

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
"1 DECEMBER 1918" UNIVERSITY OF ALBA IULIA
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF HISTORY

THESIS OF PHD

PHD supervisor:
C.P.I dr. MARIUS ROTAR

PHD student:
PRESURA DANUT VIOREL

ALBA IULIA
2024

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
"1 DECEMBER 1918" UNIVERSITY OF ALBA IULIA
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF HISTORY

HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF THE FUNCTIONING OF THE ALBA IULIA
PENITENTIARY

(1872-1968)

PHD supervizor:
C.P.I dr. MARIUS ROTAR

PHD student:
PRESURA DANUT VIOREL

ALBA IULIA
2024

Keywords: prison, penitentiary, Alba Iulia, gaol, punishment, detainees, arrangement, communism, employees, guards, sources, post-war period, National Administration of Penitentiaries (ANP)

A "rough" definition is proposed to us by dictionaries...prison is nothing more than "a correctional institution where persons sentenced to deprivation of liberty serve their sentence"; a place where someone or something is confined; judicial punishment that consists in the confinement of convicted persons in a particular institution with a strict regime; a place where it is difficult to live; denied; custody; slavery; stalag; dungeon; mound; solitary, imprisonment, etc....

Therefore, in order to fully understand how the archaic, medieval and later modern societies thought and implemented the punishments and sanctions on those found guilty, it is appropriate to lean on the evidence, the historical testimonies of the penal institutions in general and, in particular, on the penitentiary from Alba Iulia, a city with deep historical roots where the events that happened over it interfered with the coercive actions against some prominent representatives of Romanian history.

The proposed topic is circumscribed to the pragmatic historical research that the elaboration of a doctoral thesis entails. The own introspective analysis of the existing documents and testimonies will hopefully provide a better understanding of the phenomenon of reclusion used on a local and regional level (Transylvania -Ardeal - Alba Iulia) as well as through the analogical method (of comparison), at the level of Romanian society in the 19th - 20th centuries.

The main intention of this work is to reconstruct as much as possible, following the access to the documents of the time but also by corroborating with other works in the field (which, admittedly, are just a few!), a relevant picture of the location, conditions of detention, the nature of the crimes, the prison population and its nationality in the Alba Iulia penitentiary. Why do we want to insist on the nationality as well as on the proportion of imprisoned Romanians?

Being under Hungarian jurisdiction, Transylvania (Ardeal) experienced a faster development of prisons; the fortresses, built from the beginning with unique places of detention, as well as the courts, parliaments and local diets. The primary motivation of the Hungarian class was to dominate, to keep under control the majority Romanian population, and to impose itself, if necessary, through the

"long arm of the law", imprisoning and thus giving an example of the strong hand of Hungarian rule. To support the previous statement, It has allocated a consistent space with examples of incarceration discretion of the Romanians having as a legal basis their "political agitation, with a nationalist background". Considered that a precise topic, less known from a historiographical point of view, well documented, could offer certain advantages of knowing prison life as it was under the Hungarian order but also after the union of Transylvania with Romania during the monarchy and, finally, during the period of sad memory, the communist one.

A new element of this work is given by the fact that in the retrospective presentation of the history of the prison in Alba Iulia, the topic is approached from the perspective of the research carried out in the documentary fund under the preservation and conservation of the National Archives, Alba Iulia branch (with the inherent difficulties of translation and adaptation to the modern language of some documents written in Hungarian for the period 1872-1919), materials and documents kept by the services of the ANP Archive (formerly DGP) as sources.

We can say that the research on this topic penetrates a "virgin" field because, from our knowledge and information, the data on the prison, later the penitentiary in Alba Iulia, are present only tangentially in various works that only refer to the general way about the existence and history of this settlement, a fact that leads us to the motivation of this approach. In order to understand the way punishments are applied fully, the legal system applied throughout the historical stages, and the variations of detention within the limits of social regimes, it is helpful to review them. The Antiquity period on today's Romania's territory, within the limits of Dacia organised under the state jurisdiction led by Burebista and later by Decebalus, does not offer us many relations or traces of criminal legislation. We find references to the existence of a legal system and some laws in the populations before the Geto-Dacians from ancient historians.

Regarding the origin of prisons, we can say that an archaic form has existed since ancient times. The incarceration and use of some prisoners to work inside mines or salt furnaces are attested even from when Dacia came under Roman rule. The Romans used the prisoners for the most challenging work, including the extraction of gold and other metals (iron, silver) as well as the extraction of salt. From various inscriptions, there were many mines and salt pans in Dacia.

This extensive approach to the evolution of detention institutions in the history of Romania offers us a deep look into the judicial past of the country. Throughout the ages, from the times of the Geto-Dacians until the modern period, the system of punishment and detention has evolved, reflecting societal, cultural and political changes.

We believe that the period between the middle of the 19th century and the middle of the 20th century in the penitentiary's history, especially regarding the penitentiary institutions in the area, is a subject of interest for researchers interested in the monographic approach of these institutions. This period can provide a significant landmark for those wishing to explore in depth the evolution and functioning of these penitentiaries, given that they had a significant influence on the local community, at least in the first decades of their existence.

It is noted that two distinct categories of researchers could benefit from the results of this work. The first category consists of those interested in studying the communist prison phenomenon, who focus their analyses starting from the 1950s. The second category is represented by researchers who analyse communist prisons, having a solid and detailed documentary base before the communist period.

Through this work, the way is opened to future steps, including the need to continue and complete the documentation and analysis of the operation of the penitentiary in the context of communist repression. A monographic work dedicated to this period is expected to significantly contribute to understanding the prison's history and its staff's destinies during the communist regime.

The current work also provides a valuable starting point for the detailed investigation of the fates of prison staff members in the fourth and fifth decades of the 20th century, compared to their subsequent developments in communist Romania. This topic was not addressed in detail in the present study but could represent a point of interest in future research, especially in the context of significant changes in the prison system and increased staff mobility.

Approaching the evolution and functioning of the penitentiary during the highlighted period is essential from a historical and social point of view. It brings to light fundamental details about the impact of this institution on the local community and the inmates, highlighting its implications in the context of political and social change.

Investigating the penitentiary's history allows for a complex picture of how this institution has evolved, reflecting societal and legal system changes. Analysing its evolution in the context of political change can provide a deeper understanding of how criminal justice and the treatment of offenders have evolved.

The evolution of the penitentiary in Alba Iulia from the creation of Greater Romania until 1968 demonstrates that the interwar period and the period under the communist regime until 1968 had a significant impact on life and events in

the Alba Iulia penitentiary, which was an integral part of society. The study of the archival documents reveals the administrative, social and economic changes and the historical events that marked the prison.

In later periods, such as the world economic crisis of 1929-1933 and the Second World War, the Alba Iulia penitentiary was affected by economic and social difficulties, and during political regimes, it became an instrument of repression against political opponents.

The period of social and political transformations after the Second World War in the context of the establishment of the communist regime in Romania analyses the impact of these changes on the Alba Iulia Penitentiary, highlighting the institution's evolution in a political climate marked by communism and totalitarianism.

An interesting aspect is the detailed presentation of the human resources available at the Alba Iulia Penitentiary during the analysed period. Lists of officials and guards, together with sketches of the location of the penitentiary, provide a clear picture of the institution's staff and infrastructure.

Of course, the sources that provide information about the penitentiary in Alba Iulia are not limited to these examples but provide important information regarding the dynamics and perspective of the events that took place, especially in the post-war period.

The external source regarding the Alba Iulia penitentiary highlights the fact that this prison did not necessarily fit into the category of force institutions of the penitentiary system, but it witnessed abuses and the terror of the communist regime. Prison overcrowding, inhuman conditions and the implementation of a system of slow extermination of opponents become central points in the description of the atmosphere of communist prisons.

The conclusion of the investigation on the evolution of the penitentiary system in the period 1876-1967 emphasises the fact that, despite a low interest of historians towards this subject, this is mainly due to the current situation and the lack of exhaust and precise resources. However, we look to the future with optimism, and we anticipate an increase in interest and the dedication of resources to researching this period of prison history.