

Making the Man of Law in Dualist Hungary: Alexa David's Career Strategies and Personal Networks on the Eve of the Twentieth Century*

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Abstract: *Making the Man of Law in Dualist Hungary: Alexa David's Career Strategies and Personal Networks on the Eve of the Twentieth Century.* The present study focuses on the educational and professional pathway of Alexa David, one of the law graduates hailing from the land of Năsăud/Naszód, in the final decade of the nineteenth and the first part of the twentieth century. David's experiences exemplify one of the area's nation-building strategies aimed at establishing a body of individuals trained in law, who could defend the interests of the Romanian nation in Hungarian courts, and contribute to its betterment in all domains. At the same time, because of his kinship ties to the uppermost political echelon in Dualist Hungary, through his uncle Ion Ciocan, a parliamentary representative in Budapest, the Romanian man of law saw himself in a privileged financial position, and was introduced into a wide-ranging network spanning many counties and social-professional levels. He made use of this network in his personal efforts of advancement, and then gave back when he had managed to establish himself as part of the administrative system of the Hungarian, and later on, Romanian state.

Keywords: Austria-Hungary, Transylvania, law students, legal professionals, nineteenth century, marriage strategies

Rezumat: *Formarea juristului în Ungaria Dualistă: Strategiile de carieră și rețelele personale ale lui Alexa David la începutul secolului al XX-lea.* Studiul de față se concentrează asupra traseului educațional și profesional al lui Alexa David, unul dintre absolvenții de drept din ținutul Năsăudului, în ultima decadă a secolului al XIX-lea și începutul secolului XX. Experiențele lui David exemplifică una dintre strategiile de construcție națională utilizate în regiune, care ținea constituirea unui corp de indivizi educați în domeniul juridic, care puteau să apere interesele națiunii române în tribunalele maghiare, și care să contribuie la dezvoltarea sa în toate domeniile. În același timp, datorită legăturilor de rudenie cu cel mai înalt eșalon politic al Ungariei Dualiste, prin

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unchiul său Ion Ciocan, deputat în Parlamentul de la Budapesta, tânărul jurist s-a văzut plasat într-o poziție privilegiată din punct de vedere financiar, fiind de asemenea introdus într-o rețea vastă, întinsă pe multiple comitate, și cuprinzând indivizi din diferite categorii sociale și profesionale. A reușit să se folosească de această rețea în eforturile sale de avansare, returnând ajutorul primit după ce a reușit să se erijeze ca parte a sistemului administrative al statului maghiar, și apoi al celui român.

Cuvinte-cheie: Austro-Ungaria, Transilvania, studenți la drept, juriști, secolul XIX, strategii matrimoniale

On August 6th 1892, in his application for one of the scholarships offered yearly by the Administrative Commission of School Funds in Năsăud (Hu. Naszód), Alexa David expressed his wish to receive a stipend of 300 Gulden in order to “study [at] the medical faculty – or perhaps at the law faculty – of the University of Cluj.”¹ His application would be approved in the meeting of the Administrative Commission of August 20th 1892, though in a procedurally uncharacteristic manner. In pursuing the goal of fashioning a Romanian elite in the area of the former military border regiment of Năsăud,² the Administrative Commission was guided by local social-professional and national necessities. The need to establish a local legal elite, which had already been voiced by the Greek Catholic vicar Macedon Pop around the mid-nineteenth century,³ would remain a constant factor in the policy governing the granting of scholarships to young Romanians who descended from a former border guard family and wished to pursue a higher education. Very often, although young applicants expressed an affinity or interest in several fields of study, and law was sometimes among the least favoured, the Administrative Commission conditioned the granting of a scholarship with the compulsory study of law. If one takes into consideration the costs involved by a higher education, as well as the limited resources of applicants’ families, the mandatory study of law appears as a justified compromise.⁴

¹ Bistrița-Năsăud County Branch of the National Archives (hereafter SJANBN), Fund *Administrația Fondurilor Grănicerești Năsăud* (hereafter AFGN), folder 1493, f. 1.

² Lazăr Ureche, *Fondurile grănicerești năsăudene: 1851-1918* [The Border Guards Funds from Năsăud] (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2001), pp. 68-83.

³ “Monarchia austriacă” [The Austrian Monarchy], *Gazeta Transilvaniei*, Brașov, XIV/20, 8 March 1851, p. 91.

⁴ Ovidiu Emil Iudean, “Elite strategies of minority nation-building in dualist Hungary. Law graduates supported by the Năsăud Border Regiment scholarship funds,” *Banatica*, 27 (2017), pp. 517-533.

In Alexa David's case, the Commission would prove to be much more permissive, leaving the choice of field to the scholarship recipient. Most likely, the fact that the young student was the nephew of Ion Ciocan (a sister's son), the principal of the Romanian Gymnasium in Năsăud and a former president of the Commission,⁵ likely played a significant part in the Commission's attitude towards Alexa David. Nevertheless, the young protégé's choice would be agreeable to the Commission, as he embarked upon the study of law. His entire activity would be heavily influenced by this choice, as David would consequently guide his professional activity by the principles he revealed in an early letter to his uncle, when he began working as a lawyer: "[...] the social element nearest to me will be the people. So long as my powers allow me, I will therefore strive and work toward covering their needs with honest efforts".⁶

David would enjoy the opportunity to demonstrate his professional skills both as a lawyer, when he defended various co-nationals in numerous trials, and as a royal judge (Hu. királyi járásbírák),

⁵ Ion Ciocan (1850-1915) was likely the most significant political figure of the land of Năsăud at the end of 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. He was part of the first generation to graduate from the Romanian Higher Gymnasium of Năsăud, where he finished his studies "eminently" in 1871. He pursued studies in theology and philosophy in Vienna, Graz, and Budapest. He taught at the Gymnasium and then became its headmaster for almost two decades, and during his tenure the institution's main building was constructed. He headed the Năsăud Border Guard Funds, one of the region's most important institutional frameworks. In 1886 he won his first parliamentary mandate, running on the lists of the Hungarian Liberal Party, which was governing at the time. The network of close relations he established with various Hungarian authorities, both at county and at central levels, imbued him with a high degree of influence in regional decision-making. This was also evidenced by his lengthy political career, spanning almost two decades, with a brief pause in 1901-1903, a career during which he represented as parliamentary deputy the constituency of Năsăud. His rich correspondence reveals the essential role Ciocan played in resolving the matters brought to him by the inhabitants of Năsăud. He distinguished himself through his intervention activity in the service of the inhabitants of Năsăud, regardless of ethnicity, mediating between the people and the central or county authorities. From 1898 he became a professor at the department for Romanian language and literature at the Budapest University, heading it until 1908. He died on the 6th of September 1915, but not before solving many of the problems faced by his co-nationals throughout Transylvania as a result of the onset of the First World War. For a detailed biographical sketch, see Gavrilă Tomi, "Ion Ciocan - La 90 de ani de la trecerea sa în neființă," [Ion Ciocan - 90 Years after his Passing], *Arhiva Someșană*, 4 (2005), pp. 285-291.

⁶ SJANBN, *Alexa David* personal collection, folder 185, f. 1.

during the First World War. His career pathway was most likely not exceptional for the time, but rather similar to those of other thousands of Romanians in Dualist Hungary who embarked on the study of law and later on worked in various fields where such training was required or advantageous. Nevertheless, there are few works in Romanian historiography dedicated to the study of the educational and professional pathways followed by these Romanian jurists,⁷ even though they comprised a considerable segment of the Romanian elite in Dualist Hungary. Precisely for this reason and owing to the existence of a rich and revealing archival material, we decided to draft a biographical sketch of Alexa David, focusing on the stages of the legal educational pathway upon which he embarked, the career strategies he embraced, and the personal ties he established, as one of many Romanian law graduates in Transleithania on the eve of the twentieth century.

Family Background

Between 1761 and 1851, the village of Mocod (Hu. Szamosmakód) was a part of the second Romanian border guard regiment of Năsăud, 12th company. After the military border was dissolved in 1851, and the Romanian District of Năsăud was established, the village became part of this new administrative unit. Following the 1876 union between the Saxon district of Bistrița and its Romanian counterpart of Năsăud, Mocod would be integrated into the Bistrița-Năsăud County.⁸

⁷ With the exception of a few monographic works such as Vasile Petrica, *Teologul și juristul Dr. Moise Ienciu (1881-1953) – o viață uitată într-o arhivă* [The Theologian and Jurist Dr. Moise Ienciu (1881-1953) - a forgotten life in an archive] (Caransebeș: Editura Episcopiei Caransebeșului, 2003), or various dictionaries such as that dedicated to this group's participation at the Great Assembly of Alba Iulia on the 1st of December 1918, Lazăr Gruneanțu, Mirel Ionescu, *Contribuția avocaților din Transilvania și Banat la Mare Unire* [The Contribution of Lawyers from Transylvania and Banat to the Great Union] (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2018), Romanian historiography has generally passed over this elite segment. A cursory analysis of the cultural and national activity of the Romanian jurists can be found in Ioan Bolovan, Dorel Moțiu, "Contribuții la cunoșterea activității cultural-naționale a avocaților și funcționarilor români în cadrul Asociației naționale din Arad (1863-1870)," [Contributions to the Knowledge on Romanian Lawyers and Clerks's National Cultural Activity within the Arad National Association (1863-1870)], *Crisia*, 17 (1987), pp. 31-38.

⁸ Nestor Șimon, *Schițe monografice ale localităților din fostul Regiment II românesc de graniță de la Năsăud* [Monographic Sketches of the Settlements of the Former Romanian 2nd Border Guard Regiment from Năsăud], eds. Adrian Onofreiu, Mircea Prahase, Claudia Septimia Sabău (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2014), pp. 65-66, 68, 132-137.

Alexa David would be born in Mocod on March 25th, 1870, as a descendant of an old border guard family, of Greek Catholic confession. His father, George David, who stemmed from a peasant background, would not advance on the social ladder, but rather retain his parents' status.⁹ Pelagia, his mother, was the daughter of Andrei Ciocan, a wealthy peasant from Mocod, who also served as the parish cantor and teacher at the confessional school. Pelagia's younger brother was Ion Ciocan, the future political leader from Năsăud.¹⁰

The young Alexa would remain an orphan at a young age, as George David passed away in 1875, leaving his son's education to the care of his mother and her relatives. He would pursue a primary and secondary education at the Romanian Gymnasium of Năsăud. In 1889, prior to the completion of his secondary studies, Alexa David would also lose his mother. In the summer of 1892, he would nevertheless manage to pass his maturity examination (baccalaureate) with the highest qualification.¹¹

Educational Background

Lacking in financial resources, an orphan of both parents, but eager to continue his education, Alexa David shared in the fate of many young men in late nineteenth-century Hungary, seeing himself compelled to seek out other avenues of financing his university studies. As a great many other descendants of former border guard families, he enjoyed the opportunity of applying for one of the scholarships offered by the Năsăud Border Guard Funds. However, unlike his peers, he also enjoyed the support and guidance of Ion Ciocan, his uncle, who had already established himself as one of the most influential figures in the area by the early 1890s.

Despite his privileged ties, Alexa David's scholarship application for the financing of university studies did not lack any of the typical documentation for this kind of endeavour. It contained a certification of his descent from a former border guard family, an extract of his baptismal record from the local parish priest, a medical certificate, his maturity examination, as well as a document provided by the local authorities of Mocod, attesting to his exemplary moral behaviour and his material standing. Although many of these documents were drafted with the

⁹ SJANBN, Fund AFGN, folder 1493, f. 4-5.

¹⁰ SJANBN, *Ion Ciocan* personal collection, folder 78, f. 25.

¹¹ SJANBN, Fund AFGN, folder 1493, f. 7-9 and *Alexa David* personal collection, folder 3, f. 1-4.

purpose of aiding the young applicant in his pursuit of a scholarship, despite their teleological quality, they manage to convey a detailed and nuanced image of Alexa David's accomplishments. In August 1892, the applicant had already reached 21 years of age, was in good health, and had graduated from the gymnasium with distinction. He had managed the feat of earning the highest mark ("eminent") not only for his maturity examination, but also throughout his secondary education, regardless of discipline: he excelled both in humanistic disciplines (classical languages, Romanian, German, Hungarian, etc.) and in the study of sciences (mathematics, physics, etc.). What is more, as the certificates issued by the local lay and parish authorities indicate, he had distinguished himself through his morality and good behaviour, as an upstanding member of local society. The entirety of the land he had inherited from his parents was under the administration of his maternal uncle, and therefore, the young applicant was justified in stating that he "had no wealth" in his request for a scholarship. Although at first glance, his material situation appears to have been precarious, we learn from his correspondence with his uncle that Alexa David was constantly supported in his endeavours by Ion Ciocan, who provided his nephew with monthly sums of money, which could reach the amount of 160 Gulden.

As has been noted, David had petitioned the Commission in charge of granting scholarships for a stipend that would allow him to study in one of two fields: medicine or law. This stipend, amounting to 300 Gulden, was granted to the applicant for the university year 1892/93. David's choice was to pursue law studies at the University of Cluj (Hu. Kolozsvár). His personal file as scholarship recipient suggests that he attended the courses of the law faculty successfully, for the entirety of the school year. On the basis of the documents issued by the University of Cluj certifying his attendance and good track record, Alexa David petitioned the Administrative Commission again on the 25th of June 1893, asking that his scholarship be renewed for the coming school year of 1893/94. Shortly afterwards, on the 20th of August 1893, the Commission would approve his renewed application.¹²

The annual stipend of 300 Gulden, to which were added the sums he received monthly from his uncle, enabled the young law student to transfer to the more prestigious university of Budapest. Student life in the Transleithanian capital opened up a myriad of opportunities, especially from an academic standpoint: David could attend the lectures of the most renowned law professors in the

¹² SJANBN, Fund AFGN, folder 1493, f. 10-16.

Hungarian part of the Dual Monarchy, and had access to extensive specialty works, which could not be found in other university libraries. However, a considerable material effort was required to finance one's stay in Budapest.

Ion Ciocan received periodic updates from his nephew regarding his educational progress, in which the student also detailed his material situation, emphasizing the challenges faced by this educational category in the Hungarian capital. Alexa David found himself in a very privileged circumstance, rarely shared by Romanian students from the Dual Monarchy, which allowed him to prioritise his comfort and his study environment over his financial resources. This was visible in his choice of accommodation,¹³ as the young student elected to rent a room in a family home, where all of his needs were catered to, although the costs of such an abode were higher than average. Certainly, David knew how to argue in favour of his choices so as to persuade his uncle of their pragmatism, emphasising their beneficial effects on his education, and consequently on his future career in the field of law:

“Having previously written to you regarding the quarters (Ro. cartelul) that I have rented with all its provisions, I failed to mention how much I was paying, as I find it too expensive. However, I took this step in the hope that, by raising my budget with 5 Gulden more than what I would have paid, should I have accommodated myself in a different home, I will be repaid through the convenience I thusly enjoy; moreover, I have prospects to improve my knowledge of the language. I pay 46 fl.¹⁴ each month, a sum for which I receive every provision, except for washing, which will cost me up to 2 fl. 50 cr. monthly, and so it would be 48 fl. 50 cr.”¹⁵

Therefore, beyond personal comfort, the opportunity to improve his knowledge of the Hungarian language by conversing with his hosts

¹³ The search for quarters was, most often, the first step young students had to take once they arrived in Budapest. For a more detailed account of similar experiences of Romanian students see Cornel Sigmirean, “La belle époque: studenți români din Transilvania la universitățile europene,” [La Belle Époque: Romanian Students from Transylvania at European Universities] in *Viața cotidiană în Sibiu secolelor XIX-XX* [Everyday life in 19th -20th century Sibiu], eds. Mihaela Grancea, Ioan Popa (Sibiu: Astra Museum, 2015), pp. 55-60.

¹⁴ “Fl.” stood for Hungarian florins, or Gulden, at the time. We have elected to use the form “Gulden” throughout the text, but maintained the shortened “Fl.” where it appeared in original passages from letters. “Cr.”, when it followed “Fl.”, denoted Kreuzer, a sub-unit of the Gulden.

¹⁵ SJANBN, *Ion Ciocan* personal collection, folder 208, f. 448.

and fellow tenants also weighed heavily in this arrangement, warranting the extra financial efforts:

“I will be living alone in a single room (Ro. *chilie*), therefore I think I will also have convenience for my studies. [...] we are some 6 persons in that place, of whom many are young people; graduated, but young; there is a d[octo]r. in medicine, a professor, an engineer, two other university students, with whom I think I will be able to converse during my hours of leisure, and thus to fully become acquainted with the language.”¹⁶ The need to overcome linguistic lacunae, which Alexa David seems to have felt dearly, might seem odd given the law student’s prior educational track record, and especially his “eminent” qualification in the Hungarian language courses at the *Gymnasium*. It should however be mentioned that one would have had little chance to practice Hungarian in daily conversation in the Land of *Năsăud*, an area predominantly inhabited by Romanians. Additionally, as a law student, David would have encountered an increasing number of specialty terms, which he likely would not have met with during his secondary studies. In fact, many Romanians hailing from the same region and studying in Budapest encountered similar challenges, as Alexa David’s wide-ranging correspondence attests to.

Part of the funds received by David were meant to purchase specialty works of law. Although the price of such volumes was quite high, especially if one opted to buy newer editions, rather than those supplied in antique shops, the young student again found persuasive arguments in favour of this more expensive choice: “[...] I bought myself a copy of commercial law with 7 fl. 20 cr. I could have procured an older edition, but on the occasion of a public examination, I saw that on account of only one question, not contained in the older edition, a student was failed.”¹⁷ What is more, once he had reached Budapest, he also joined the local Romanian students’ society “*Petru Maior*”,¹⁸ for which the membership fee amounted to 3 Gulden.

Given that most of the university year coincided with the cold seasons, one also needed to purchase adequate clothing in order to brave the gales on the Danube. Buying cold-weather clothing required a significant financial effort even for a student the likes of Alexa David: “[...]”

¹⁶ SJANBN, *Ion Ciocan* personal collection, folder 208, f. 454.

¹⁷ SJANBN, *Ion Ciocan* personal collection, folder 208, f. 448 v.

¹⁸ On the society see Eugenia Glodariu, *Asociațiile culturale ale tineretului studios român din Monarhia Habsburgică: 1860-1918* [Cultural Associations of the Romanian Student Youth in the Habsburg Monarchy: 1860-1918] (Cluj-Napoca: Muzeul Național de Istorie a Transilvaniei, 1998), pp. 51-64.

from the remaining 62 fl. I purchased a change of winter clothes; however, I picked a good fabric so that I could be ensured for at least 2 years. I am in dire need of a winter overcoat. My shoes, I think, will hold.”¹⁹ The high costs of items, as well as his preference for higher-quality fabric, persuaded him to lease the purchase of a good winter overcoat, which “would last some 4 to 5 years”, at a total cost of 45-50 fl. Owing to this investment, David saw himself compelled to write his uncle to ask that his monthly allowance be “supplemented”, especially seeing as he had also unexpectedly needed to buy a pair of shoes as well: “I am lacking a hat, which I cannot buy from the sum I have received this month. [...] when I received 70 fl. I paid for my shoes, as I had nothing to walk with; I am still making regular payments towards my winter overcoat.”²⁰ Despite spending some not inconsiderable sums on clothing items, Alexa David would write to Ion Ciocan that he did not “[...] seek luxury in apparel”, but rather that he “would procure some juridical tomes.”²¹

What is clear is that Alexa David made the most out of the facilities he was privileged enough to enjoy and wholly devoted himself to his studies. According to the certificates issued by the University of Budapest, during the course of the first semester of 1893/94, the student attended a wide variety of courses: public Hungarian law (Hu. magyar közjog), theory of law (Hu. jogbölcészlet), private Hungarian law (Hu. magyar magánjog), national economy (Hu. nemzetgazdaságtan), ethics (Hu. az ethika), and finally Hungarian bankruptcy law (Hu. magyar csődtörvény). He had the opportunity of learning from the best Hungarian specialists in the field, among which we note Ágost Lechner, Ágost Pulszky, Benő Zsögöd, Imre Pauer, and Mihály Herczegh. During his second semester, he continued to hear lectures in public and private Hungarian law, the theory of law, national economy, while also adding to his schedule classes in financial law (Hu. pénzügytan), concerning the executive powers in Hungarian public law (Hu. a végrehajtó hatalomról a magyar közjog szerint), political economy (Hu. közgazdasági politika) and even in medical jurisprudence (Hu. törvényszéki orvostan). He could therefore expand his knowledge of law and his acquaintance with late nineteenth-century Hungarian law specialists with such names as Vilmos Mariska, Mihály Goszthony, Béla Földes, Gyula Pikler, Zoltán Ráth or the physician Lajos Csatóry.²²

¹⁹ SJANBN, *Ion Ciocan* personal collection, folder 208, f. 454 v. – 455.

²⁰ SJANBN, *Ion Ciocan* personal collection, folder 208, f. 405 v. – 406.

²¹ SJANBN, *Ion Ciocan* personal collection, folder 208, f. 517.

²² SJANBN, Fund AFGN, folder 1493, f. 20, 24.

During his first two years of study, Alexa David successfully passed all his exams, and therefore the Administrative Commission granted his request of July 27th, 1894, and continued to award him a stipend for the university year of 1894/95.²³ Like many of his peers, Alexa David saw himself compelled to interrupt his studies on October 1st, 1894, as he was mustered to “regular military service.” Consequently, he petitioned the Commission to postpone awarding his stipend to the following university year, when he was set to complete his military duties.²⁴ While his service would be completed sooner than hoped, lasting only a few months, at the end of 1894 the student took ill, and needed to admit himself to medical supervision for some time in Cluj. Although in February 1895 his health had somewhat improved, the physicians advised him to “sacrifice some months to recover.” Taking advantage of these circumstances, he petitioned to be released from compulsory military service, and in early 1895 his health was repeatedly assessed by military physicians. As they did not find his illness to be serious enough to preclude service, Alexa David needed to resume his military duties until July 1895.²⁵ Following their completion, he would return to his studies in Budapest, benefitting from the stipend granted by the Năsăud Border Guard Funds. At the end of the university year 1895/96 he passed his final examination, and on the 26th of May 1896 he was certified as a graduated jurist. Shortly afterward, on the 3rd of July 1896, the graduate submitted a new application for a 300 Gulden scholarship in order to continue his studies, this time as a doctoral student at the University of Budapest. His petition was approved in August of the same year, so that in the autumn of 1896 Alexa David began to prepare his doctorate in law in parallel to working as a legal trainee.²⁶ It would be the beginning of a lengthy period of training that would ultimately enable his entry into the legal profession as a full lawyer.

Becoming a Lawyer: Career Strategies

Between the 14th of October 1896 and the 15th of March 1898, Alexa David worked as a legal trainee at the royal court of Subotica (Hu. Szabadka),²⁷ where he earned a monthly wage of 41 Gulden 66 cr.,²⁸ thus

²³ SJANBN, Fund AFGN, folder 1493, f. 21, 22 v.

²⁴ SJANBN, Fund AFGN, folder 1493, f. 29.

²⁵ SJANBN, *Ion Ciocan* personal collection, folder 208, f. 526-527, Fund AFGN, folder 1493, f. 32.

²⁶ SJANBN, Fund AFGN, folder 1493, f. 34-38, 46-52.

²⁷ SJANBN, *Alexa David* personal collection, folder 9, f. 1.

²⁸ SJANBN, *Alexa David* personal collection, folder 6, f. 2-3.

completing his mandatory traineeship after finishing his studies. It was in this town in the North of Vojvodina that he learned the news of his uncle's victory in the parliamentary elections for the constituency of Năsăud. In a congratulatory letter addressed to Ion Ciocan on November 6th 1896, Alexa David pondered on the responsibilities taken on by a Romanian politician with his accession to a deputy's seat on the Budapest Parliament: "I see in you an unbeatable fighter for the interests of your nation of the same blood", for which "you will not ignore any moments that concern it, nor will you put aside any chance to contribute to its improvement in all fields."²⁹ These were the thoughts expressed by a young jurist, who only a few weeks before had sworn an oath of entry into public service in the Hungarian state. Although the administrative judicial activity was demanding, in December 1896 Alexa David successfully passed the first *Rigurosum* in the course of doctoral studies, an accomplishment he mentioned to the Administrative Commission, also sending his certificate as proof.³⁰ He had therefore fulfilled the requirements of the forum granting him the scholarship for the university year of 1896/97, and was therefore awarded another stipend for the coming university year of 1897/98.³¹ According to the statutes, this would be the last year in which Alexa David could be granted a stipend, as he had enjoyed this financial support for four years of study.

Earning a doctor's title would however prove more difficult than the young jurist from Năsăud had expected, although law was regarded as one of the most accessible fields of study at the time.³² His activity at the royal court in Subotica, as well as the fact that during the school year of 1897/98 he "was for the most part ill" prevented Alexa David from taking his other examinations. Under these circumstances, his scholarship for the second semester was suspended, and only partially reinstated for half the regular amount after interventions were made with the president of the Administrative Commission. The situation was only clarified at the end of 1899, when Alexa David submitted the documents certifying that in June of 1899 he had successfully passed his second exam, and therefore received the remaining sum from his

²⁹ SJANBN, *Ion Ciocan* personal collection, folder 212, 33 v. - 34.

³⁰ SJANBN, Fund AFGN, folder 1493, f. 53, 62.

³¹ SJANBN, Fund AFGN, folder 1493, f. 60 - 61 v.

³² Cornel Sigmirean, *Istoria formării intelectualității românești din Transilvania și Banat în epoca modernă* [The History of the Formation of Romanian Intelligentsia in Transylvania and Banat in the Modern Age] (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2000), p. 108.

original stipend granted in 1897.³³ Eventually, David would pass all of his necessary examinations, and on the 5th of May 1900, the University of Budapest awarded him the degree of “*Doctorem Iuris Universi*”.³⁴

The satisfaction of having obtained a doctoral degree would however be clouded by the premature passing of his aunt, Ion Ciocan’s wife Amalia Ciocan (née Piciu), on the 13th of May 1900.³⁵ Having lost their only daughter, Leon and Ana Piciu would adopt their son-in-law’s nephew. Alexa David thus became the adoptive son of the former head of the Land Registry in Năsăud, a man who enjoyed a considerable respect in the former border regiment area, where small land owners predominated.³⁶ Having already completed his traineeship, earned the title of doctor in law, and as the sole heir of the Piciu family, Alexa David was well prepared for a lawyer’s career in Năsăud.

In order to become a lawyer, he needed to pass an examination in front of a commission at the Chamber of Lawyers of Târgul Mureş (hu. Marosvásárhely).³⁷ So as to better prepare for this examination, Alexa David would relocate to Târgu Mureş in the autumn of 1900, where he would dedicate his time to study and, following his uncle’s advice, he would try to establish ties that were necessary to the accomplishment of his professional goals. As a deputy in the Hungarian parliament, Ion Ciocan had recommended his nephew to various distinguished figures in the public life of Târgu Mureş: “A few day ago I met here the deputy Bernády Gy.³⁸ I recommended you to him on this occasion as well, and he told me to tell you that you should visit him again. Go therefore and

³³ SJANBN, Fund AFGN, folder 1493, f. 62-72.

³⁴ SJANBN, *Alexa David* personal collection, folder 4, f. 4.

³⁵ *Obituary for Amalia Ciocan, née Piciu*, in SJANBN, *Alexa David* personal collection, folder 14, f. 1.

³⁶ Tomi, “Ion Ciocan,” p. 286.

³⁷ The license to practice as a lawyer was granted by a Chamber of Lawyers. Such an institution existed in each of the 27 judicial districts of Dualist Hungary. See Mária M. Kovács, *Liberal Professions and Illiberal Politics. Hungary from the Habsburgs to the Holocaust* (Washington – New York – Oxford: Woodrow Wilson Center Press – Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 14-15.

³⁸ György Bernády (1864-1938) was a Hungarian politician, parliamentary representative of the urban constituency of Târgu Mureş (Hu. Marosvásárhely) II between 1896 and 1901, and the mayor of Târgu Mureş between and 1902 and 1912. For his biography and activity see Imola V. György, *Bernády György és kultusza Marosvásárhelyen: a lokális történelem mint narratív identitás* [György Bernády and his Cult in Târgu Mureş: Local History as Narrative Identity] (Cluj-Napoca: Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2018).

see him, even if you have no work with him; visit him from time to time, because it can only be of use to you from many perspectives.”³⁹

After a year and a half spent in Târgu Mureș, Alexa David enrolled to take the examination that would allow him to enter the Bar. The examination fees and “everything else you might need” were covered by Ion Ciocan, who had provided his nephew with the necessary financial support for the duration of his stay in Târgu Mureș. However, on the 15th of February 1902, Alexa David would telegraph his uncle that he had failed the examination, “a great blow” for the young jurist, as he himself confessed. The letter Ion Ciocan sent to his nephew shortly after having learned of his lack of success reveals both the young jurist’s despondency as well the affection his uncle bore him: “I believe that you are distressed, and that in this occurrence you see a great blow. Anyone would be the same when something unwanted happens, something that one could not accept, that perhaps had not even occurred to them; [...] I know that you did your duty, and even maybe exerted yourself more than was necessary. You may at least be consoled in this [...] Others had the same happen to them, and still they crafted for themselves, although later, a good future. God will also help you.”⁴⁰ The uncle’s forecast would come to fruition in only a few months. After spending some time in Năsăud, in the home of his adoptive parents, Alexa David would overcome the despondency elicited by his failure and resume preparing for the examination, this time successfully. On the 27th of September 1902 he would again find himself in front of the examination commission, whose members he would persuade of his knowledge and aptitude, and who would grant him the “requested formal qualification”, enabling him to begin practice as a lawyer.⁴¹

Shortly afterwards, Alexa David opened a lawyer’s practice in Năsăud, in a rented space located in the building of the Năsăud Border Guard Funds, the institution that had contributed so much to his educational pathway. The practice however needed to be furnished, while the newly-made lawyer had to purchase a new wardrobe, appropriate to his new social-professional status, as he wrote to his uncle on the 20th of October 1902: “As far as the furnishing is concerned: some printed items I had already procured in Oșorhei⁴², now I only wait [for some] from the “Minerva” institute in B[uda]pest;

³⁹ SJANBN, *Alexa David* personal collection, folder 135, f. 2.

⁴⁰ SJANBN, *Alexa David* personal collection, folder 135, f. 11-12.

⁴¹ SJANBN, *Alexa David* personal collection, folder 9, f. 1.

⁴² Târgu Mureș.

the first I paid for, the latter will cost 42 Crowns; I can pay for them as well. I ordered in Bistrița 3 dressers for books, archives, and clothes, a writing desk, 6 chairs, a clothes stand and a washing table, which I expect [to be delivered] these days. Everything is of good quality and enough for me. I paid 100 Crowns, and the rest will be paid in monthly instalments of 20 Crowns. [...] A bed I will bring from home, and a long table I shall order here, with less than 20 Crowns I think I shall also manage it, but I can last without it for another half-year. I ordered winter apparel with 70 Crowns. [...] Up to this point therefore there is no monumental need of money, except what I will still require for: footwear, a hat, and other smaller items; then some other necessities for setting up: an index, a day-book, etc. which I can be purchased for modest prices.”⁴³ Although he assured his uncle that he required no other funds, the deputy replied to his nephew’s letter noting that “from the money deposited at the Aurora⁴⁴ you may withdraw up to 300 Gulden.”⁴⁵ Most likely, the security offered by his uncle’s financial resources enabled Alexa David to craft his own financial strategy by prioritising the need to firstly establish himself as a respected professional, to be followed some time later by setting higher fees for his services: “now, at the beginning, until I gain trust I cannot start with higher prices than what is required to cover direct costs, because, as I know the people, and as I see them, they need to be raised [to know] that if they come into trouble and cannot help themselves, they will seek advice from those who deal with such issues specially.”⁴⁶

Marriage Strategies and Personal Networks

Having opened his office and begun his activity as a lawyer, professional objectives to which he had devoted his entire energy for a decade, ever since his enrolment as a student at the law faculty of Cluj, Alexa David, then at the age 32, could finally take the time to seek out personal and familial fulfilment. He was as pragmatic in this endeavour as he had been before: he wished to contract a marriage that would enable his

⁴³ SJANBN, *Alexa David* personal collection, folder 185, f. 1-2.

⁴⁴ The credit and safe-keeping society “Aurora” of Năsăud. Established in 1873, according to its statutes, it had the purpose of “procuring for the peasant people the necessary capital means to maintain and develop its economy” On its role and activity see Nicolae Drăgan, *Monografia societății de împrumut și păstrare “Aurora” din Năsăud: 1873-1923* [Monograph of the Aurora Credit and Safe-Keeping Society of Năsăud: 1873-1923] (Cluj: Imprimeria Dr. Sebastian Bornemisa, 1923).

⁴⁵ SJANBN, *Alexa David* personal collection, folder 135, f. 23.

⁴⁶ SJANBN, *Alexa David* personal collection, folder 185, f. 2.

social and material advancement, while also giving him the satisfaction of a perfect conjugal living. He would first seek to marry one of the women stemming from the most respected families in the land of Năsăud, but, as he revealed to his uncle, he had found none to conform to his expectations: "Regardless of how many acquaintances I have, I am unable to find the person with whom I could start a home - and I do not wish to make ties with persons without means."⁴⁷ Given his requirements, Alexa David needed to seek further than his native county to neighbouring areas, and it was only in the summer of 1908 that he could state that he had "heard of a woman from Marmația", who was said to correspond to his expectations. He had most likely learned of her existence from Dumitru Hodor, a young Romanian jurist from Maramureș (Hu. Máramaros), who had obtained his doctoral degree at the University of Cluj and had undertaken his training in Alexa David's practice,⁴⁸ with whom he had maintained close ties. Irma Maria Raț, the woman in question, was Hodor's maternal aunt.

Greatly interested in Irma Raț, David would make use of the pretext of fulfilling various juridical duties in Sighetul Marmației (Hu. Máramarossziget) in September 1908, and travel to visit her relatives as well as acquaintances in the area, who he hoped could provide more information about the woman. During his first visit he was also able to meet Irma herself. She was located at the time in Dragomirești (Hu. Dragomérfalva), living in the home of her brother, George Raț, who was gravely ill and whom she was caring for. Their meeting was brief, as David spent the night in the home of Demetriu Hodor's parents, in Strâmtura (Hu. Szurdok), where Irma was living most of the time. On the second day of his trip, he visited one of his uncle's close friends, Tit Bud, the Greek Catholic vicar of Maramureș, in Sighetul Marmației. He took the opportunity of this discussion to bring up his plans for marriage, and, among the "8-10 women, as well as some girls, and a widow" the vicar mentioned in this context as potential spouses for David, Irma had also been included. Without divulging his real intentions, David managed to obtain from the vicar the information he needed: "regarding herself, this is all I learned: that she has been split from her husband by the courts for a long time, and that in the past years the vicar recommended three men to her, but she refused to wed any of them."⁴⁹

⁴⁷ SJANBN, *Ion Ciocan* personal collection, folder 208, f. 90.

⁴⁸ SJANBN, *Alexa David* personal collection, folder 135, f. 36; Sigmirean, *Istoria formării*, p. 541.

⁴⁹ SJANBN, *Ion Ciocan* personal collection, folder 208, f. 89.

Following his matrimonial “voyage” to Maramureș, Alexa David wrote to Ion Ciocan, notifying him of “the steps of my marriage”, emphasizing his preference for Irma Raț. His potential spouse’s father had been a parish priest in Cavnic (Hu. Kapnikbánya) and then the Greek Catholic dean of Copalnic-Mănăștur (Hu. Kápolnokmonostar). Irma had been married for a year with a certain priest called Mihalca, the son of the former county commissioner (Hu. alispán) of Maramureș, but had divorced her husband after he became mentally ill, and needed to be admitted to a sanatorium. She was about 35 years of age, had no children, was “brunette, full-figured [...] cultured enough”, and would bring a dowry of “16000 Cr.[owns] which she would be compensated with by her father-in-law.” The fact that Irma had been previously married was not an impediment in Alexa David’s eyes, but rather on the contrary: he had “reached the belief that I might start a home only with a woman of at least 30 years of age, and if she has already been married once, then all the better, because she will have been acquainted with this way of life and there will be no need for schooling in this regard.” Although he confessed to his uncle that “she made a good impression on me”, he urged Ciocan to enquire with the elite hailing from Maramureș, then located in Budapest, “particularly in regards to the family, the life [she has led] after her separation, and anything else you might find necessary.”⁵⁰

Eager to aid his nephew in this matter, Ciocan first contacted his colleagues in Parliament who represented the constituencies of Maramureș. He did not manage to obtain too much information as “most of them are of another nation, and perhaps that is why they are not that knowledgeable”, while one of the Romanian deputies for Maramureș, Petru Mihalyi, had been ill for a lengthy period, and was missing from Budapest. After having consulted other acquaintances from Irma’s county, Ciocan would write to his nephew that “I heard no disagreeable talk, neither of the family, nor of the person; and I have been told satisfactory words regarding both.”⁵¹

Consequently, at the end of October 1908, persuaded that “only with such a woman will it be appropriate to make this tie”,⁵² Alexa David married Irma Raț. His wedding was witnessed in Church by Ioan Gheție,⁵³ the headmaster of the Năsăud Gymnasium, and a close friend

⁵⁰ SJANBN, *Ion Ciocan* personal collection, folder 208, f. 89-90.

⁵¹ SJANBN, *Alexa David* personal collection, folder 135, f. 48-50.

⁵² SJANBN, *Ion Ciocan* personal collection, folder 208, f. 98.

⁵³ On the life and activity of the professor and parliamentary representative Ioan Gheție see Ovidiu Emil Iudean, *The Romanian governmental representatives in the Budapest Parliament: 1881-1918* (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2016), pp. 143-144.

of his uncle's.⁵⁴ David's choice of spouse was fully in accord with his expectations, as the marriage would allow him to advance socially and materially, to establish a series of new personal and professional ties in the county of Maramureş and to deepen existing ones, and finally, to enjoy a fulfilled personal life that would last until his wife's passing on the 21st of February 1931.⁵⁵

Career Changes and Personal Networks during the First World War

Professionally accomplished and personally fulfilled, Alexa David would remain active as an attorney in Năsăud for more than a decade. During this time, he pled in hundreds of trials, in causes such as murder, forced executions, calumny, debt recovery or inheritance, defending the interests of both particular individuals and organisations.⁵⁶ He distinguished himself as an able lawyer, and the income he derived from his activity had led him to believe that he could pursue the same line of work until retirement.

The outbreak of the First World War would however bring about significant changes in his and many others' career pathways. Only one year after the War had begun, the inhabitants of Năsăud found themselves in a precarious situation, facing various material hardships and lacking food, and feeling acutely insecure due to the fighting occurring nearby between the Austrian-Hungarian and Russian troops.⁵⁷ This situation also had repercussions on Alexa David's practice. On the 7th of March 1915, the lawyer wrote to his uncle in Budapest about his intention to join the corps of state judicial clerks, thus renouncing the freedom as well as the uncertainty of a liberal profession: "Ever since the war had begun in the summer of the previous year, the business in my practice has been drastically reduced and I started to make an inventory [...] I cannot predict the situation after the war, but I think that only

⁵⁴ SJANBN, *Ion Ciocan* personal collection, folder 208, f. 91.

⁵⁵ *Obituary Irma Dr. David née. Raţiu* in SJANBN, *Alexa David* personal collection, folder 14, f. 7.

⁵⁶ The *David Alexa* personal collection from the SJANBN contains almost one hundred folders (no. 15 to 111) including case files from the lawsuits where he served as an attorney.

⁵⁷ On the dire circumstances in which the Romanians in Năsăud found themselves see Ovidiu Emil Iudean, "Bridging the Gap: Romanian Parliamentary Elite in Aid of their Communities during the First World War," in *World War I. The Other Face of the War*, eds. Ioan Bolovan et alii. (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2016), pp. 95-107. For the situation of the fighting on the Eastern front see Dennis Showalter, "War in the East and Balkans, 1914-18," in *A Companion to World War I*, ed. John Horne (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 66-81.

through strenuous work would I be able to evaluate and collect what is owed to me. I have thus reached the conviction that by occupying the office of royal judge in Năsăud I would more easily be able to attain my goal and would also be ensured for the future.”⁵⁸

In early 1915, it seemed that Alexa David’s wish could have found fulfilment: the royal judge Németh had been transferred to Dej, and therefore the royal judge’s seat in Năsăud had become vacant. This office was vied for by many local jurists, no fewer than 14 candidates submitting their applications for the seat.⁵⁹ As he himself confessed, Alexa David was “determined to enter the office of judge”, and to this purpose, to appeal to his personal network in order to enable this change of position, especially seeing as “at the local court, at the tribunal and at the court of Cluj my activity [as a lawyer] has been praised many times. I have a spotless image [in the eyes of] of the Chamber of Lawyers.”⁶⁰

Expectedly, David’s main supporter was his uncle. As a governmental representative in the Budapest Parliament, he was able to intervene with the Minister for Justice Jenő Balogh, to whom he conveyed his nephew’s situation and wish, and from whom he obtained the promise of a favourable resolution. However, at the same time, Ion Ciocan also notified David that a position of public notary in Năsăud had become available. The notary occupying the office, Schreiber, had requested his transfer from Năsăud to an area farther away from the frontline and had also asked Ion Ciocan to intervene with the central authorities in his favour. Discussing Schreiber’s request with his close friend, Vasile Hossu, the Greek Catholic bishop of Gherla (Hu. Szamosújvár), Ion Ciocan had been advised to make all necessary arrangements so that in Năsăud “a Romanian public notary be appointed”, an office for which his own nephew had been recommended.⁶¹

Alexa David thus saw himself compelled to choose between two public offices that could have offered him the solution to the material problems caused by the war. Thinking that “the office of notary might be better, because this office would gain a different traction under my tenure”, but maintaining the intention to occupy the position of royal judge, Alexa David decided to travel to Budapest to solve the matter of

⁵⁸ SJANBN, *Ion Ciocan* personal collection, folder 98, f. 136.

⁵⁹ SJANBN, *Ion Ciocan* personal collection, folder 98, f. 136, 140.

⁶⁰ SJANBN, *Ion Ciocan* personal collection, folder 98, f. 136.

⁶¹ SJANBN, *Alexa David* personal collection, folder 135, f. 112-115.

his future employment.⁶² While in the Hungarian capital, he took all necessary administrative steps to fulfil this goal, but in the meantime the office of public notary no longer represented an option, as Schreiber had withdrawn his transfer request from Năsăud.⁶³ However, the only remaining option, that of royal judge, did not seem to materialise either. Beyond financial constraints, the possibility of being mustered in the Austrian-Hungarian army constituted a further reason for concern. Expressing his unease, Alexa David would write to his uncle on the 1st of June 1915 that he would “be glad to see the matter resolved because – as I see – our mustering is near, and if other reasons will not be able to help me, then the job will spare me many troubles.”⁶⁴

Under these circumstances, despite being in precarious health, Ion Ciocan made use of all the relations established during a lengthy political career in order to seek the fastest resolution of his nephew’s situation. The efforts were not for naught, as at the beginning of July 1915, Alexa David wrote to his uncle to thank him for “the exertion in his cause”, notifying him that he had been appointed as a royal judge.⁶⁵ Thus ended Alexa David’s career as a lawyer, and began a new professional chapter in the jurist’s life, in the public service of the state, a chapter that would be continued after 1918, in the service of the Greater Romanian public.⁶⁶ Ion Ciocan’s interventions with the Minister for Justice in Budapest in the first half of 1915 would be the final testament of the support and care that the political figure had provided his nephew with throughout his lifetime. On the 6th of September 1915, Ion Ciocan would pass away,⁶⁷ leaving the greater part of his estate to Alexa David.

Conclusions

For national minorities, who were permanently struggling for rights in the framework of multi-ethnic empires – the situation of the Romanians in Dualist Hungary –, the fashioning of a legal elite would become a fundamental necessity over time. The case of Alexa David, though not perhaps typical, owing the privileged circumstances he enjoyed through the connections established by his uncle and his significant financial support, conveys a highly revealing image of the

⁶² SJANBN, *Alexa David* personal collection, folder 185, f. 4.

⁶³ SJANBN, *Ion Ciocan* personal collection, folder 98, f. 143.

⁶⁴ SJANBN, *Alexa David* personal collection, folder 185, f. 5.

⁶⁵ SJANBN, *Ion Ciocan* personal collection, folder 98, f. 148.

⁶⁶ SJANBN, *Alexa David* personal collection, folder 9, f. 1.

⁶⁷ *Obituary of Ion Ciocan*, in SJANBN, *Alexa David* personal collection, folder 14, f. 5.

formation and professional ascension of a Romanian law graduate in early twentieth-century Transylvania.

His career strategies, coupled with his constant preoccupation to enlarge and deepen his personal network depict the challenges faced by those who were active in the field of law. His professional activity undoubtedly brought with it a significant social capital at local level, which was attested to by the rich correspondence he received, in which his help in various matters outside the boundaries of legal activity was required. The jurist had become a *de facto* broker, mediating between the inhabitants of the land of Năsăud and their parliamentary representative, Ion Ciocan.

However, his entry into the service of the state would significantly alter the Romanian man of law's image, if the accusations lodged against David by Romanian veterans from Năsăud in the autumn of 1918, after their return from the frontline, are given credence: "That whore David who sold his body and soul to the Hungarians and Jews, [you] made him distribute brandy, so that he could take more for himself, and to us who were in the fire, not give us anything? Why?"⁶⁸

Despite these tense and polarising experiences at the end of the war, the knowledge and the expertise of Romanian jurists who had earned their education in Dualist Hungary were sufficient recommendation after 1918 for them to occupy administrative and judicial positions in the newly-formed public service framework of Greater Romania. Many of them acquitted themselves of their responsibilities honourably during the interwar period as well, as was the case of Alexa David, who would be awarded the "Steaua României" Order to the degree of officer on the 14th of November 1922."⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Vlad Popovici, "Notes on the Romanian Civil Servants from Beszterce-Naszód/Bistrița-Năsăud County during World War I and its Aftermath (1914-1921)," *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie "George Barițiu" din Cluj-Napoca. Series Historica, Supplement*, 55 (2016), p. 175.

⁶⁹ SJANBN, *Alexa David* personal collection, folder 9, f. 2.