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Pimen Constantinescu

The Collection of Interwar Literary-Cultural Journals

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Abstract

In the economy of the library of the “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu Romania, an important place is taken by the collection of about fifteen thousand volumes, mostly in the humanities. These were donated by Pimen Constantinescu, the first librarian and manager of the University of Cluj Library, Sibiu Branch.

More than 515 reviews can be identified as part of the donor’s collection: many of these works are literary magazines, fiction, poetry, criticism and other writing. The aim of this study is to present a history of this valuable collection, from its establishment up until today. The research starts from the context which brought Pimen Constantinescu to Sibiu, his personality, his concerns and his motivations. Furthermore, we identify the growth and means of organisation of this cultural heritage that was threatened with destruction under the communist regime.

There are no studies directly concerned with the history of this collection. We will however try to find links between Pimen’s appraisals on Romanian publishing activities and similar studies. Although Pimen subscribed to the most important journals in the country, we will focus especially on those which are less well-known, particularly emphasizing those less highlighted by studies on the Romanian history of press.

Keywords

Interwar period; Romanian local publications; literary magazines; complex cultural profile

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I. Pimen Constantinescu – teacher and bibliographer

The “Pimen Constantinescu” book and periodicals collection comprise a total of 15.000 units. It was named after the donor who was the main bibliographer of the Library of the Faculty of History and Philology¹ between 1969 and 1971, these volumes occupy a special place in the collection of the “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu Library.

Through his activity, Pimen Constantinescu's² name is connected with many places in Romania³ and also in Italy (i.e. Perugia and Rome, but especially the Friuli region), where his theoretical training took place or where he worked as a teacher, editor or collaborator of literary journals.⁴

The zealous Romanian Italianist arrived in Sibiu in 1932, initially as a teacher at the High School of Commerce. Permanently settled there, he was also active at the Gheorghe Lazar theoretical High School conducting in both places Italian reading, creative writing and culture clubs, the latter called “Leonardo da Vinci,” with their own small publications, library collection and exchange activity; furthermore as a founding member and editor of different local periodicals⁵. In 1941⁶ when the “Ferdinand I” University of Cluj found refuge in Sibiu, he was a substitute Italian lecturer at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters (1941-43) and a professor at the Academic Pedagogical Seminary until 1944. After 1951, he became a scientific secretary at the Sibiu branch of the Society of Historical and Philological Sciences; meanwhile, he was decorated for taking part in the war campaigns of 1942-1943 and 1944-1945.

He was permanently interested in local culture and Italian poetry, as a sample of his work mentioned proves incontrovertibly: “*Istoricul presei focșănene: Bibliografie (1859-1900) (Focșani, 1931),*” *Publicațiile periodice românești ale Sibiului de azi* (Sibiu, 1934), *Sibiul literar* (with Elie Măgeanu, Tipografia săteanului, 1934), “*L'Infinito*” *di Leopardi in romeno* (Salonic, 1937), *România și Italia* (Sibiu, Curierul, 1937), *Limba și literatura italiană la Sibiu* (Sibiu, Sibiul Publishing House, 1938), *Memorandumul român și Italia* (Sighișoara, 1947). He also translated many works of the Italian poets Gabriele D'Annunzio, Pietro Mignosi and Gino Novelli, among others).

The entries in the online catalogue of the Italian National Library⁷ once again prove how much his activity as a promoter of Italian culture was appreciated. From his correspondence with Italian

¹ Filială de la Sibiu a Universității „Babeș-Bolyai” din Cluj. [The Sibiu subsidiary of the “Babeș-Bolyai” University of Cluj].

² Born in 1905 in Plăinești, county of Râmnicu Sărat, nowadays Dumbrăveni, county of Vrancea – †1973 Sibiu.

³ Focșani – where he graduated from high school and made his debut with poems and translations in “*Universul literar*”, “*Căminul*” și “*Freamătul*”; Câmpina – substitute Latin teacher, 1927-1928; Bucharest and Galați – teacher at several high schools and Latin text book author; librarian at the Italian Seminary of the University of Bucharest; Brașov – assistant professor, then lecturer at the Academy of Higher-level Commercial and Industrial Studies, between 1941 and 1947.

⁴ He published articles in journals all around the country, focusing especially on translations and reviews (“*Căminul*”, “*Freamătul*” – Focșani; “*Făt-Frumos*”, “*Junimea literară*” – Cernăuți; “*Câmpina*”, “*Datina*” – Turnu-Severin; “*Hyperion*” – Cluj; “*Luceafărul*” – Timișoara; “*Promoteu*” – Brașov etc.); according to some sources, he submitted work to nearly 100 journals.

⁵ As a founding member and secretary of the cultural circle “*Thesis*” in Sibiu, Constantinescu was not even 30 years old when he founded “*Ausonia: caiete trimestriale de poezie italiană*”; at the same time, he was also the editor of the local journals “*Provincia literară*” and “*Sibiul literar*”.

⁶ The same year, he received a PhD from the University of Rome, with the thesis “*Poezia socială a Adei Negri*”

⁷ See *Catalogo del Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale*, <http://opac.sbn.it/>.

personalities and institutions, we have selected one description which captures the intensity of his overwhelming feeling of attachment to the common heritage of Romania and Italy:⁸

cc. 1r-2v

Mittente:

Constantinescu, Pimen

[...]

Destinatari:

Bertoni, Giulio

Luogo: Sibiu (Romania).

Data: 1940-07-07 (Il timbro postale di partenza reca la data 1940-07-08).

Osservazioni:

[...]

Argomento:

Lettera nella quale Costantinescu lo ringrazia per essersi espresso favorevolmente riguardo la sua attività rivolta soprattutto all'Italia; inoltre, esprime la sua speranza che la Romania e l'Italia diventino paesi confinanti e costituiscano un solo stato neolatino.

Comprehensive and sustained, while Pimen Constantinescu's translation activity was appreciated, it was also subjected to criticism and controversies. Many translators were treated this manner, for either good or strictly polemical reasons. Coşbuc's experience who is Constantinescu's subject in his 1968 study *Atitudinea lui Coşbuc faţă de traducerea "Divinei Comedii"* (Coşbuc's attitude towards the translation of *The 'Divine Comedy'*) is relevant in this respect.⁹

In an article from the journal *Abecedar*, Emil Giurgiucă bemoans the state of contemporary translations from Italian to Romanian, stating that they suffer from "a type of anemia that repels the reader." He expresses his hopes regarding "Mister Pimen Constantinescu," "a little savant that is not distasteful at all," who should not follow the trend of bringing together poetry, indices and erudite comments: "That is why I hope for a Pimen Constantinescu to be less of scholar than he is, and rather more of a poet (sensitive dragonfly!) and translator of art as he seems to be."¹⁰

Pimen Constantinescu's life was also marked by virulent polemics, moments that cultural history is scattered with,¹¹ though it must be kept in mind that these moments are not representative regarding his relations with other people. Subjective opinions should be taken with a grain of salt; some of them are stronger (even harsh) while others are softer, painting a picture that today may seem confusing and contradictory for those who encounter this man of culture for the first time.

⁸ We have omitted some sections and addenda. For the full description, see *Manus online: Censimento dei manoscritti delle biblioteche italiane*: http://manus.iccu.sbn.it/opac_SchedaScheda.php?ID=0000166753.

⁹ In spite of C.A. Ionescu's article "*Monstruoziţă poligloto-coşbuciste în traducţia 'Infernului' lui Dante din 'Forţa morală'*", II, 1902, no. 15, p. 3, the Romanian poet goes on with the publication of translations from Dante in "*Sămănătorul*" and notes on page 95 of ms. rom. 2930, "it is not the critics who understand the importance, but those ephemeral mosquitoes that bring down every word." Gheorghe Chivu, "Manuscrisele Divinei Comedii" [The manuscripts of the Divine Comedy], in *Limba română* [The Romanian language], no. 9-12, year XXIII, 2013.

¹⁰ *Abecedar*, Thursday, 22 June 1933, Year I, no. 7, page 4.

¹¹ See, for example, Steluţa Pestrea Suciu, "Frize" – the first journal from Braşov open to modernism, in "*Țara Bârsei: Revistă de cultură a Muzeului Casa Mureşenilor Braşov. Articole de istorie, literatură, geografie, sociologie şi muzicologie*", no. 2/2008, p. 312. Due to their attitude, perhaps too blatantly exclusivist and reforming, the young writers of "Frize" made Pimen Constantinescu their stalwart enemy.

Some called Constantinescu “the cultural parasite”¹², while the critic Nicolae Manolescu said – “I met [him] in a reading room of the Astra Library and who I talked about books with endlessly.”¹³ “He was a priceless guide in my readings that had matured...”¹⁴, he was seen as a model by others and a model that some of his students did not forget even decades after his death. According to some, the modest look of the professor oppressed by the “system” hid his intellectual capabilities and passions; “nevertheless, it was enough to get close to him, listen to him to get to love Italy and its wonderful language.”¹⁵ “A professor of Italian (...) who was extremely attached to his students,”¹⁶ Mrs. Otilia Răduleț recalls at old age.

To the very end, he remained attached to a place with its own historical and cultural identity in the North-East of Italy. Friulian-laden poetry had a special place among his preoccupations; selecting and translating poems published between the sixteenth century and 1968 required a lot of time, patience and courage the Italianist in Sibiu needed to defy the system rules.¹⁷

Constantinescu died in Sibiu on 23 April, 1973. A volume of his translations of Friulian poetry was published posthumously, signed by the man who defined himself as “*un rumeno che ama e guarda alla Friulia come alla sua sorella*.”¹⁸

II. Important collections in the Pimen Constantinescu book stock

The professor’s periodical collection – an impressive number of titles,¹⁹, though some only include the first issues – can be connected to his strong humanist spirit which, is motivated by his need to be informed rather than being oversized, as his detractors claimed. As the editor of some regional journals and collaborator to numerous other original contributions, particularly translations, he was

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ Nicolae Manolescu, *SOS – bibliotecile publice!* [SOS – Public Libraries!], 9 May 2014, on the webpage: http://adevarul.ro/cultura/carti/sos-bibliotecile-publice-1_536cf0440d133766a8810d63/index.html. See also Tudor Cristea, “Nicolae Manolescu în căutarea cărților pierdute,” [Nicolae Manolescu, looking for lost books] in *De la clasici la contemporani* [From classics to contemporary authors] (Târgoviște: Bibliotheca and Marcona Publishing House, 2008), 331-334.

¹⁴ Idem, *Cititul și scrisul*, 113.

¹⁵ See *Con grano salis*, the subchapter “Profesorul Pimen Constantinescu” [Professor Pimen Constantinescu] in *Lacrima Prigoanei* (Gordian Publishing House, 1994). Available online: <http://miscarea.net/lacrima-prigoanei-evocari.htm>.

¹⁶ Otilia Răduleț on Pimen Constantinescu, in “*Supraviețuitorii. Mărturii din temnițele comuniste ale României*” [The survivors. Testimonies from the communist prisons of Romania], interviews by Anca Ștef (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2014), 69.

¹⁷ About the “illegal” passing of the manuscript to Italy, see: Florica Dimitrescu, “*Lirica friulană în limba română: Poezie friulană. Din Renaștere până în zilele noastre: traduceri de Pimen Constantinescu*”, review to the edition done by Nicolae Mocanu (Cluj Napoca: Clusium Publishing House, 1993), in: *Dacoromania*, 34/1996-1997, p. 341.

¹⁸ *Poezia friulană. Din Renaștere până în zilele noastre / Poesie furlane. De Risassince al Nufcent / Poesia friulana, dal Rinsciment al Novecento*, selection and translation by Pimen Constantinescu (Cluj Napoca: Editura Clusium, 1993). Note on the edition: Nicolae Mocanu, p. XIX.

¹⁹ More than 515: over 215 in newspaper format (almost exclusively in Romanian) and over 175 in book format, to which we add 124 titles at the Sibiu State Archives (Romanian Italian, and other foreign languages), a few copies and some volumes of the more complete journals, “purged” (grouped separately) by him (for their right orientation or the sensitive topics they covered) when he donated his entire book stock to the university library of Sibiu in 1969 (according to his records at the D.J.A.N. Sibiu, Pimen Constantinescu book stock, File no. 29, 30 and his reports on the library, File 177, 178).

motivated by a need to be informed. As he testifies in a curriculum vitae from 1970,²⁰ he published his first poems in *Universul literar* in 1922 (5th grade high school), he translated over a thousand poems from Italian, Latin, French, Spanish, German, Russian, Portuguese, Latin and he had a special interest in forming Romanian-Italian and Italian-Romanian connections. He was a member of the editorial committees for the journals “*Căminul*” (1925-1926) and “*Freemătul*” (1925-1927) in Focșani, a founder of the Romanian translations of Italian poetry (which included biographies, portraits and bibliographies), “*Ausonia: caiete trimestriale de poezie italiană*” (Focșani and Sibiu, 1932-1934), collaborator, editor of the journal “*Provincia literară*” (Sibiu, 1932-1933), then, after it was no longer published, editor of the local cultural journal “*Sibiul literar*” (12 issues, 1934), and a member of the editorial committee of the journal “*Curierul*” (Sibiu, 1937-1939). Between 1937 and 1940, he was the Romanian editor of an Italian journal from Salonic, “*Olimpo*,” in 1937 he became the Romanian representative-correspondent to Perugia University – and this only includes his activities before 1944.

As an active member, president or secretary of several local literary societies, associations of high school teachers, research groups in literary history, local culture and folklore, he was dedicated to capture, reflect on and review the latest literary works, studies and information published at the time. He accomplished all this with the help of multiple contacts, but also through his own material resources, as his large collection of periodicals proves.

His interest started when he was still a student; between 1926 and 1929 he was a librarian of the Italian Seminary of the Bucharest University as well as a member of the Students' Committee of Letters and Philosophy (1926-1928).²¹

His extended documentation of the literary press at the time is reflected in his own collection which includes most titles of regional journals “*Noua generație*”, quoted by G. Călinescu in “*Istoria Literaturii române de la origini până în prezent*” [The History of Romanian Literature from its Origins to the Present] (1941).

Lastly, as a literary figure, translator, and also a chronicler, literary historian and critic, he contributed to many interwar literary-cultural journals all around the country, as well as in some traditional and prestigious ones. He mentions the following collaborations with journals and newspapers:²²

- *Convorbiri literare, Roma, Azi, Lotus, Revista Societății Tinerimea Română, Progresul, Farul Căminului, Gospodina, Revista scriitoarelor și scriitorilor români, Universul, Curentul, Curentul literar, Tribuna Școalei, Românizarea, Buna Vestire, Decembrie, Prepoem, Revista germaniștilor români, Tinerețea, Îndrumarea tinerimii, Dacia rediviva, Preocupări literare, Tribuna tineretului, Porunca Vremii, Reacțiunea literară, Viața literară, Satul* (Bucharest);
- *Pontice, Marea Noastră* (Constanța);
- *Bugeacul* (Bolgrad);
- *Viața Basarabiei* (Chișinău and Bucharest);
- *Cuget Moldovenesc* (Bălți);
- *Ecoul Crimeii* (Simferopol);
- *Cetatea Moldovei* (Iași);

²⁰ Sibiu Country Department of the Romanian National Archives, Pimen Constantinescu book store, File 41, f. 23-31.

²¹ Daria Iordache Lauretta, “Profil bio-bibliografic Pimen Constantinescu, în *Lirica friulană în limba română. Poezie friulană. Din Renaștere până în zilele noastre*.” Selection translated to Romanian by Pimen Constantinescu (Cluj-Napoca, Clusium Publishing House, 1993), XXII.

²² Sibiu Country Department of the Romanian National Archives, Pimen Constantinescu book stock, File 41, f. 27-28.

- *Junimea literară, Făt-Frumos, Revista Bucovinei* (Cernăuți);
 - *Avântul* (Piatra Neamț);
 - *Căminul, Freamătul, Milcovia, Curentul Moldovei, Buletinul italo-român, Foaia necăjiților, Îndrumarea tinerimii* (Focșani);
 - *Anuarul Școlii Superioare de Comerț, Revista vremii, Orizonturi* (Galați);
 - *Gazeta cărților* (Ploești și București);
 - *Strada, Câmpina, Cucul Prahovei, Prahova* (Câmpina);
 - *Ramuri, Arhivele Olteniei* (Craiova);
 - *Zorile Romanaților* (Caracal);
 - *Datina, Provincia* (Turnu-Severin);
 - *Luceafărul* (Timișoara);
 - *Hotarul* (Arad);
 - *Hyperion, Ofensiva Română, Viața ilustrată, Societatea de mâine* (Cluj);
 - *Eu și Europa* (Deva);
 - *Blajul* (Blaj);
 - *Țara Bârsei, Prometeu, Păunașul Codrilor, Plaiuri Săcelene, Tribuna* (Brașov);
 - *Tribuna, Cuvântul poporului, Provincia literară, Luceafărul, Acțiunea, Gazeta Sibiului, Sibiul, Pământ și vrajă ardeleană, Țara, Anuarul Școlii Superioare de Comerț de băieți, Curierul, Glasul strămoșesc, Amicul Poporului, Calendarul Astrei, Gata la datorie* (Sibiu);
- Foreign journals:
- *Termini* (Fiume): Romanian anthology in Italian, 1939;
 - *Olimpo* (Salonic);
 - *Rassegna italo-romena* (Milan);
 - *Meridiano di Roma, Quaderni alla ribalta* (Rome);
 - *L'horizon nouveau* (Brussels).

The pseudonyms he sometimes used are revealed in the aforementioned curriculum vitae of 1969, before he was employed as the (sole) librarian, i.e. “main librarian” of the Faculty of letters and History in Sibiu: Farcaș Vrînceanu; Civis Romanus; P. I. Comnen; Radu Mehedinți; Traian Leonescu.

To illustrate the openness of some regional and local journals, we would like to quote from “*Căminul*,” year I, no. 5-6, May-June 1925; the Table of Contents includes Pimen Constantinescu when he was a high school student (and already a member of the editing committee): “*Căminul*” Published monthly under the direction of a committee.



Table of contents:

Din nevoile de astăzi, Gh. Dimitriu; *De Ziua eroilor*, N. D.; *Cetatea păcii (Meditații)*, Preot A. C. Cosma; *Celor ce construiesc*, Const. Z. Buzdugan; *O excursie în Transilvania (Note de drum)*, Preot C. Gh. Vartolomeiu; *Folklor. Vălăritul și Surăția. (Obceiuri Vrâncenești). din Negrilești*, I. D. Neagu-Negrilești; *Vălăritul. (Obceiuri Vrâncenești). din Năruja*, Simion Hârnea; *Idei, instincte... oameni*, N. Drușu; *Când voi fi liber (versuri)*, Ni-Dru; *Originalitatea „Țiganiadeil”*, Const. Radu, profesor; *Fărâme...*, Nănești; *Din ciclul „Dedicații”. Farmacista (versuri). Licențiată în drept versuri*, George Negrea; *Figuri putnene dispărute. +Manolache I. Antache. Respect mamei lui: Tușa Soltana*, Ștefan Ion Gheorghiu; *Pagina tinereții. Oda a IV-a din Horațiu (versuri)*, Pimen Constantinescu; *Mâna*, Th. Storm. *Iuliei L. (versuri)*, Pimen Constantinescu; *Fără somn*, Th. Storm (versuri), Pimen Constantinescu; *Melancolie*, Gh. Gheorghiu; *Viața culturală din Focșani*, Gh. Dimitriu; *Cronica. Științifică*, I.D.; *Medicală*, Dr. Const. Macri; *Sportive*, Cpt. M. Stoenescu; *Recensii*, G. D.; P. Constant.; T. E. O. „Universul literar”, Anul 41, Nr. 20, 17 Maiu, sub conducerea d-lui Iorga; Ramuri, 1 dec. 1924.; „Țara de Jos” și „Graiul nostru” (Bârlad).; „Freamătul”, Anul I, Nr. 2-3, P. Neamț.; „Cuvântul literar și artistic”, Anul II, Nr. 22., 31 Mai 1925.; „Machina”, Anul I, Nr. 6-7, Aprilie-Mai, R.-Sărat., P. Constant.; „Miorița” Nr. 7-8, An. III.; „Datina”, Martie.; „România întregită”, An. I, Nr.6, Cluj.; „Buciumul”(Gorj).; „Albina”, București.; „Revista noastră”.; „Luceafărul”, Cluj, Liceul „Gh. Bariț”, Nănești.; *Însemnări, Cronicar., Bibliografie*, G. D.; *Noutățile librăriei*; *Revistele primite*: „Miorița”, Galați; „Datina”, Turnu-Severin; „Răsăritul”, București; „Clipa”, București.

III. Conclusions

Through his activities – as a student, doctoral student, teacher, editor, editor-in-chief and author – Pimen Constantinescu had his name connected to many places in the country²³ and in Italy (Perugia and Rome, and especially in the Friuli area). His merits for the translation of Italian poetry are undeniable.

As the editor and collaborator of the publication “*Sibiul literar. Revistă de literatură și cultură generală*.” (12 issues, 1934), supplement of the newspaper “*Sibiul*,” Pimen Constantinescu reviewed “*Cronica literară*” (for example, of the “*Antologia poezilor tineri*” by Zaharia Stancu and Ion Pillat) and “*Cronica locală*”. He also draws a history of the Sibiu press (subsequently editing in the excerpts of the journal “*Sibiul literar*” *Publicațiile periodice românești ale Sibiului de azi. Schiță bibliografică*. Sibiu, 1934) and of the Astra Central Library, along with translations from the works of the Italian writers Gabriele d’Annunzio, Giosue Carducci, Giovanni Pascoli²⁴.

Literary chronicles, press reviews, bibliographical preoccupations – all these are arguments (in addition to the frequent publications the exchanges and inter-newspaper publishing activity) for constituting special collection of Romanian cultural journals and placing a strong accent on the topicality of the age, on regional colour, and finally on the complex cultural profile.

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²³ Focșani: he graduated high school and started his literary career with poems and translations in “*Universul literar*”, “*Căminul*” and “*Freemătul*”; Câmpina: a teacher of Latin; Bucharest and Galați: teacher in different colleges and author of manuals for Italian; librarian at the University of Bucharest; Brașov: assistant (then lecturer) at the Academy of Higher level Commercial and Industrial Studies, etc.

²⁴ Hangiu, I. “*Dictionarul presei literare romanesti: 1790-1990*” [Dictionary of the Romanian Literary Press: 1790-1990] (Bucharest: Publishing House of the Romanian Cultural Foundation, 1996), 442-443.

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