. 1–2.

⁴³ In 1915, 55 copies were sent in Vălcău (Sălagiu) to S. Filip, one in Lugoj to (?) Crașovan, 10 in Geoagiu to P. Modol and 20 in Cămărașul-deșert (Cojocna) to F. Hădărean; *Transilvania*, no. 1–6 (July 1915): 92; *Transilvania*, no. 7–12 (December 1916): 102.

organized by the representatives of the departments, soldiers benefited from the Sibiu office of support materials for the initiation in the stage of primary education. Initiatives that proved the need for education of Romanian soldiers were also reported in the pages of ASTRA's publications, three such cases being mentioned only during the years 1908–1909. In the first one, Teodor Filipescu⁴⁴ from Sarajevo, recalled, in a letter sent to a newspaper editorial office, that he taught the soldiers of the 13th Army Corps in Zagreb to read and write using a translation of the textbook of the Croatian teacher F. Anderlici.⁴⁵ A few months later, the same periodical published a news item about the initiative of Captain Gustav Dekáni, part of the Infantry Regiment no. 51 of the Austro-Hungarian army from Cluj, mostly Romanian, to reduce to a minimum the percentage of 10% of illiterate recruits incorporated annually. Moreover, for the exercise of the learned notions, he made available to the school beginners a library of Hungarian and Romanian books bought at his own expense.⁴⁶ Towards the end of 1909, *Transilvania* magazine also published the request of the military priest Virgil Cioban from Vienna, who addressed the Association the request that the Sibiu office to intervene at the Ministry of War so that, in the winter months and under the supervision of military priests or officers, graduates of the Romanian regiments to train illiterate soldiers in writing and reading.⁴⁷

During the literacy campaign for the Romanian adults, soldiers were also mentioned as direct beneficiaries of the literacy courses held in the ASTRA divisions, in the period preceding the Great War. A news item from 1912 reported that the teacher Andreiu Pora managed to teach writing and reading to 60 soldiers of the Infantry Regiment no. 62 from Cluj, following some school meetings held between February 26 – May 5 of that year.⁴⁸ For the next year, the activity report of the Abrud Cămpeni district highlighted Lieutenant Basil Barbu as the teacher of 60 illiterate soldiers in Abrud.⁴⁹ The Romanian officer's contribution to the primary education of soldiers extended during the years 1912–1914, when he trained, in his free time, as a volunteer, approx. 200 soldiers of the IV / 64th

⁴⁴ Chemist and publicist, collaborator and member of ASTRA Mircea Măran, "Preocupările științifice și publicistice ale lui Teodor Filipescu", *Studii de știință și cultură* 11, no. 4 (2015): 155–160, <http://www.revista-studii-uvvg.ro/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/3.4.pdf>

⁴⁵ The textbook used a methodology based on the "Our Father" prayer, well known to those without primary education; *Țara noastră*, no. 51 (December 14/27, 1908): 414–415.

⁴⁶ *Țara noastră*, no. 22 (May 31/June 13, 1909): 177.

⁴⁷ *Transilvania*, no. 5 (October–December 1909): 434. In response, the Central Committee asked the military priest Virgil Ciobanu for more information about the process of training Romanian soldiers during military service; *Transilvania*, no. 1–2 (January–April 1910): 52. The discussion, at least at the level of published lines, stopped at that stage (no news on this topic appeared in any of the following issues).

⁴⁸ School classes were held six hours a week; *Transilvania*, no. 5 (September–October 1912): 481.

⁴⁹ *Transilvania*, no. 7–9 (September 1914): 252.

Infantry Battalion with garrison in Abrud.⁵⁰ His education services were also acknowledged by ASTRA which, in a document registered in the spring of 1914,⁵¹ noted the decision of the ASTRA's Central Committee to send a message of gratitude to the Romanian officer, in the absence of financial funds to reward his pedagogical activities.⁵²

Notable efforts, in terms of supporting materials, were made by the Association during 1914. Most of the 583 *ABCs* distributed during that year⁵³ were sent for the training of soldiers in the months leading up to the outbreak of the armed conflict.⁵⁴ It should be noted that, for the maximum efficiency of such approaches, in the case of all applications and regardless of the number of textbooks required, ASTRA sent at least one copy for each of those targeted by the schooling measures. Instead, similar to the customs in the relations with its divisions, the Association requested the sending of a report showing the measure of the efficiency of the course.⁵⁵ In this way, the Association responded to literacy efforts initiated by the military commands, necessary for the provisions transmitted to the troops to be fully understood, but also so as to not tarnish the overall image of the army. The "occasional" teachers were appointed from the troop structures, preferably from those accustomed to such practices according to similar experiences, volunteers and ranks, or from the category of military priests.

In the first category we can include the intervention from Bistrița, at the beginning of January 1914, of the volunteer-teacher Ioan Nechiti, part of the 32nd Honved Regiment, after which he obtained from ASTRA copies of the *ABCs* signed by the teacher Ioan Bota, as well as guidelines for optimal use,

⁵⁰ Gabriela Mircea and Cristian Florin Bota, *Autobiografia generalului Vasile Barbu, fost comandant adjunct al Gărzilor Naționale de la Alba Iulia din 1 Decembrie 1918, ca izvor istoric (1908–1942)* (Alba Iulia: Editura Astra-Despărțământul Timotei Cipariu, 2011), 47.

⁵¹ Central Committee of the Abrud-Câmpeni branch report, February 23, 1914.

⁵² Decision of the Central Committee of the Association no. 1827/1913, A.N.S.J.Sb., *ASTRA* Fund, file 538/1914, f. 1. The Romanian officer enjoyed the same recognition towards the end of 1915, when the image of the enemy of illiteracy was reshaped in a personal discussion with the members of *Românul* newspaper's editorial office [cf. *Românul*, no. 257 (November 25/December 8, 1915): 6].

⁵³ *Transilvania*, no. 1–12 (December 1919): 8. Official records of the requests and dispatches of *ABCs* appear grouped in notes from the first half of the year (cf. A.N.S.J.Sb., Fond ASTRA, Register of alphabetical indexes, vol. VI, year 1914, letter "A", tab 5, notes 6, 108, 109, 110, 123, 137, 145, 153, 200, 238, 244, 254, 271, 305, 425, 438).

⁵⁴ *Transilvania*, no. 1–6 (July 1915): 92. The amount of manuals sent to soldiers, between January and June 1914, was 445, according to the 8 documents presented below.

⁵⁵ Each department, where literacy courses were held, had to send to the Association, together with the annual report, a situation of those accustomed to the notions of reading and writing following their attendance.

necessary for the training of the 20 illiterate soldiers.⁵⁶ Another volunteer, Octavian Doctor (?), part of the Infantry Regiment no. 31, confirmed from Sibiu, also in the first month of 1914, the receipt of 158 *ABCs* for all the uneducated soldiers of companies 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, 15 and 16.⁵⁷ Also in Sibiu, as a support of primary education courses for the benefit of the Artillery Regiment no. 36's fighters, the Transylvanian Association sent 13 *ABCs* by I. Bota, as a result of the request submitted to ASTRA by the volunteer Vasile Vlassa.⁵⁸

In the first half of 1914, the Sibiu office was asked also, three times, for support manuals for illiterate soldiers, as a result of the involvement of some officers and non-commissioned officers in the educational process. Sublieutenant Ioan Aron, appointed instructor by the command of the Infantry Regiment no. 51 stationed in Târgu Mureș, obtained 200 *ABCs* for as many "students", as well as a guide, called *Călăuza noului abecedar* by Petru Șpan, for teaching instructions.⁵⁹ Following another correspondence, Sergeant Gheorghe I. Todea, from Infantry Regiment no. 63 from Bistrita, received a *ABC* for each of the 16 illiterate comrades from his company. Very determined to complete the mission with which he had been entrusted, also "at the highest command", Sergeant Todea was ready to pay the textbooks from his own balance, if it had not been sent to him free of charge.⁶⁰ One hundred books of "Biblioteca Poporală a Asociațiunii" series were also sent by ASTRA to Lieutenant Emil Savu, for the practice of the soldiers belonging to the Infantry Regiment no. 5 from Kisszeben following the literacy program led by the Romanian officer for the practice of soldiers who almost forgot their native language.⁶¹

Military priests also contributed to the primary education of the troops. For example, in the middle of 1914, Ilie Hociotă notified the Association of the few months of didactic activity for the benefit of the illiterate soldiers of the Infantry Regiment no. 2 from Brașov, as a result of which, 22 of the participants learned to read and write. What made this case more special, beyond the message of thanks for the 55 *ABCs* sent by ASTRA, was a second course led by the same teacher as the 28 illiterate Hungarian soldiers, whom he trained in their mother language.⁶²

⁵⁶ A.N.S.J.Sb., *ASTRA* Fund, file 110/1914, f. 1–4. In this case, there were two requests followed by two deliveries because the first package was returned by the postal services.

⁵⁷ A.N.S.J.Sb., *ASTRA* Fund, file 153/1914, f. 1.

⁵⁸ A.N.S.J.Sb., *ASTRA* Fund, file 254/1914, f. 1.

⁵⁹ In this case, the schooling hours took place during the winter months, A.N.S.J.Sb., *ASTRA* Fund, file 200/1914, f. 1–2.

⁶⁰ One hour of study per day was provided for the school training of soldiers, A.N.S.J.Sb., *ASTRA* Fund, file 660/1914, f. 1.

⁶¹ A.N.S.J.Sb., *ASTRA* Fund, file 696/1914, f. 1; A.N.S.J.Sb., *ASTRA* Fund, Input/output register, vol. 10/1914, file 42, note 1368.

⁶² The educational course took place between January 10 and June 10, 1914, with 2 hours of study per week, A.N.S.J.Sb., *ASTRA* Fund, file 1341/1914, f. 1–2.

Conclusions

Started from local and voluntary initiatives, but then encouraged, for national-political reasons, at the level of all territorial sections of ASTRA, the primary trainings of illiterate adults were, for the Transylvanian Association, a pragmatic “barometer” of the opening of the Romanian rural world to education, a fact reflected in the modest participation in literacy courses. Beyond this aspect, it is worth to notice that ASTRA did not spare any effort in organizing literacy courses for uneducated adults, and supporting any attempt of scholar training activities in its departments, awarding prizes for volunteer teachers and free support materials for all participants at school classes. However, in some cases, the support given to the “fight” against illiteracy has exceeded the boundaries of its territorial sections. This was the case of the military units of the Austro-Hungarian Army whose initiative to literate uneducated soldiers, with the help of occasional teachers, was supported by the Association by sending a sufficient number of *ABCs*, as support materials for all illiterate Romanian soldiers who satisfied the military service.