

Georgeta Fodor

## **Transylvania and Târgu Mureș in the Time of Lorand Gaspar. The Premises of His Multilingualism and the Translator to Come**

**Abstract:** The present study focuses on creating a comprehensive image of the political, cultural, and social historical background in which Lorand Gaspar was born and raised. Aiming to reveal the main historical phases of his birthplace's evolution, our article centres on demonstrating how the multiethnic and multicultural context of the author's early years significantly influenced his future professional and literary career. The study is organised into two parts: the first offers a historical overview of Transylvania and Târgu Mureș, concentrating on the interwar period. This section also references local and regional identities, such as the emergence of "Transylvanianism" as an expression of ethnic Hungarian identity. Additionally, it seeks to clarify the frequently used term "Est Transylvania" (Transylvanie orientale), which Lorand Gaspar and his exegetes refer to. The second part emphasises the Francophone beginnings in Târgu Mureș, providing relevant information about Gaspar's acquaintance with the French language, utilising school reports and references to the French presence in the area.  
**Keywords:** Târgu Mureș; Interculturality; Ethnicity; Nationalism; Francophonie.

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This study adheres to the methodology specific to historical approaches. It aims to establish fundamental contextual milestones for a better understanding of Lorand Gaspar's complex and multicultural personality. It is a cultural history and imagological approach exploring the idea of multiple identities emerging because of living in a multicultural space.

We base our approach on statements like Edward Hallett Carr's: study the historian before studying the facts<sup>1</sup>, which is relevant in this context because we believe that any approach with biographical significance cannot overlook the physical and cultural environment, which are crucial in shaping an individual's human and professional development trajectory.

Therefore, any effort to understand Lorand Gaspar's work must consider his Transylvanian past, especially since our cultural and social identity is always shaped by the historical and cultural contexts in which we live. Like all those born in and connected to this Transylvanian space, Lorand Gaspar bears the imprint of the multiethnic and multicultural specificity that has gradually developed since the medieval era, progressing through the

modern period of national identity affirmation. Noteworthy is Sorin Mitu's assertion that Transylvania does not possess a unique identity; rather, multiple identity projects have emerged within its boundaries, competing and constantly evolving and redefining themselves according to the historical context.<sup>2</sup> This may have led to a tendency among those living in such spaces to receive and easily adapt to different cultural contexts. This quality also resonates in Lornad Gaspar's integration into various environments from Hungarian, French, and Middle East backgrounds.

We want to emphasise that this study is a valuable contribution to the conversation around historical facts already well-known and discussed by Romanian and Hungarian historians. As we mentioned earlier, it aims to offer a historical overview that deepens understanding and provides those interested in the work and life of Lorand Gaspar with accurate and relevant information about the historical and cultural evolution of Transylvania in general, and Târgu Mureş in particular. This is especially important as we focus on the significant developments and changes these regions underwent after the First World War, particularly following the Great Union act of 1918. We found such an approach relevant, considering that most studies and biographies of Lorand Gaspar's personality do not make such references. They tend only to mention his origins from eastern Transylvania (Transylvania orientale), but they do not clearly explain what this notion means in geographical and, more importantly, cultural terms.

However, the article presents an original contribution that complements the second part of this study, particularly

regarding the prerequisites for the emergence of Francophonie in the Mureş region and provides relevant information on Lorand Gaspar's multilingualism. We emphasize that Lorand Gaspar was born and raised during the period when French became the 'first foreign language' in Transylvania as well. Therefore, the study highlights the 'francophone atmosphere' created by integrating the French language into the school curriculum and establishing a French institute for girls, reflecting both the presence of a francophone community and representatives of the French mission in the city. Additionally, the article refers to the community-level impact of General Berthelot's visit to Târgu Mureş during his 'Transylvanian tour' in 1927. By selecting these seemingly eclectic subjects, we aim to outline the cultural landscape in which Lorand Gaspar was born and raised from 1925 until his emigration.

### **'Born in Eastern Transylvania': Transylvanian Identity Between Historical and Cultural Imagination**

Many historians have researched and made efforts to understand the specific identities of human communities (majority vs. minority, national vs. local/regional) articulated within a shared space. We believe that historian Sorin Mitu's statement is among the most comprehensive, as it simultaneously summarises the idea of multiple identities. He stated that 'each of us has a multiple identity composed of several distinct elements, including local, ethnic, national, gender, and European identities, which manifest depending on the context we are in and the

social role we play in specific situations'.<sup>3</sup> These identity valences do not oppose or cancel each other; rather, they complement and shape our entire social personality, determining a unique way in which we relate to the world and the surrounding universe. Moreover, the pluralistic and multiconfessional spaces bear another distinctive note: the definition and construction of identity through reporting and comparison, sometimes also in conflict with one another. Being raised and educated in such an environment can lead to a greater permissiveness and openness to the interception, assumption, and reception of specific elements within cohabiting communities. If we analyse the life, personality, and work of Lorand Gaspar, we would be inclined to argue that the openness, integration, and acceptance of various cultures and cultural spaces may have been shaped precisely by his upbringing in 'Eastern Transylvania,' the place where he was born and raised. Lorand Gaspar himself seems to share this theory. For instance, during an interview—the only one conducted in Romanian—with the Romanian journalist Smaranda Enache, Gaspar confessed: I believe this mixture of nations and blend of cultures is a defining feature of the area. I think the characteristics of multilingualism and polysemy are among the virtues of these lands, reflecting a perfect naturalness.<sup>4</sup>

Examining the region's evolution over its long history, we will agree, as Gaspar did, that it proves to be extremely generous in studying and understanding the articulation of these multiple identities, having still a visual materialisation that perhaps also resonated in the artistic concerns of Gaspar.<sup>5</sup> This is articulated through a simple visit to the central space of the city,

which includes buildings specific to the Hungarian, Szekler, Jewish, and Romanian communities alike. Lorand Gaspar also bears the imprint of this multiculturalism with a Sekler father and a Hungarian-speaking mother of Saxon-Armenian origin:

My family had a unique background. My father was a Szekler, while my mother, although Hungarian by language, had an Armenian father and a Saxon mother. This Armenian grandfather was among those who migrated from Turkey and married a Saxon woman from Reghin.<sup>6</sup>

The foundations of multiculturalism and multilingualism in the region can be traced back to the medieval era. Here, we will not focus on the historical evolution of Târgu Mureș during the Middle Ages. We will highlight certain aspects that we consider significant and helpful in understanding its uniqueness. Therefore, we will place particular emphasis on the interwar period during which Lorand Gaspar was born and lived, a time that also marks the onset of 'Transylvanianism' and Mureș Francophonie.

The history of Gaspar's hometown has been the subject of several monographs authored by both Romanian and Hungarian scholars. In this article, we primarily reference Ioan Eugen Man's fourth volume monograph, *Târgu Mureș: Istorie urbană*, which examines the city's evolution from its origins to contemporary times. This work should be incorporated into the synthesis dedicated to the history of Transylvania, notably the one coordinated by Ioan Aurel Pop, Thomas Năgler, and Magyari András.<sup>7</sup>

The city is an integral part of Transylvanian history, a region that emerged during the medieval period, initially as a voivodeship under the Hungarian medieval kingdom and later as an autonomous principality under Ottoman suzerainty (1541). Subsequently, with the Leopoldine Diploma of 1691, the region was incorporated into the Habsburg Empire. Another significant moment in its political and administrative evolution occurred in 1867 when the Austro-Hungarian Empire was established. Additionally, two other key events took place in 1918, when, following the First World War, Transylvania became part of the Kingdom of Romania by popular decision made at the Great National Assembly in Alba Iulia on December 1, 1918. The second event occurred in 1940, with the Vienna Dictate when the northern part of the region (including Târgu Mureş) was ceded to the Hungarian state until it was reintegrated into Romania with the re-establishment of Romanian authorities in 1945.

When appreciating the ethnic composition of the region, it is important to recognise that this aspect has generated considerable controversy in modern and contemporary times. The multiethnic character of the region, predominantly inhabited by Romanian ethnic groups, is illustrated by the censuses conducted by the authorities. These censuses reflect the multiethnic nature within Transylvania's borders, including Romanians, Hungarians, Saxons, Armenians, and Széklers, along with a significant Jewish community until the end of the Second World War. It is noteworthy that the legal status of these communities evolved according to the political situation of the province:

the majority versus minority dynamic often shifts, with the most significant change occurring after the Great War, when the Hungarian community, once the political majority, became the most significant minority in the country. Similarly, for a prolonged period, the Romanians lived outside Transylvania's political and constitutional framework.<sup>8</sup> All these political and administrative changes, of course, influenced the nation-building process of the communities. Accordingly, the relationships among these communities were directly shaped by each period's political and social specifics. These interactions were characterised by coexistence, collaboration, and, at times, confrontation. This is the cultural context in which Gaspar was born and raised. He witnessed two key events. Accordingly, the relations among these communities were directly influenced by each period's political and social specifics. To summarise, these relationships were characterised by coexistence, collaboration, and, at times, confrontation. This is the cultural context in which Gaspar was born and raised. He witnessed two key moments: the first year after Transylvania was integrated into the Romanian kingdom and the Vienna Dictate when Northern Transylvania was ceded to Hungary. The Vienna Dictate, when Northern Transylvania was ceded to Hungary.

Geographically and culturally, the city of Târgu Mureş is situated in central Romania, specifically in northern Transylvania. However, Lornad Gaspar refers to his place of origin as 'Eastern Transylvania.' This terminology has also been used by exegetes and in all of Gaspar's biographical presentations. However, what does 'Eastern Transylvanian' mean?

Historically, we have the term 'Northern Transylvania,' which denotes the 43,492 km<sup>2</sup> territory ceded by the Kingdom of Romania to Hungary in 1940, following the Vienna Dictate. 'Eastern Transylvania,' as far as we can deduce, relates to the area of the 'Székely Land (*Székelyföld*), the place of origin of Gaspar's father. Therefore, the expression has both a geographical and cultural significance. Geographically, it refers to the southeastern part of Transylvania, inhabited mostly by Széklers.<sup>9</sup> Culturally, it refers to the Széklers' community, which still has a strong ethnic identity. As Sorin Mitu argued, although all Transylvanian territories exhibit some degree of ethnic territoriality, the Székely Land is the most clearly delineated of all.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the preference for 'Eastern Transylvania' is not 'poetic license' but rather a cultural reference intended to emphasize and honor his Transylvanian Székler origin. Gaspar's interview supports this assertion: 'My father came from Székely Land and was one of those Hungarians from the eastern provinces who consider themselves somewhat different because of their history as border guards and soldiers.'<sup>11</sup>

Likewise, in his volume, *Derrière le dos de Dieu* (Gallimard, 2010), Gaspar mentions that this expression refers to: 'The name given to that region from Eastern Transylvania, where my grandparents came from.'<sup>12</sup>

The center of this 'Eastern Transylvania,' which Gaspar refers to, is the city of Târgu Mureș, his hometown, which has played and continues to serve as the region's administrative centre<sup>13</sup>. The name 'Market' for the city has been documented since the fourteenth century in the forms of *Novum Forum* and *Novum Forum Sicularum*;

however, evidence of human existence in the area dates back to the Neolithic period. The term 'market' refers to the specifics of the settlement and the process of forming medieval towns near the river, a space favorable for commercial activities.

In 1616, with the diploma of Prince Gabriel Bethlen, Târgu Mureș was elevated to the rank of a 'royal free city', which gave it the right to build walls and bastions of defense.<sup>14</sup> In the 17th century, the evolution of Transylvania and the city is linked to their entry under Habsburg rule, established by the Leopoldine Diploma of 1691.

Regarding the demographic structure of the 18th and 19th centuries, the data is more certain due to the solid documentary foundations that exist, as the imperial authorities were very rigorous about population censuses. The predominant presence of Romanians is unquestionable, as is the multiethnic character of the region. What varies is the share and involvement of these communities in political life because, starting from the medieval period, the legislation imposed by Hungarian kings used religious criteria to exclude Romanians from the legal system framework. Therefore, for instance, Romanians, excluded from the political sphere, did not enter the cities till later; this, of course, does not exclude contacts and interaction with other privileged communities of Hungarians, Széklers and Saxons.

For Târgu Mureș, relevant in terms of demographics, is the first statistic of the Greek-Catholic Romanians in Transylvania, dating from 1733 and made by Inochentie Micu Klein, according to which in Târgu Mureș there were 60 families, which represented about 10 % of the population of the city.<sup>15</sup> The city's small number

of Romanian inhabitants is attributed to the restrictive measures imposed by the authorities; however, the Romanian population was dominant in the neighboring rural areas. During the first census ordered by Emperor Joseph II in Târgu Mureş from 1784 to 1787, 5,934 inhabitants were recorded. Of these, the number of Romanians is estimated to be 425.<sup>16</sup>

The period leading up to the end of the First World War, especially the first decade of the twentieth century, marks a time of significant transformations for the city, fueled by the desire for modernisation and organisation. The actions of Mayor Bernady Gyorgy are particularly noteworthy. From 1902 to 1912, he oversaw the construction of key public buildings, including the Palace of Culture, the Administrative Palace, and several educational institutions.

In 1900, according to the census in Târgu Mureş, there were 19,522 inhabitants, of whom 1864 were Romanians, 16,705 were Hungarians, 606 were Germans, 72 were Slovenians, 8 were Croats, 2 were Serbs, and 185 were classified as others.<sup>17</sup> (Man, II: 177). From the confessional perspective, the situation was as follows: 1033 Orthodox, 1352 Greek-Catholic, 5532 Roman-Catholic, 8915 Reformed, 556 Evangelicals, 470 Unitarians, 1658 Israelites, 6 others.<sup>18</sup>

Although Lorand Gaspar was not Jewish, as some scholars suggest, the city had a significant and active Jewish community. Therefore, references to this community are relevant, as they contribute to the city's multiethnic and multicultural identity. The first Jews settled along the Mureş River in the 17th century and established themselves in the city in 1829 during the 19th century.<sup>19</sup>

The Mureş Jewish community began to develop significantly after 1867, when the dualist pact resulted in the recognition of the equality of the Mosaic faith alongside other religious practices. Gaining civil rights progressively initiated a process, similar to that in other regions, of voluntary assimilation. In the case of the Jewish community in Târgu Mureş, they opted for the Hungarian language. Since 1862, a place of worship has been operational in Târgu Mureş, and the first school was documented in 1880. In 1892, the foundation stone of the synagogue was laid, establishing the great emblematic building that continues to represent Târgu Mureş to this day.<sup>20</sup>

Demographically, during the interwar period, which is the focus of this paper, comparing the figures between the censuses of 1900 and 1930 in Târgu Mureş shows that Jews represented 15% of the total population.<sup>21</sup> The community grew and developed an effervescent cultural life centered around two synagogues, a cultural centre, a Jewish school, and a ritual bath.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, Jews became an important presence in the city's economic life. Notable figures included businessmen, patrons, bankers, doctors, lawyers, journalists, political leaders, and men of letters.<sup>23</sup>

The multicultural and Jewish presence in Târgu Mureş formed part of the imagery observed by Lorand Gaspar during his childhood. It remains visible today; buildings such as the Apollo Palace, the "Splendid" Hotel, and the Burger House are just a few that reflect their presence and involvement in community life. Unfortunately, the occupation of Northern Transylvania following the Vienna Dictate marked a dark period for the Târgu Mureş community, as Jews were deported to Nazi camps.

### **The Multicultural Târgu Mureş during the Interwar Period and the Beginnings of Francophonie**

The end of the First World War will bring about significant changes, both institutionally and politically, as well as at the identity level. Based on the principle of national self-determination, the Romanians in Transylvania, who formed the majority, decided to unite with Romania during the Great National Assembly in Alba Iulia on December 1, 1918. Consequently, after the Union, the history of Târgu Mureş became linked to that of the Romanian state.

One of the most significant moments was the reorganization of the city's management and administrative system through the integration of Romanian officials. The transfer of authority was not without difficulties. However, in a report from 1919, the prefect of the city remarked that 'in Târgu Mureş and Mureş County, there is perfect calm; the officials remaining in service and continuing their duties.'<sup>24</sup>

We will not address the political-territorial issues here; instead, we will focus on appreciating and highlighting the impact of this significant change on identity levels, involving the repositioning and redefining of majority and minority ethnic groups. For example, the Hungarians, who formed the political majority, will now become an ethnic and political minority, the most significant in the newly formed Great Romania. Therefore, the political change had a tremendous effect on the community. It also marked the development of what scholars define as 'Transylvanianism'.<sup>25</sup> In the interwar period, at the basis of this current are some of the most prominent intellectuals from the interwar period, Károly Kós, Aladár Kuncz, Sándor

Makkai and Sándor Reményik.<sup>26</sup> At the foundation of the 'Transylvanian idea' is the belief that the national identities and ideologies of the Romanians, Hungarians, and Germans in Transylvania are compatible and reconcilable.<sup>27</sup> Although Lorand Gaspar did not participate in these theoretical debates, his references to his native town and the cultural context of his upbringing suggest that he shares the notion of multiple identities that coexisted and interacted fruitfully.

Notably, Romanians living in Transylvania will also evolve towards a regional identity. This identity shifts in response to their changing political situation. For instance, before the Great Union, their 'Transylvanianism' possessed a self-defensive national character; after 1918, the mission transformed into the creation, not only political but also practical, of the national state.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, both the Romanians and the Hungarians have strengthened the ethnocentric aspect of their national consciousness, relying on dichotomies such as similarity/difference, identity/alterity, we/them others.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps this also explains why Lornad Gaspar is relatively unknown among Romanians.

Beyond the national reconfiguration of minority versus majority, the early interwar years, which coincided with Lorand Gaspar's childhood, marked the beginning of vibrant life and cultural activities in the city, alongside support for Romanians by establishing cultural and educational institutions. Gradually, Hungarians must learn Romanian to respect and integrate into the new state. Undoubtedly, young Gaspar did not fully perceive these changes during his early years, yet he was certainly affected by them, as he notes. In the interview mentioned earlier, he emphasises that the context was crucial for his personal and professional development.

I spoke all three of these languages (Hungarian, German, and Romanian) from childhood. At the age of six, my father enrolled me in French classes. By the time I turned ten, I was speaking all four languages effortlessly. I remember how my parents sent me to summer camps, either in Ocna Sibiului, at a camp where mostly Saxons came and spoke only German, or at Carmen Silva,<sup>30</sup> where I was surrounded solely by Romanians and Romanian was the only language spoken. I interacted with others, always filled with wonder at the presence of another culture language.<sup>31</sup>

Significantly, Lorand Gaspar notes he began studying French at the age of six. French was the first foreign language in the Romanian kingdom and became the first in the Transylvanian region. According to school documents, Lorand Gaspar studied French in school,<sup>32</sup> too. These documents also prove that children were exposed to multilingualism during the interwar period, also because of the political changes.

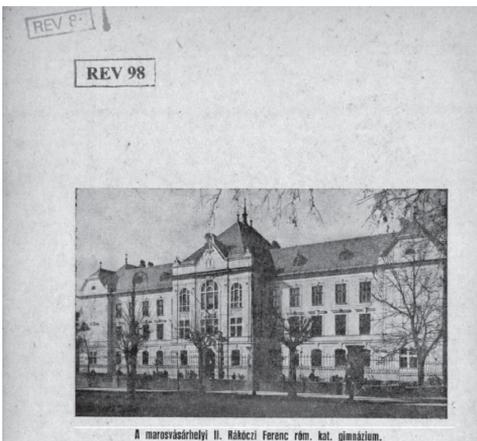


Image with the school building as included in the school yearbook of 1940-1941<sup>33</sup>

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VIII. OSZTÁLY. Osztályfőnök: **Hant Géza.**

A tanuló neve, vallása ismétlé-e? Internátusban lakik-e?	TANÍTÁRÓK											Tanfel- mérészet		
	Magyarra- tanít	Hittan	Magyar nyelv	Történelem	Földrajz	Latin nyelv	Matematika	Francia nyelv	Római nyelv	Térszemle- tanítás	Érdem- díjazás		Alt. tan. eredmény	
Arczavai Károly	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	1	3	100
Abraham Imre izr.	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
v. Bakóczy László	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
Chifor János gkat.	2	1	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
5 Dunai Frigyes i.	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Erdős István	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	60
Fall Sándor	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Gaspar Lorand	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
Hajdu Jenő	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
10 Hornyák Sándor	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Hornyák József	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Imre István	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
v. Incze Iván ref.	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Janka Ferenc i.	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Kerekes János i.	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
15 Khell Adám i.	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Nagy Endre ism.	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Schlett Andor	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Schmidt Károly	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
Svetla Gyula	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
20 Szabó Zoltán	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100

Kimaradt: Molnár Kálmán. Összesen: 21.

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VII. OSZTÁLY. Osztályfőnök: **Pongrácz Tamás.**

A tanulók neve, vallása, ismétlé-e? internátusban lakik?	TANÍTÁRÓK											Tanfel- mérészet	
	Magyarra- tanít	Hittan	Magyar nyelv	Történelem	Földrajz	Latin nyelv	Matematika	Francia nyelv	Római nyelv	Térszemle- tanítás	Érdem- díjazás		Alt. tan. eredmény
Arczavai Károly	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	3	50
Abraham Imre izr.	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
Brozsek László	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
Chifor János gkat.	1	1	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
5 Erdős István	1	1	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	50
Fall Sándor	1	1	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Gaspar Lorand	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
Hajdu Jenő I.	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	50
10 Hornyák Sándor	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
Hornyák József	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Imre István	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Incze Iván ref.	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
Janka Ferenc i.	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Kerekes János I.	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
15 Khell Adám i.	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Kozma Béta i.	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	50
Molnár Kálmán ref.	2	2	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	100
Nagy István Béla ág. ev.	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Si. Andor	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
20 Schmidt Károly	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
Svetla Gyula	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
Szabó Zoltán	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
<b>Magántanulók:</b>													
Csábi Pál	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	50
Farkas Albert	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	50
25 Isekutz Antal	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	50
Nagy Dezsi ref.	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	50
Kilyén Sándor unit.	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	50

Kimaradt: Császár Károly. Összesen: 28.

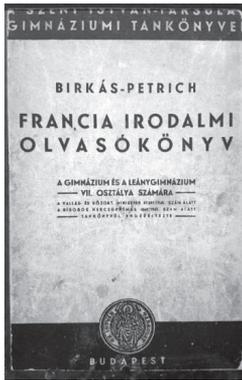
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VI. OSZTÁLY. Osztályfőnök: **Dr. Vild Frigyes.**

A tanuló neve és vallása	TANÍTÁRÓK											Tanfel- mérészet	
	Magyarra- tanít	Hittan	Magyar nyelv	Történelem	Földrajz	Latin nyelv	Matematika	Francia nyelv	Római nyelv	Térszemle- tanítás	Érdem- díjazás		Alt. tan. eredmény
Arczavai Károly	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1/4
Abraham Imre izr.	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Brozsek László	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Chifor János g. kat.	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
5 Erdős István	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
Fall Sándor	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
Florján Kálmán	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
Gaspar Lorand	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Hajdu Jenő	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1/2
10 Hornyák Sándor	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
Hornyák József	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	1/4
Kerekes János	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
Khell Adám	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Kozma Béta	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
15 Lukács István	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Moga László	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Molnár Kálmán ref.	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Say Géza	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Schlett Andor	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
20 Schmidt Károly	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Schnitzer Ernő izr.	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
Svetla Gyula	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
Szabó Zoltán	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Lorand Gaspar school situation according to the school reports for 1940-1941, 1941-1942<sup>34</sup>, 1942-1943

The documents indicate that he learned Hungarian, Latin, German, French, and Romanian<sup>35</sup>. In 1940–41 and again in 1941–1942, he was listed among the students awarded a prize (in books) for their results. Notably, his class tutor in 1940–1941 was Vild Frigyes, a professor of German and French as well.



Birkás Petrich, *Francia nyelvkönyv*, cover of the textbook recommended for learning French in 1940–1941

In May–June 1943, Gaspar graduated from high school with excellent results in his bachelor's degree: Hungarian, Latin, German (optional subject) and Romanian (optional subject). Due to his results, Lorand Gaspar was also awarded a special distinction: *'kitüntetéssel érett'*,<sup>36</sup> (Évkönyve az 1942–43. Tanévről: 35)

Regarding his religion, although some studies have affirmed that he was Jewish, the school documents do not confirm this assumption, as the mention *'izr'* is missing next to his name, unlike other students.

### 'The French Atmosphere in the City'

As mentioned, the interwar period also marks the beginning of French language cultivation in Târgu Mureș schools. However, the French language is not only the first foreign language of the Romanian kingdom but also carries much deeper significance: it represents the language of Romania's main allies and friends; therefore, it serves as a cultural symbol.<sup>37</sup>

One of the events that might have echoed or impacted Gaspar's father's decision for his son to have French lessons might have been the famous visit made in the city, in 1927, by the French General Berthelot, part of his Transylvanian tour. The entire community welcomed the General, and the newspapers of the time presented this event and the interest and appreciation of French cultural progress in the region.<sup>38</sup> In the same context and relevant for understanding the importance given to the French language, the General declared to the correspondent of *'Le Temps'*, that he was delighted to observe that 'a significant progress was made in Transylvania towards the reception of the French language and thought'. The general completes his argument referencing what a Romanian priest told him a few years before: 'The French language is the language of liberty'.<sup>39</sup> The same article referred to the French authorities' involvement in promoting French culture in the region by sending French professors and even supporting such initiatives as founding libraries and organising courses in the French language. However, at a general level, these efforts were considered insufficient but promising: 'the French idea (read thought/influence)' will grow stronger as soon as the language is known in these provinces.<sup>40</sup>

The *Universul* newspaper details the visit from Târgu Mureş. This account is more relevant for imagining the atmosphere in the town in 1927. According to the article, the General arrived from Cluj around noon, accompanied by the French counsellor from Cluj and the one from Timișoara. The local authorities and important members of the community welcomed him. The general and his entourage were welcomed in front of the town hall by the public, accompanied by the music of the military band, which played *La Marseillaise*. The general was very pleased and grateful for the welcome and expressed his enthusiasm with the exclamation: ‘Long live the Great Romania!’<sup>41</sup>

Relevant to the French atmosphere of the town, we believe it is a unique initiative in Transylvania: the establishment of a private French Institute for Girls, recognised as a high school. We have included some remarks in this study because we believe this initiative is pertinent for creating a general picture of the first interwar decades, which also encompasses the French presence in the already multicultural community, where this high school was very active in organising public events.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, it serves as an invitation to interdisciplinary debates aimed at understanding and examining the evolution and development of Francophonie in Romanian society after the war.

The French Works Joint-Stock Company financially supported the French Institute/Girls High School. From the beginning, the teaching staff and the students have reflected and contributed to the city’s multicultural environment, with Romanian and French teachers, the latter coming from the French University Mission, and the students being both Romanian and Hungarian.

According to the school documents, the school was attended by all minorities in the country who, ‘alongside the local element, have the same advantages’.<sup>43</sup> Without detailing, what is relevant in the present study, intended to provide a general overview on the multicultural landscape in which Lorand Gaspar was born, as well as on how the town turned into a ‘francophone one,’ is the mission and objectives assumed by the institute, that of ‘conveying Western cultural’ values. Moreover, one of the school reports stated that such an institute ‘will contribute to the spread of culture and interaction between students of different ethnicities, as no criteria such as religion and nationality are taken into consideration during enrollment, ‘the primary concern being to provide thorough French instruction and a broad artistic education.’<sup>44</sup> Overall, the school is presented as the perfect example of creating a sense of community and fraternity. Therefore, the French language and culture are presented as a unifying factor for the members of different ethnic groups.

Embracing multiculturalism and fostering the French language and culture will enhance the uniqueness of the town and region. The political changes at the start of the interwar period faced challenges, controversies, and conflicts. Nonetheless, the Mureş area also exemplifies a welcoming attitude towards cultural reception and integration, which is essential to its identity. The history of this space has left its mark on the personality of Lorand Gaspar, whose multilingualism and interdisciplinary profile are rooted in the long and sometimes complicated history of this cultural space— a fact he never denied. On the contrary: ‘Coming from a family that embraces cultural differences has made me very proud.’<sup>45</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Carr, *What Is History?* Cambridge, Penguin Books, 1961, p. 17.
2. Sorin Mitu, *Identități moderne în Transilvania*, Cluj-Napoca, Argonaut, 2016, p. 14.
3. *Id.*, *Transilvania mea. Istorie, mentalități, identități*, Iași, Polirom, 2013, p. 34.
4. "Dincolo de exercițiul înțelegerii sinelui. O convorbire între Smaranda Enache și Lorand Gaspar", in *Gazeta de Mureș*, No. 25, 1992, p. 6.
5. We refer to the photographic album published in Romania: Lorand Gaspar, *Approche de la lumière*. Cluj-Napoca, Koinónia, 2008.

6. "Dincolo de exercițiul înțelegerii sinelui. O convorbire între Smaranda Enache și Lorand Gaspar", in *Gazeta de Mureș*, No. 25, 1992, p. 6.
7. Ioan Aurel Pop, Thomas Nágler and Magyari András (Eds.), *Istoria Transilvaniei*, volumes I-III, Cluj-Napoca, Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2008.
8. Sorin Mitu, *Identități moderne în Transilvania*, p. 18. The premises for changes in their political status will emerge in the 18th century when the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church was formed.
9. Nowadays, the expression refers to Covasna, Harghita, and part of Mureș County. It does not have administrative significance; however, the inhabitants, the Hungarian-speaking Szeklers, share a strong ethnic identity that includes preserving traditions and exhibiting significant autonomous tendencies.
10. Sorin Mitu, *Identități moderne în Transilvania*, p. 17.
11. "Dincolo de exercițiul înțelegerii sinelui. O convorbire între Smaranda Enache și Lorand Gaspar", in *Gazeta de Mureș*, No. 25, 1992, p. 6.
12. Lorand Gaspar, *Derrière le dos de Dieu*, Paris, Gallimard, 2010, p. 8. Quoted by Corina Bozedeau, "Lorand Gaspar or the Writing of a Complex Existential Path", in *Acta Marisiensis. Seria Philologia*, 5, Issue 1, 2023, p. 82. DOI: 10.2478/amph-2023-0088. "Derrière le dos de Dieu": nom donné à cette région de la Transylvanie orientale où se situent les rudes villages des hauts plateaux des Carpates dont mes grands-parents étaient originaires".
13. It was the center of Szekler County and later the municipal residence of Mureș county.
14. Ioan Eugen Man, *Târgu-Mureș: istorie urbană. De la începuturi până în anul 1850*, vol. I. Târgu-Mureș, Nico, 2006. p. 38.
15. *Ibidem*, III, p. 287.
16. *Ibidem*, p. 290.
17. *Ibidem*, II, p. 177.
18. *Ibidem*, II, p. 177.
19. Reference for Jewish community in the city available at: [https://www.izraelsarokms.ro/tort\\_detailro.php?id=40&cp=1&tip=1](https://www.izraelsarokms.ro/tort_detailro.php?id=40&cp=1&tip=1) (Accessed 14 April 2025)
20. *Ibidem*.
21. Cornel Sigmirean, "Evreii din Tîrgu Mureș. Ghetou si Holocaust", in Pál-Antal Sándor, Sebestyén Mihály (összeáll.): *Maros-Torda megyei olvasókönyv*, Lelöhely: adatbank.ro; Digitális szövegtárak. An English version of the study was published in *Studia Universitatis Petru Maior. Series Historia*, no.1, 2014 available at [http://old.upm.ro/cercetare/studia\\_historia/](http://old.upm.ro/cercetare/studia_historia/)
22. *Ibidem*.
23. *Ibidem*.
24. Man, IV, p. 9.
25. 'Transylvanianism' originates in the second half of the 19th century, after the 1867 dualist pact marked by a profound centralization from Budapest. Gyula Dávid, "Transilvanismul. Câteva considerații în legătură cu conceptul și prezențele lui în trecut și prezent", in Francois Breda, Valentin Trifesco, Luminița Ignat-Coman, Giordano Altarozzi eds., *Austrian Influences and Regional Identities in Transylvania*, Bratislava Ab-Art, 2012, p. 148.
26. *Ibidem*.
27. *Ibidem*.
28. *Ibidem*, p. 150.
29. Imola Katalin Nagy, "Transylvanianism as Identity Discourse", in *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica*, 6, 3 (2014), pp. 317-333, DOI: 10.1515/ausp-2015-0021, <https://acta.sapientia.ro/en/series/philologica/publications-acta-philolo/philologica-contents-of-volume-6-no-3-2014/transylvanianism-as-identity-discourse> (Accessed 10 February 2025).
30. Carmen Sylva is the literary pseudonym of Queen Elisabeta of Romania. In the interwar period, her name was given to the now-seaside resort Eforie Sud.
31. "Dincolo de exercițiul înțelegerii sinelui. O convorbire între Smaranda Enache și Lorand Gaspar", in *Gazeta de Mureș*, No. 25, 1992, p. 6.

32. Lornad Gaspar attended a Roman Catholic religious gymnasium. We lack information on his primary school, which could have been one of the five primary schools in the city in 1924. See Gheorghe-Ovidiu Czinka, *Învățământul primar confesional: orthodox, Greco-catolic, romano-catolic, reformat, unitarian, luteran, izraelit, particular și de stat, românesc și maghiar din județul Mureș, de la începuturi până la 30 august 1940*, Sângeorgiu de Mureș, Cronică Mureșeană, 2024, p. 174.
33. Note that the yearbook refers to 1940-1941, the first school year after the Vienna Dictate, when Northern Transylvania (Târgu Mureș included) was ceded to Hungary. In the text, it says that the Hungarian population of the city received the news joyfully. Daróczi, L., ed., *Évkönyve az 1940-41*, Marosvásárhely: Nagy Samu Könyvnyomdája, 1941, p. 8. 'It was organized the adornment of the city with Hungarian flags and insignia, the students making over 150 coats of arms. On 2 September, teachers participated in a „Te Deum in the Roman Catholic parish church in gratitude.'
34. According to the documents from 1941-1942 he was also active in the scouts group: '181. sz. *Szent Imre Cserkészcsapat*' (181 Saint Emeric Scouts Group). He held the position of „orvezeto” (chief of patrol) - leading position within a subunit of scouts.
35. Where 1 is excellent and 4 is poor as equivalents to grades.
36. The distinction translates: 'He promoted with distinction'. Daróczi, L. (Ed.). (1943). *Évkönyve az 1942-43. Tanévről*, Marosvásárhely: Nagy Samu Könyvnyomdája, p. 33.
37. Noteworthy, the first Romanian high schools to be founded in the city will also offer French as a foreign language.
38. S.n., *Transilvania*, no. 8-9, 1927, p. 380.
39. *Ibidem*.
40. *Ibidem*, p. 381.
41. *Universul*, no. 153, 1927, p. 3.
42. *Universul*, no. 301, 1926, 6. The newspaper describes an artistic event organized for the community.
43. *Annuaire du Lycée et de l'Institut Français de Târgu-Mureș – Roumanie, 1925-1931*, No. 1, March 1931.
44. *Universul*, no. 301, 1926, 6.
45. "Dincolo de exercițiul înțelegerii sinelui. O convorbire între Smaranda Enache și Lorand Gaspar", in *Gazeta de Mureș*, No. 25, 1992, p. 6.