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Eugenics and Freemasonry in the Banat during the first half of the XX Century: The Banat-Crișana Social Institute

Attila Varga¹

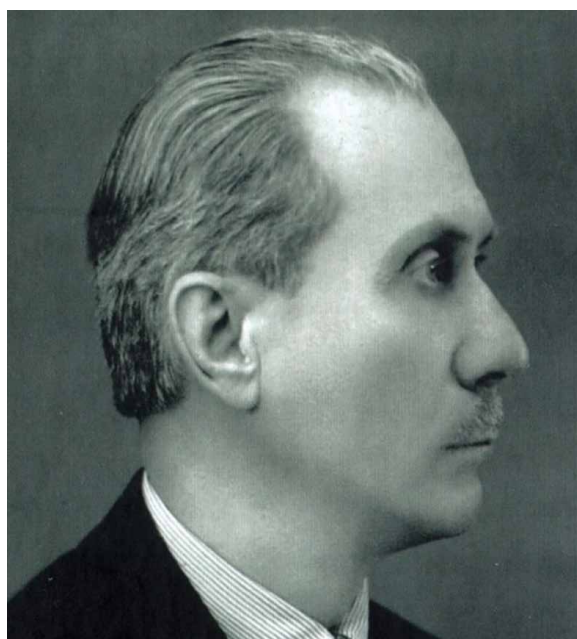


Figure 1. Cornel Groșorean (1881-1949). publicist, journalist, politician, freemason and director of the Banat-Crișana Social Institute.

Abstract

The present study highlights the beginning of the dissemination of eugenic ideas in Banat, Caraș and the Severin counties, in two different phases: before and after the World War I. On the basis of archival documents, we have shown that Freemasonry, namely the “Dél” (South) Lodge of Lugoj, played an important role in the dissemination of eugenic ideas in the aforementioned area. After the Great Union of 1918, eugenics activism in the province was taken over by the members of the prestigious Banat-Crișana Social Institute, founded in 1932. Nevertheless, the role of Freemasonry in spreading eugenic ideas did not diminish in this new period. This is due to cultural and scientific personalities such as Cornel Groșorean, who was a publicist, journalist, politician, director of the Institute’s journal, but also a Freemason in the Lugoj Lodge.

Keywords: *Eugenics, Freemasonry, Banat, Cornel Groșorean, Banat-Crisana Social Institute*

¹Romanian Academy of Science.

*Take care of your health and that of your children,
because only a healthy and strong people is able
to become strong and feared by the others*
Cornel Grofşorean (Sanitary advices)

Eugenics and freemasonry in Banat

The spread of eugenics ideas in the Banat, a region in southwestern Romania (or southern Hungary before 1918) took place in two distinct stages. In the first phase, before World War I, the Freemasonry, particularly the Lodge “Dél” (Hu: South) from Lugoj played an important role. After the Great Union of 1918, during the second phase, eugenics activism in this province was taken over by the members of the prestigious Banat-Crişana Social Institute created in 1932 (Fig. 2).

The role of the Freemasonry in spreading eugenic ideas continued during this second phase. Some prominent members of the Institute were famous freemasons. This was the case of Cornel Grofşorean (1881-1949), publicist, journalist, politician and director of the Institute, initiated to the Lodge “Dél” on 16 April 1910^a.

During the early twentieth century, prominent members of the Lodge “Dél” believed in eugenic ideas of national protection and improvement and tried to spread them in the Caraş-Severin county. This was possible, in part, due to the very effective propaganda made by the scientific and cultural personalities gathered around the journal “Huszadik Század” (“Twentieth Century”).

It was created in January 1900 and it successfully popularized eugenics as a form of social theory. Alongside Jászi Oszkár (1875-1957), “Twentieth Century” also published articles written by prominent Hungarian eugenicists such as József Madzsar, René Berkovits, Lajos Dienes, Zsigmond Fülöp, Géza Hoffmann and Pál Teleki.

Cornel Grofşorean corresponded with Jászi Oszkár already in 1904. Grofşorean sent him an original paper, and was then invited by the editors of the “Twentieth Century” to write more about social issues^b. A year later, Grofşorean met Jászi in the village of Teregoa and a long collaboration ensued.^c For instance, Grofşorean sent him some documentary material that Jászi used to write his famous work “The formation of national states and the ethnic question” (Hu: A nemzeti államok

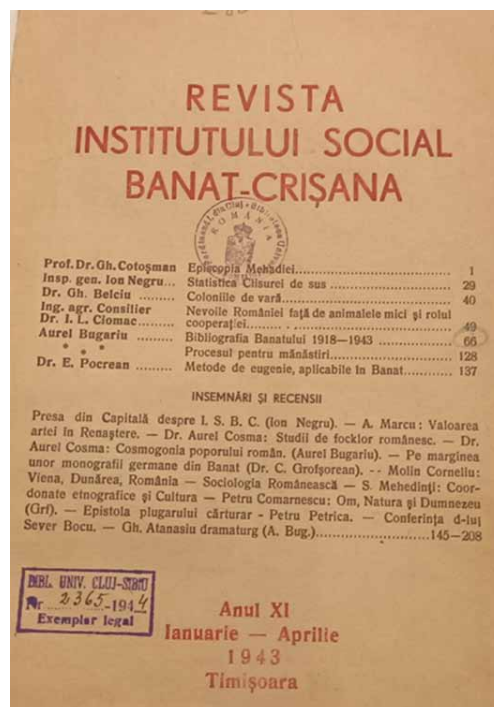


Figure 2. The Banat-Crişana Social Institute's Journal which appeared between 1933 and 1945.

kialakulása és a nemzetségi kérdés)^d.

From 1911 onwards, the Hungarian Freemasonry in the Banat became more involved in popularizing eugenic ideas related to the health of the nation. Vas Béla, the Venerable Master of the Lodge “Dél”, played an important role. He often spoke to other freemasons about sustaining the national community and promoting a social system inspired by masonic principles.^e

From his point of view, the smooth running of a society depended on the observance of fundamental freedoms, equal rights, but also on democratic rules. In such a society, man needed to be freed from the sources of his unhappiness, and for this, the freemasons had to work to eliminate social imbalances. These existed because of the unequal distribution of resources, ignorance, passions and bad habits which first affected the individual then the community and the nation^f.

Therefore, it was necessary to protect the health of the “new man”, freed from vices and passions, which was supposed to be the future of a strong nation. In his well-known study entitled “Sanitary advice” [Ro: Sfaturi sanitare], Grofşorean emphasized the fact that

^a National Archives of Hungary – Budapest, *Archive of Freemasons Order: Masonry Lodge “Dél”*. See the register of the lodge members, 137 cs. LXXXVIII. (1909-1918).

^b Carmen A, *Cornel Grofşorean. Biografia unei personalităţi (1881-1949)* [Cornel Grofşorean. The Biography of a personality (1881-1949)], (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2019), 340.

^c *Ibidem*.

^d *Ibidem*, 342.

^e National Archives of Hungary – Budapest, *Archive of Freemasons Order: The Lodge “Dél”*. See *A páholyról (oktató munka)* [About the Lodge. Educational work], Budapest, 1911, 137 cs. LXXXVIII. (1909-1918).

^f *Ibidem*.

the most powerful medicine in nature that helped a person to stay healthy were, in fact, fresh water and air, and also cleanliness of the body^a. He insisted on the observance of hygiene measures, the care of the body, the preservation of cleanliness in the community and the removal of unhealthy habits that facilitated the spread of disease-causing bacilli which degraded the individual and the body of the nation alike.

Eugenics offered, in fact, a modern response to the alleged decline of the nation's biological health, creating an original scientific narrative. Its legitimacy came from the intense concern for improving the biological qualities of the population and protecting its health. As Grofşorean put it during his campaigns through the villages of Banat, he suggestively mentioned: *Take care of your health and that of your children, because only a healthy and strong people is able to become strong and feared by the others*^b.

During the 1930s, this view devolved: associations and reading societies, but also various press in Romanian, Hungarian and German languages. Since 1896, a very well-known Romanian cultural society, the so-called "ASTRA", had carried out an intense activity of culturalization of the Romanian population in Transylvania and the Banat, promoting art, folklore, ethnography, Romanian history and medicine. Grofşorean's concerns for the public and preventive hygiene can be explained in two different ways.

In 1887, after completing his studies in Vienna, the renowned scholar and director of ASTRA, George Popovici (1862-1927) decided to settle in Lugoj. There, he began an intense political activity, with the Romanian National Party, standing out as a deputy in the Hungarian Parliament in Budapest. He sought to defend the interests of the Romanian nation, supporting the activity of spreading culture and science, especially medicine. Grofşorean was also invited to Lugoj in order to give a series of lectures about hygiene and the principles of healthy living. As he recalled: *"Although I am not a doctor, but as a man who dealt a lot with medicine, I think I will be able to tell you about some things that are of interest [...] because you, the people, you are the truly base of the country."*^c

Grofşorean adhered not only to Jászi's Masonic projects, but also to his scientific ideas, informing a complex research agenda dedicated to the health of the individual and the nation. In this sense the

context was favorable. Through its extensive network of freemason lodges opened across the country, but also by the large number of doctors who joined them, freemasonry contributed a lot to the large dissemination of the eugenic ideas.

Grofşorean, therefore, continued to march on these ideas of public and preventive hygiene, but he managed to implement concrete measures in this regard only after the union of Transylvania and the Banat with the Kingdom of Romania in 1918.

Following the model for the institutionalization of eugenics created by Jászi and the scholars grouped around "Twentieth Century" Grofşorean and his friends sought to achieve the same in the Banat. They will achieve that goal a decade after 1918, once again having Freemasonry by their side. But by this time, the most important role in supporting and disseminating eugenic ideas in the Banat was no longer played by a Freemason Lodge, but by a highly prestigious institution: the Banat-Crişana Social Institute.

The Banat-Crişana Social Institute: a "cultural belt" against Hungarian revisionism

In 1932, when the Banat-Crişana Social Institute was created, the elites from the Banat led by Cornel Grofşorean considered it to be a great academic success. After 1918, they wanted to create a "cultural citadel" in order to make for the lack of a Romanian university in the southwestern part of Romania. Grofşorean and the well-known doctor Iosif Nemoianu (1894-1968) wanted to bring together various strands of research activity in the Banat and thus create in a centralized research system.

As inspiration, they used the already famous Romanian Social Institute established in Iaşi in 1919 and then moved to Bucharest, by Dimitrie Gusti (1880-1955). Their connection to this Institute meant, in fact, the extension in the Banat of the eugenics movement supported by the Sociological School from Bucharest^d. Inspired by Gusti's monographic technique, Grofşorean and his colleagues began to investigate, from a scientific point of view, social and medical problems of the Banat society during the interwar period.

The monographs prepared by the Banat-Crişana Social Institute's scholars revealed various aspects of the villages in the Banat that hitherto were less

a Cornel G, *Sfaturi sanitare* [Sanitary advices], (Timişoara: Cartea Românească, 1926).

b *Ibidem*.

c *Ibidem*, 5.

d Carmen A, *Cornel Grofşorean. Biografia unei personalităţi (1881-1949)* [Cornel Grofşorean. The Biography of a personality (1881-1949)], (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2019),

known: the problem of depopulation^a and the lack of the general hygiene. The results of this research were published between 1933-1946 in the Banat-Crișana Social Institute's Journal. It was led by Grofșorean and aimed to be a faithful image of all the steps undertaken by the institute himself.

The journal had a steering committee consisting of some renowned names from Banat's scientific life: V. Blășianu, Rector of the Polytechnic School - as president, Iosif Nemoianu - as general secretary, Dion Mardan, Adrian Brudariu, Ioachim Miloia, Victor Vlad, Mihai Groșșianu, Cornel Grofșorean and the physician Emil Pocrean^b. The research activity of the institute was divided into seven different sections: economic, social policy and sociology, cultural and artistic, urban planning and administrative, legal, minorities and medical^c.

In the first year of its activity, 216 people enrolled in the institute's departments, and 29 of them to the medical section. It brought together important physicians such as: M. Popoviciu, I. Nemoianu, I. Gabor, I. Popa, A. Maior, I. Todan, N. Drăgan, N. Borcea, I. Imbroane, Gh. Atanasiiu, A. Suci, I. Duma, V. Popoviciu and E. Pocrean^d. The research topics addressed all these scholars were various: birth rate under medico-legal report, mortality, infant mortality, the role of syphilis and tuberculosis in Banat's depopulation, the hygienic conditions of the peasants, medical assistance of adults, abortions and contraceptive methods, prostitution and eugenics^e.

One of the most relevant researches related to the depopulation was made in 1943 by Emil Pocrean^f. His research focuses on the eugenics methods used in Banat and is based on the previous contributions made by Salvator Cupcea (1908-1958), Cornel Grofșorean and Iuliu Moldovan (1882-1966). Pocrean began by saying that: *protecting the family means in fact the protecting of the nation, and the biological capital of a state is inventoried according to the number and quality of children*.

He then emphasized the fact that a new conception of biology was needed to place at the forefront the hereditary factor. Pocrean he also mentioned that humanity was a subject to the mysterious force of heredity and for this reason the "selection of the hereditary core" and the "good germplasm", were vital. For this effective selection the measures proposed by Pocrean were several: *the prenuptial health examination, the creation of an Eugenics Office used for premarital consultation and guidance, propaganda for marriages between those who belonged to the "superior stock", the granting of financial loans to those of superior racial qualities who wished to start a family, the reduction of debts by 25% for every child born in good families, criticizing those with superior qualities who prioritized pleasures and the desire for freedom instead of the family, sterilizing those who, through their defects, spoiled the qualities of the nation: morons, criminals, madmen, deaf- mutes, epileptics, lunatics, alcoholics or those with serious and contagious diseases (syphilitic, tubercular, alcoholic)*^g.

Such eugenic measures proposed to be applied in Banat for the protection of the people were based on the firm belief of medical scholars such as: *"it is better to have a smaller number of citizens but of higher quality than many but of lower quality. That because quality is more important than quantity"*^h.

When Pocrean published all his eugenic solutions for the protection of the Romanian national body, in Hungary the impact of the social and biological policies imposed by the government since the beginning of the 1940s was significant. Between 1940-1941, as Northern Transylvania was joined with Hungary, Hungarian national policy aimed to restoring the country's sense of historical mission in this region. The political authorities put into practice a complex eugenic plan of social and biological improvement where the notion of a healthy and vigorous Hungarian family was linked to the cult of race.

Faced with Hungarian propaganda, the Banat-Crișana Social Institute responded not only by its own narrative of social and biological improvement of the Romanian national body, but also with an expansion of its activity. This was planned to be made on the entire territory of the western border of the country. This was intended to create a "cultural belt" in front of all Hungarian revisionist tendenciesⁱ.

a See Cornel G, *Situația politică și culturală a minorităților etnice din România la finele anului 1930* [The political and cultural situation of ethnic minorities in Romania at the end of 1930], (Timișoara, 1944).

b Andrei N, *Din istoria cercetării sociale românești. Institutul Social Banat-Crișana* [From the history of Romanian social research. The Banat-Crisana Social Institute], (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 1999), 53.

c *Ibidem*, 56.

d *Ibidem*, 76-77.

e *Ibidem*, 81.

f Emil P, *Metode de Eugenie aplicabile în Banat* [Eugenic methods applicable to the Banat], in "Revista Institutului Social Banat-Crișana"[The Journal of the Banat-Crișana Social Institute], XI, January-April 1943, 137-142.

g *Ibidem*, 139-141.

h *Ibidem*, 142.

i Andrei N, *Din istoria cercetării sociale românești. Institutul Social Banat-Crișana* [From the history of Romanian social research. The Banat-Crisana Social Institute], (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 1999), 59.

The first stage of the Institute's extension was realized by establishing a section in Arad. Grofşorean himself asked C. Radu to contribute to the creation of this section, and all the support was provided by a group of local physicians. The Arad section of the Institute was led by Dumitru Cosma - president, Eugen Dorca - Secretary and Aurel Botiş - Archivist. The following research topics were included in the activity program of this section: tuberculosis, nutrition in the Arad region, the causes and remedies of infant mortality in the villages, rural popular customs, the elaboration of a health monograph of the city of Arad^a.

Concerned with Hungarian revisionist propaganda, Grofşorean considered the fact that from this point of view Arad county was the most exposed part of the country. It was also the reason he considered the minority problem in Romania as being very important: *"if we don't know what all minorities have, how they live and what they have, if we don't inventory the same phenomena for Romanians in Hungary, we may lose the county."*^b

Following the strategy of the "cultural belt" protection, the second stage of the Institute's expansion aimed at the creation of sections in Oradea and Satu Mare. As well as the creation of Institute's departments in Caransebeş, Lugoj and Oraviţa, this initiative also belonged to Cornel Grofşorean. But many of these expansion projects were not realized, because the

necessary intellectual forces were not found to support a serious and effective long-term activity.

During World War II, the Institute's activity was seriously affected, the sections were disorganized, and many members were incorporated into the army. In 1943, Grofşorean mentioned the fact that the Institute would continue its activity and the sections will be re-established. But in 1945, the Institute stopped its activity, and its Journal only appeared for a short time in 1947^c.

The Banat-Crişana Social Institute had the merit of standing out as a scientific reference point. It provided an important documentary basis for researching the economic, social-political, cultural and medical development of the Banat region during the interwar period^d. But this representative institution was not only a forum for research and dissemination of social and medical knowledge.

It was also a veritable hotbed of culture, managing to bring together the most important experts from the southwestern part of Romania. Many of these individuals were also Freemasons. How significant was the role of the freemasonry in supporting this scientific institution until the end of the World War II, needs to be explored further.

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Ευγονική και Ελευθεροτεκτονισμός στο Banat κατά το πρώτο ήμισυ του 20^{ου} αιώνα. The Banat-Crişana Social Institute

Attila Varga

Η παρούσα εργασία μελετά την πορεία της διάδοσης των ιδεών της ευγονικής στο Banat, το Caraş και το Severin της Ρουμανίας, σε δύο διαφορετικές φάσεις: πριν και μετά τον Α' Παγκόσμιο Πόλεμο. Με βάση αρχειακά έγγραφα, δείξαμε ότι ο Τεκτονισμός, και συγκεκριμένα η «Dél» (Νότια) Στοά του Lugoj, έπαιξε σημαντικό ρόλο στη διάδοση των ιδεών της ευγονικής στην περιοχή αυτή. Μετά τη Μεγάλη Ένωση του 1918, την προώθηση της ευγονικής στην επαρχία ανέλαβαν τα μέλη του διάσημου Κοινωνικού Ινστιτούτου Banat-Crişana, που ιδρύθηκε το 1932. Ωστόσο, ο ρόλος του Τεκτονισμού στη διάδοση των ευγονικών ιδεών δεν μειώθηκε κατά τη νέα αυτή περίοδο. Αυτό οφείλεται σε προσωπικότητες του πολιτιστικού και επιστημονικού κόσμου, όπως ο Cornel Grofşorean, ο οποίος ήταν εκδότης, δημοσιογράφος, πολιτικός, διευθυντής του περιοδικού του Ινστιτούτου, αλλά και μασόνος στη Στοά Lugoj.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: Ευγονική, Ελευθερομασώνοι, Banat, Cornel Grofşorean, Banat-Crişana Social Institute

^a *Ibidem*, 59-60.

^b *Ibidem*, 61.

^c *Ibidem*, 69-70.

^d *Ibidem*, 182.