

THE BANAT CALENDAR PRESS IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD (1918-1938): A SOURCE OF EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AWARENESS¹

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ABSTRACT. This paper aims at providing an overview of the Banat calendar press products during the interwar period, focusing on the place and duration of the publication on one hand, and on their structural and thematic features, on the other hand. The starting point of the study is an attempt to define this functional type of text by drawing out its characteristics. The article offers an overview of the structure, content and function of the German-language calendars of Banat during the interwar period, with the intention of underlining their peculiarities. The analysis of the calendars has shown that they are a living proof of the way of thinking and acting, but also a reflection of the cultural and linguistic identity of the Banat Swabians of that time.

Key words: calendar press, German minority, Banat Swabians, cultural identity, Banat region, interwar period

1. Introduction

The interwar period in the Romanian provinces was characterized, among other things, by a “strong German minority press” (Petrinca 1940:

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12), which was a clear evidence of “the material and cultural progress that this ethnic group made in Romania” (ibid. 1940: 12). As for the press freedom, the same legal regulations were applied to both the Romanian and the German-speaking population. This fact led to an increase in the number of German publications, but also to their diversification (cf. Bican 2007: 163).

In addition to the daily newspapers, there were also weekly papers and other publications, some of them even without a regular publication date, which were very popular not only in the towns but also in the villages. They mainly served to inform the German-speaking ethnic groups, but also had the intention of promoting their own culture, religion and language. The high interest in the press, even outside the big cities, undoubtedly shows the striving for education also among the rural population.

The calendars, which were an important part of the press in the Banat region in the interwar period, enjoyed a special significance among the rural population and craftsmen. Weisenfeld (1939) believes that the calendars had the task, especially in the village, to “create a firm awareness of the community and the historical achievement of the people” (1939: 107).

This paper aims to provide an overview of the Banat press products in the interwar period, focusing, on one hand, on the place and duration of publication, and on the other hand on the structural and content-related characteristics of such products. The starting point of the study is the attempt to explain and to list the characteristics of this type of press. The article does not provide an in-depth qualitative analysis, but rather an overview of the structure, content and function of the German-language calendars in the Banat region, between 1918 and 1938, with the intention of explaining their special features. In this regard, one relevant example from each calendar was examined in order to underline its peculiarities. The analysis is based on the study of the interwar Banat calendars, available in the University Library of Cluj-Napoca.

2. Reflections on the term 'calendar'

The Duden (2002: 514) defines the calendar as a "time guide through the year, [...] a list of the days, weeks and months of a year". Calendars are a well-documented historical source, because they "reflect the time and space in which they were created". (Hameter 2005:10)

Calendars have a practical use and they consist of three parts, the *calendarium*, the reading and the advertising part. Regarding the *calendarium* part, Hemeter thinks that "Calendars connect the future with the cyclical return of certain events, for example the re-entry of a certain constellation of stars after one year. [...] Especially holidays and feast days, church as well as state celebrations, were noted in this part". (2005: 7-8). The reading section "publishes not only texts such as rules, admonitions and advice, but also lyrical forms such as sayings, poems, as well as texts with a dialogical-dramatic structure" (Klingenbock 2005: 232). Furthermore, the author emphasizes the representation form variety that can be found in the calendar. "The (popular) calendar gathers [...] different kinds of texts, such as poems, sayings, anecdotes, historical reports, fictional stories, rules, instructions, pictures etc." (ibid: 233).

The advertising section is of varying length and does not have the same importance in all calendars. In some of them, the ads appear at the end, in others, between the texts in the reading part and there are also a few calendars without ads.

The calendars enjoyed a wide circle of addressees: "not only reading peasants, servants, workers, but also poor and wealthy citizens". (Weiss 2005: 164)

3. The calendar's structure and target group

The core structure of the calendars examined is almost always the same and consists of an introductory calendar section, called the *calendarium*, a longer reading section and, with few exceptions, an

advertising section. In addition to the calendrical and astronomical data, the *calendarium* contains the so-called weather and farmers` rules, for almost every field of activity of the reader. The farmers` rules are "rules in short, pictorial sentences and [...] they tell the farmer what work is more suitable in a certain period" (Horn 1984: 135). The weather rules "are based on the power of observation of ordinary people and contain the linguistic formulation of a centuries-old experience" (ibid: 135-136).

A further classification possibility focuses on the readership. There are calendars that address the rural population, which is also indicated by the range of themes, and there are also calendars that aim at reaching readers from the cities, to the same extent. In this case, an extension and a diversification of the thematic offer can be noticed. The specialized reports on agricultural topics alternate with texts dealing with science, history or language. In the farmer-oriented calendars, the emphasis is placed on agricultural topics. It is impressive to see how wide the range of topics is and how well the texts are documented and argued.

4. Banat

These folk and city calendars are an important part of the interwar press history. Nowadays, they are an important proof of the achievements, the spiritual life, the way of thinking and acting of the German minority in the Banat region in those years. For the readers of that epoch, they were a source of information, but also a provider of culture and knowledge.

As for the development of the Banat German press, the well documented work by Alexander Krischan (1987)³, among others, offers a chronological overview of the last two centuries. Besides listing the daily

³ Krischan Alexander (1987): *Deutsche periodische Literatur des Banats. Zeitungen-Zeitschriften-Kalender 1771-1971*, München: Verlag der Südostdeutschen Kulturwerkes.

and weekly publications, the author also mentions the calendars printed in Banat (1987:60-66), which, however, have only been marginally researched. Paul Seulean (2008) also examines the press of the interwar period in Cluj-Napoca, Sibiu and Timisoara and features a classification of the publications, based on the following criteria: place of publication, year of publication, periodicity, editor and profile of the publication. (Seulean 2008: 72-93).

The Banat interwar calendar system contains publications that were mainly published in Timisoara (18 calendars), but towns like Lugoj (2 calendars), Periam (4 calendars), Jimbolia (1 calendar), Lovrin (1 calendar), Biserica Alba (2 calendars) and the city of Arad (2 calendars) also had their own calendars. In terms of the calendar publishing duration, some existed for decades, such as the *Illustrated Country Courier Calendar* published in Lugoj, which appeared between 1874 and 1941, while others, such as the *German Folk Calendar*, in Periam, had only a one-year appearance.

The analysis of these calendars is based on a thematic classification. One category includes calendars with a religious focus, such as *The Marian Calendar for the Promotion of Christian Life*. Other calendars are dedicated to the working class, such as *The Workers` Calendar*, published by the Banat Socialist Party. There are also calendars that target the farmers: *The Banat Farmer Calendar - An Illustrated Yearbook for Everyone*.

An important category are the calendars addressing not only a specific target audience, but also a wide-range of readers: these are various folk and house calendars for the urban and rural population, illustrated family calendars (Timisoara) or mainly literary calendars, such as *The Narrator* (Periam), in the pages of which, a multitude of stories, poems and sayings can be found.

The *Marian Calendar for the Promotion of Christian Life* (Marien-Kalender zur Förderung des christlichen Lebens) was edited by Dr. Retú and published by the "Der Landbote" (the Country Messenger) publishing house. The calendar was printed between 1911 and 1941 in Timisoara. On the cover page, you can see the picture of the Holy Mary. In the first part, the *calendarium*, public holidays, the four seasons

and the eclipses are listed. Each month appears on a page and at the end of this representation the commodity markets are listed. The already known farmer rules also find their place in this calendar, but the particularity of this type of calendar are the rhymes, sayings, wisdoms and prayers. "If it rains on Good Friday, the whole year is blessed" (1923: 7), "December is mild, the whole winter is a child" (1923: 14). On page 18, the main prayer of the calendar appears: "Love God your Lord above all things; love your neighbor as you love yourself".

The reading part of the calendar provides texts that refer to God and to the Christian values. These texts have an instructive, educational component and a profound moral: "How can one become happy?" (1923: 27), "In our soul, there is God, there is love and there is peace!" These texts focus on the virtues of Christianity and the importance of the love of God. The reading section also includes texts that are brought together under the headline "Useful Information". Here, very useful house, family and economy advice is given: "What is the influence of indoor plants on air quality?" (1923: 48), "How much interest does your money bear?" (1923: 69).

Although it is a Christian calendar, it also contains jokes, anecdotes and informative texts. These last ones are not only about the biblical chronology, the history of the Church, but also about other important events of political and historical relevance. (1923: 66-69). Topic-specific essays, excerpts from the church preaching and instructive Christian texts about God and the church are also described in the publication. The main intention of this calendar becomes the attempt to bring the Sacred Scripture and the Church closer to the mere believer.

The *Workers` Calendar* (Arbeiter-Kalender) was published between 1920 and 1948 by the Banat Socialist Party in the Csendes brothers` printing house in Timisoara. On average, such a calendar consisted of 102 text pages, while the advertising section was at the end. The official holidays in Great Romania appear in the calendar and, on each page, the months are listed, while the saints who are celebrated on a particular day appear next to that day. In addition, historical events

are mentioned and important information from the lives of various personalities is also presented. This historical thematic core can also be found in the reading section. Many pages (1924: 29-44) are dedicated to the historical situation at home and abroad and the focus is placed on the role and significance of the working - class society throughout Europe. In this context, several reports are also included, focusing mainly on the workers and their occupations: "The Workers` Home in Resita" (1924: 79-83) or "In Memory of the Workers` Sports in Timisoara" (1924: 89-93).

Socialism and party movements are always praised and glorified: "socialism is the principle of justice in the midst of injustice exacerbated by war". (1924: 59). We can notice, in the reading sections, several statements made by Fichte, Kant and Marx, which are in harmony with the publication`s orientation.

The calendar ends with a list of important addresses in Timisoara and with data about the annual fair and the post office. The last pages contain advertisements on various topics.

The *Banat Farmer Calendar* (Banater Bauern-Kalender) (1922-1941), bearing the subtitle *Illustrated Yearbook for Everyone*, had an average of 80 text pages and an advertising section. The calendar is described as a "particularly well-meaning, entertaining house friend and advisor" and, according to the message on its cover page, it is dedicated to "the farmer, the merchant, the tradesman and the bourgeois house". The publisher of the calendar was Peter Hollinger and it was edited by the "Der Landbote" book publishing house. The *calendarium* follows the usual structure: the listing of saints and holidays, but it also mentions the already known farmers` rules.

The reading section contains general interest texts, which can be dedicated to a wide readership: for example, the "Useful Information" section (as in the Marian calendar), but also texts debating political topics: "The foundation of the local council in Saint Nikolaus" (1923: 40), "The Banat-Swabians during the election campaign" (1923: 45) and also

humorous content in form of anecdotes, jokes and funny short texts (1923: 34-39; 1923: 64-65). The reading section ends with finance and postal rate information.

The *German People`s and House Calendar* (Deutscher Volks- und Hauskalender) (1935-1939) had 190 pages and was published by the Temeswarer newspaper (Temeswarer Zeitung). The calendar looks like a book with a cardboard cover page. The *calendarium* presents the four astronomical seasons, but also the eclipses, weather forecasts, celestial phenomena and holidays. Most of the pages are dedicated to the reading part and contain a lot of reading material.

The emphasis of the whole calendar is on the recipient's education. There are many reports "Mary Queen of Romania" (1938: 50), novellas "The Midnight Dream" (1938: 72), "The Farm Doctor" (1938: 77), stories "The Return of the Prodigal Son" (1938: 61-63), "The White Elephant" (1938: 65), but also poems and anecdotes. The calendar has no limited target groups, it addresses all those who enjoy reading. The last 40 pages of the calendar are published under the title "All Sorts of Useful Information" (1938: 151-190) and contain information on postal rates, passport documents, various guides and details on the annual fairs.

The *Illustrated Sunday Calendar* (Illustrierter Sonntagskalender) (1937-1939) for the common year 1937 consisted of 108 pages and was also edited by the publishing house of the Temeswarer newspaper. The calendar is intended for entertainment and, compared to other calendars, the texts in the reading section are accompanied by pictures (a fact which is also reflected in the title).

The reading section contains extensive fictional and informative, educative texts on various topics, which address a wide-range of reading public. In some texts, the author is identified by name, while other texts are anonymous. These texts are poems, stories "Shall man be honest - a small family history" (1937: 47-52), scientific reports "German as a world language" (written by Dr. Franz Thierfelder, General Secretary of the German Academy in Berlin, 1937: 61), historical texts "75 wars in the last 60 years" (1937: 68) and informative texts

"The progress of technology in pictures" (1937: 70). Most of the texts are accompanied by pictures that clarify and illustrate their content. Like most calendars, this one also ends with the section "Worth knowing", which contains information about fairs, postal system and home nursing.

The *Illustrated Family Calendar* (Illustrierter Familien Kalender) (1923-1928), for the common year 1924, was published by the Timisoara Social Missionary Society in the printing house of the Csendes brothers. A very interesting fact is that in the *calendarium* all the months of the year are listed under a specific designation: the composite has, as a defining word, a term that illustrates the major event, the dominant activity or a peculiarity related to the month concerned (January = ice month, April = Easter month, July = harvest month, October = wine month, December = Christmas month).

As for the *Illustrated Sunday Calendar*, a variety of picture-accompanied texts are published, which address a wide-range of reading public. Some texts offer advice for a healthy life "Preventing various plant diseases" (1924: 27-29), for the housewives (1924: 32-33) and for education "Children Nervousness" (1924: 42-43), "What to do until the doctor arrives" (1924: 58-59), but also reports on historical and cultural topics "The world events of the past year" (1924: 51-54), "The two hundredth anniversary of the Swabians in Banat" (1924: 47-50). The calendar provides, in its last pages, information on postal tariffs, fairs and court agenda, while at the end there is an advertising section, which includes commercials for various products and services.

The *Swabian house friend and folk calendar* (Der Schwäbische Hausfreund und Volkskalender) (1912-1939) subtitled *A Folk Reading Book*, was founded by Adam Müller Guttenbrunn and was printed in the printing house of the Csendes brothers. The calendar was printed in A5 format and had about 125 pages. Guttenbrunn believed that this calendar was the first to have the "German spirit" in its pages.

The *calendarium* is structured in the same way as in the other calendars: the reader is given detailed information about the national holidays, the four astronomical seasons, the days on which certain saints are celebrated and the weather rules. Compared to other calendars,

the reading part of this one is divided and structured in thematic sections. Several pages are dedicated to topics such as cultural identity "From the village life of the Germans in Banat" (1926: 35-52), health "Things worth knowing about the prevention and cure of tuberculosis" (1926: 82-86), "The family doctor" (1926: 90-91), history "The ruling family of Great Romania" (1926: 87-89) and books "Recommended German and German-Banat books" (1926: 107-109). It is worth noting that the articles are high quality and complex, in terms of both language and content. It is also interesting to note the advertising section of the calendar, in which not only commercial content is presented, but there is also a space dedicated to the notes taken by the reader.

The *Swabian Courier Calendar* (Schwäbischer Volksbote Kalender) (1923-1928), for the year 1928, consisted of about 95 pages and was published in Timisoara for the "dear rural people and subscribers" of the "Der Landbote" publication. Its editor was Peter Loris. Besides the information about the holidays, the astronomical seasons and the saints, the particularity of the calendar consists of a detailed listing of weather and farmers' rules "If there is a lot of sunshine in August, it certainly brings us good wine". (1928: 19). The reading section is very extensive and provides informative texts, such as reports on historical and scientific topics "The July Revolution in 1927" (1928: 37-38) or "How big is the universe?" (1928: 45-48). Most of the articles' main concern, however, is the preservation of the Germans' cultural identity in the Banat region. On the one hand, this is achieved by dialect-written texts, e.g. excerpts from literary texts and also jokes and anecdotes (1928: 73-75), but also by texts focusing on the minority's activities "Banat Swabian Youth in the German Saxony" (1928: 57-60). A peculiarity of the calendar also arises from the extremely high level of concern for the reader. The proof is the good health advice "Weight gain in infants" (1928: 63-64), "Preservation of milk" (1928: 84-85) or "How does digestion take place?" (1928: 85-86). With the target group in mind, the calendar offers a working calendar for the farmer, divided into months and with note-dedicated space. The analysis of the featured texts shows that the main purpose of this calendar is its practical use. The

explanatory and instructive texts contain useful and easily understandable and applicable information for the household, the economy and the whole family of the readers.

The *Narrator* is a cultural calendar that appeared in Periam between 1925 and 1928, it consisted of 100 pages and was edited and published by Alois Pirkmayer. The calendar is an invitation to reading and it provides a variety of thematic selections for different target groups. From the *calendarium*, the reader learns about the celestial phenomena, about the holidays and, of course, about the farmer rules "June dry more than wet, fill the barrel with good wine". (1927: 8). The reading section provides a multitude of text types: poems, sayings, jokes, stories "Of the cruel punishments in earlier times" (1927: 18-21), parables, extensive stories with and without author "The Flower of Horta" (by Reinhold Ortman, 1928: 35-60), "A successful cure" (by Josef Wichner, 1928: 50-54), literature for children "Max and Moritz" (1928: 73-75), sketches "The Corporal from Leuthen" (by Gerhard von Gottburg, 1928: 75-78), anecdotes "The Walker across the bear cage", folk songs (1927: 48-50), but also texts referring to the traditions of the Germans in Banat "A Swabian wedding in Banat" (1927: 58-61).

The calendar also proves its intercultural orientation and publishes texts about the customs, festivals and traditions of other European countries under the title "Colorful things from all around" (1928: 92-97). These texts are intended not only to educate readers, but they also aim at broadening their perspectives and way of thinking by providing topics about local as well as foreign cultures.

The *German Folk Calendar* (Deutscher Volkskalender) was edited by Alois Pirkmayer, published in Periam and had only a single edition, dating from 1924. In the *calendarium*, the list of saints and holidays appears, but also the well-known farmer's rules "New Year's night silent and clear points to a good year" (1924: 2). The reading part of the calendar contains, as usual, stories "An Incredible Race" (1924: 60), anecdotes, jokes, but also, as a novelty, house sayings "My God, I beg you, come to me, my house is always open to you" (1924: 53). The calendar is characterized by a large number of texts with medical content. The readers' care and health play an important role for the

publishers of the calendar. Some examples are “The Pulse Rate of Humans and Animals” (1924: 35-36) or “How to Take Care of the Intestine” (1924: 63). Lastly, information on the fairs is listed and advertisements for various products and services are published.

The *Homeland Courier Calendar for City and Countryside* (Heimat Bote Kalender für Stadt und Land) (Arad) edited between 1937 and 1940 and the *Folk Courier Calendar for City and Countryside* (Volksbote Kalender für Stadt und Land) edited between 1934 and 1940 were published for a relatively short time in Arad. They were released in an A5 format, they contained about 90 pages and were printed by the Phönix publishing house. The target group of the two calendars was, as already mentioned in the title, both the urban and the rural population.

The *calendarium* is built up according to the structure already known from the other calendars, with a longer listing of the weather data and conditions, holidays and, of course, the farmers` and weather rules. The reading part has two major orientations: on one hand, there are texts addressing a wide readership and belonging mainly to the fictional genre, which includes stories, poems and novellas; on the other hand, the two calendars show the great concern of the editors to illustrate, to promote and to preserve the cultural identity of the province. In this sense, there are texts published, which feature the Swabian community`s festivals, the German culture of the region, the personalities of the German minority in Banat, the Swabian traditional costumes and the church consecration festivals. In addition, there are also texts, poems and songs published in the dialect. As for the advertising section, it is of marginal importance for these two calendars from Arad.

5. Conclusions

The analyzed calendars had thematic focuses such as the health, the teaching or the education of the readership. The informative intention of many of the texts is obvious since they featured the historical, the geographical and the scientific topics in the form of well-structured and argued reports. Generally, the texts should encourage the pleasure

of reading and, in this sense, not only the calendars that had this task as their main desideratum should be mentioned, but also other calendars, which also invited the audience to read by offering text types such as stories, parables, sketches, anecdotes and jokes.

Another special feature is the attempt to approach the readership by addressing its areas of interest. This already happens in the *calendarium*, with the listing of the farmers` and the weather rules, which are to be understood as a guide through the everyday life and through the main occupations of the people.

The attention given in the reading section to the house and the household is very clear in texts that deal with the care and health of family members and of the animals and plants living in the surroundings of the reader. Advice and medical recommendations are listed, explained and illustrated with examples or even pictures in dialect or standard German.

From the pages of the calendars also emerges the attempt to maintain the cultural and linguistic identity of the Banat Germans. In this sense, literary texts, sayings and folk songs are published in dialect, but there are also reports that inform about the occupations, activities and ways of organization of the German minority in the Banat communities.

In short, the analysis has revealed the rural and traditional, but also the urban way of life in those years. Furthermore, these press products are "a mouthpiece of the national concerns" (Şeulean 2008: 62) of the German minority, a great guardian of the values and beliefs of this minority, but above all they represent a "monument to the linguistic creative power" (Horn 1984: 148) of this ethnic group.

For the readers, back in those years, the calendars were a guide, a means of education and cultural awareness, for us today they are a testimony of the occupations, the intellectual life, the philosophy and the way of thinking and acting of the German minority in Banat during the interwar period. Nevertheless, the calendars reflect the unique cultural imprint of the time.

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