

ELITE, INSTITUTIONS AND SOCIAL PROJECTS

GLIMPSES FROM THE PAST OF AN OLD FAMILY FROM RM. VÂLCEA: SIMIAN FAMILY*

Georgeta GHIONEA**

Abstract: In the Romanian historiography, after 1990, there have been noticed numerous preoccupations of the specialists, to rebuilt aspects from the life and activity of some people who left their mark on the area in which they activated. Simian family wrote a significant part of history from the town of Rm. Vâlcea, as a prosperous family, whose members rapidly advanced on the ladder of the social hierarchy of the town that spreads around Capela Hill. We managed to create an image of this old family from Oltenia, with the objective, limited by the so far researched sources, to reveal aspects from the economic, financial, political and private area of their life.

Key words: Simian family, Râmnicu. Vâlcea, industrialists, politicians, destiny.

A name often mentioned by the people living in this area is that of Simian family, a kin from Rm. Vâlcea, where important traders were born, at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, along with industrialists, lawyers and intellectuals in different fields. Through our approach, we have tried to recreate, as much as possible, the history of this old family from Oltenia. The reconstruction of the most important moments was based on the documents kept in the archives, and less on the written official papers, so it is possible that the material could present historic inadvertences, or in manner of expression, or that some of the names to be repeated, but differently presented, as found in the cited source.

Around 1877, Ion and Nicolae Simian, from *Săliște*¹, came to settle in Râmnicu Vâlcea. Their main occupation was haberdashery with bottles, harnesses, belts, trade that they practiced through a social company called *Articole de Sibiu-Goods* from Sibiu. In the same time, Ion Simian founded a textile based business in

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** 3rd Degree Scientific Researcher, PhD., "C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor" Institute for Research in Social Studies and Humanities from Craiova, of the Romanian Academy; E-mail: getaghionea@yahoo.com

¹ *Săliște*, a village in the region called "mărginime-frontier line" situated in the south of Transylvania, on the foot of Sibiu Mountains, in I. Hașeganu, *Mărginenii în viața economică a Transilvaniei și a Vechiului Regat*, Brașov, 1941, p. 5.

the town. He used to buy large quantities of wool, silk and gold thread, silk and cotton scarves etc. from Comşa Company, based in Ardeal², and then he sold them in his shops, but not only the local ones. The prosperous businesses allow the two, around 1881-1882, to bring their entire family in Rm. Vâlcea. From the same period, the archive documents offer us information about the existence in Rm. Vâlcea of a workshop of ropes, which functioned with a social capital of 40,000 lei, and 41 employees. The same source shows that the workshop was under the care of Dumitru, Ion, Nicolae and Oprea I. Simian brothers. In 1888, the workshop functioned as a social company *Opinca Românească*, had 100 employees and a tannery, where cow hides were tanned. Simian brothers carry out their activity under this association until 1900, when they separated³. From this date on, they started to work on their own. The reasons that produced the breaking-up were: the elder brother, Ion I. Simian renounced the tannery trade, engaging into forest exploitation, and his brothers, having sufficient financial profit, decided to work separately, for their own interests. Thus, Oprea I. Simian bought *the old factory* with 25,000 lei, and the other brothers built their own places. Due to their separation, the social capital for each of them was of 70,000-80,000 lei⁴.

In 1905, the documents indicate in Rm. Vâlcea the next activities, carried out by the Simians: Ion I. Simian was exploiting forests, and Dumitru and Oprea I. Simian owned individual companies of *tannery and rope making*. Besides them, at Rm. Vâlcea, in the mentioned year, the documents attest the existence of a factory of wooden bottles and other items, led by N.N. Simian, and a forest ranger, we assume the brother of the firstly mentioned one, I. N. Simian⁵.

During World War I, Simian family sought refuge in Moldova, and the factories from Rm. Vâlcea functioned under the German supervision. After 1918, the archives indicate a new association of the Simians. Oprea, with his son Nae, and Dumitru, with his son Mitică, founded under the name *Simian Brothers&Sons. The united factories of tannery, leather goods and peasants' sandals from Rm. Vâlcea*, a modern tannery, endowed with modern machinery brought from Germany and Austria⁶. The tannery functioned until 1922, when the association dissolved, and Oprea, along with his sons, Nae and Romică, and Dumitru, with his son Mitică, would carry out their activity separately.

After the death of Oprea I. Simian, in May 1925, the factory would be called "Oprea Simian Sons", the owners being Nae, Romică and Aurel (the sons of Oprea). Under this name, the factory would prove to be highly productive, having a

² *Ibidem*, p. 155.

³ Vâlcea County Department of the National Archives, The National Bank of Romania fund, Rm. Vâlcea Agency, file no. 4/1903-1933, ff. 9-10 (further cited as SJAN Vâlcea).

⁴ *Ibidem*, ff. 12-14.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ *Ibidem*, f. 20; SJAN Dolj, fund, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry from Craiova, file 29/1921, f. 14.

varied range of types of leathers and shoes, which were sold in the entire country⁷. The production of the country was affected by the economic crisis from 1929-1933, the lowest production index of the leather industry being registered in 1930, when the activity of the tannery and leather factory from Rm. Vâlcea was reduced with 60%, as confronted to 1925. In the attempt to revitalise the society, the owners founded, in 1931, a section for the production of pegs (the department was abolished in 1937), and in order to surpass the consequences of the economic crisis from 1934, they resorted to the loans from the National Bank, Rm. Vâlcea Agency. The measures brought a significant improvement, and even the doubling of the production in 1935, as confronted to 1934.

In 1937, Romică Oprea Simian sold his part of the factory (the price of the sale was 815.000 de lei⁸) that he had inherited from his father, to Nae and Aurel, therefore they remained the sole owners⁹. The two brothers managed carefully the factory, becoming involved directly in the supplying with necessary raw materials, and the distribution of the final product. The factory was supplied with sheep, horse, cow, ram skins, brought from Timișoara, Făgăraș, Deva, Craiova, Cernăuți and from abroad, from countries as Denmark, Poland, Australia, or Palestine¹⁰. The tannery was processing 3,360 tons of skins a year, from which there were made different products: box calf (the cow skin tanned with minerals, from which there was made the front side of shoes), butts, the high sides of the peasants' sandals, soles, the low side of the soles, English soles, neat's leather, small leather stripes, waste leather products, peasants' sandals, boots, transmission belts, sandals¹¹ etc. The products of the Simians could be found on the shelves of leather and shoes shops from Vâlcea County, but also from Bucharest, Călărași, Dolj, Gorj, Mehedinți, Olt, la Cernăuți, Chișinău, Roman, Iași, Alba Iulia, Arad, Blaj, Hunedoara, Brașov, Turda, Abrud¹² etc. In 1938, the production of the production of the factory registered the highest level, the archive information indicating the next quantities of products: sole – 250,867 kg, transmission belts – 40,313 kg, waste leather products – 51,858 kg, peasants' sandals – 34,152 kg, neat's leather and small leather stripes – 33,823 kg, belt stripes – 42,428 kg, shoes – 12,738 pairs, whip stripes – 236,627 pieces, ready-made products – 24,040 kg., all of them reaching the total sum of 57,604,453 de lei¹³. In the same year, the same sources indicate the following sales: soles – 212,980 kg, transmission belts – 39.851 kg, waste leather products – 39,806 kg, peasants' sandals – 32,316 kg, neat's leather

⁷ SJAN Vâlcea, fund, the National Bank of Romania, Rm. Vâlcea Agency, file no. 80/1937-1949, f. 12.

⁸ Idem, "Oprea Simian and Sons" Company fund, file no. 1/1925-1944, f. 44.

⁹ *Ibidem*, f. 41.

¹⁰ Idem, personal records Simian Romică-Oprea, file no. 4/1939, unnumbered.

¹¹ Corneliu Tamaș, *Istoria Râmnicului*, Rm. Vâlcea, Antim Ivireanul Publishing House, 1994, p. 178.

¹² SJAN Vâlcea, "Oprea Simian and Sons" Company fund, file 2/1939, unnumbered.

¹³ Idem, personal records Simian Romică-Oprea file no. 4/1939, unnumbered.

and small leather stripes – 28,276 kg, belt stripes – 39,615 kg, shoes – 11,468 pairs, whip stripes – 179,747 pieces, tanned leather waste – 11,789 kg, rasping leather, meat and bones – 253,846 kg, ready-made products – 22,230 kg, with a total value of 56,166,515 de lei¹⁴. The situation of the capacity of production, as regarding “Oprea Simian Sons” factory, between 1935 and 1938, is illustrated by the table below¹⁵:

No.	Year	Production in kilograms	Sales in lei
1.	1935	125,024	12,346,936
2.	1936	235,888	25,498,442
3.	1937	324,174	49,123,994
4.	1938	393,586	56,166,515

In 1939, wishing to become suppliers for the army, the Simians started to enlarge and transform the leather factory. For this purpose, there was built a special construction for tanning the skins through a *slow process*, they replaced the old and damaged machines with new ones, and they also built another shoe factory, able to produce 1.500 pairs a day. In the same year, the factory opened a new branch in Cluj, at no.1-3 Foch Marshal Road (after the Vienna Dictate, the branch was moved to Arad) and another branch at Sibiu, on Prince Nicolae Street¹⁶. The factory renewed the connections with the leather factories from Deva, Oradea, Buzău and Cernavodă¹⁷. Starting with 1941, there was registered a significant growth in the production, consequence of the military orders, the factory working only for the Ministry of National Defence¹⁸.

On the 1st of April 1944, engineer Aurel O. Simian and Nae O. Simian were registering the joint-stock company “O. Simian and Sons Company” with the name *Oprea Simian Sons Companies, trust house founded in 1888*, from no. 68, Col. Ap. Dumitrescu Street, with a social capital of 200 million lei¹⁹. On the mentioned date, the administration board was made of the following members: Nae O. Simian, engineer Aurel O. Simian, Tița Nae Simian, Ecaterina Aurel Simian, C. Gh. Ștefănescu Tică (married with Jeni Simian, sister of Nae, Aurel and Romică), N. Băleanu, Gh. Măcărescu (deputy auditor)²⁰. The object of the society was: *leather industry and commerce, tannery, shoe-making, ready-made civil and military products, forest exploitation, different industrial and commercial operations*²¹. A year later, in 1945, it is abolished the harnesses department, and

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ Idem, “Oprea Simian and Sons” Company fund, file no. 1/1939, f. 1.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, ff. 15, 29, 31, 69, 98.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, file no. 5/1939, f. 79.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, file no. 1/1925-1944, f. 11.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, f. 12.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

remain only the tannery and shoe-making ones. The factory was nationalised on the 11th of June 1948.

Owing to their intellectual training, economic possibilities, social and political aspirations, the Simians belonged to the category of financial and intellectual elite, and succeeded in giving their family opulence and prosperity. In order to have a complete image over the Simians, we have traced, as far as the researched sources allowed us, so far, few aspects from the private and political areas of their lives. Moreover, one of the least approached aspects, as regarding the members of this family, is their involvement in founding some important credit companies from Rm. Vâlcea. One of these companies was: **Vâlcea Bank**. The institution was founded on the 1st of June 1899, as a Savings and Credit Co-operative, being the first institution of this type from Vâlcea County. In 1909, the shareholders of the company, convoked to an extraordinary general assembly and representing the entire social capital, decided its transformation from a credit co-operative into a joint-stock company, with a social capital of 200.000 lei²². On this occasion, the administration board appointed the office members, among which there were: Dinu Simian – president, Mitică Dumitru Simian, Nae Oprea Simian and Aurel Oprea Simian. In the interval 1915-1918, the bank did not have any activity. From its balance sheet, struck on the 31st of December 1933, we find out that during 1930-1932, in this institution, most of the credits were given to farmers, with interests of 8, 9 and 11%. In the same period, in order to handle the restitution of the deposits, the bank had to sell some of its properties. Among these, the building from Col. Apostol Dumitrescu Street and four properties in the communes of Roman-Horezu, Gușoieni and Zlătărei²³. The bank faced more problems in 1933-1939, not being able to fully recover after the economic crisis. On the 1st of February 1943, *Vâlcea Bank* merged with the *Bank of Râmnic*. The merging documents were published in the Bank Official Gazette, no. 10, from the 19th of May 1943; half of year later, on the 16th of December 1943, Banca Vâlcea was erased²⁴.

In the first half of the 20th century, **Oprea I. Simian**, great landlord, got involved in the financial activities from Vâlcea County participating to the creation of the **Bank of Râmnic**. The company was founded on the 16th of May 1905, and admitted as a current account one, by the National Bank Agency from the locality, on the 19th of January 1906²⁵. Once with the founding of the bank Oprea I. Simian, became actively involved in the banking activities, successively holding the positions of director and president of the company. The organizational form of the society was that of a joint-stock company with nominative shares, with unlimited

²² Idem, The National Bank of Romania fund, Rm. Vâlcea Agency, file no. 4/1903-1933, f. 20.

²³ Idem, The Chamber of Commerce and Industry from Vâlcea fund, file no. 33/1931, ff. 18-19.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, f. 1.

²⁵ Idem, The Bank of Râmnic fund, file no. 13/1940, f. 20; *Ibidem*, file no. 17/1947, f. 3; Idem, The Chamber of Commerce and Industry from Vâlcea fund, file no. 57/1931, f. 1.

duration. The bank was founded with the help of the Romanian Bank from Bucharest, which subscribed to the initial social capital, along other 55 citizens from the county, Bucharest and Craiova, most of them traders and landlords. The banking products and services offered by it were: mortgages, and loans in current accounts, guaranteed by deposits, warrants, commercial papers and mortgages. The main services provided by the institution were addressing to the farmers and shepherds from the Communes of Vâlcea și Argeș Counties, in a smaller extent to the traders, for buying goods and viticulturists, for buying agricultural inventory. He dedicated to the promotion and support of some small and medium credit companies, a part of the credits being directed towards: the Vineyard Bank from Drăgășani, Drăgășani Bank, Viitorul Commercial Bank from Govora, Vaideeni Commercial Bank, Cerna Commercial Bank from Măciuca etc. On the 25th of September 1931, the *Bank of Râmnic* was registered at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry from Vâlcea, with a social capital of 35 million lei. Until the end of 1932, due to the loss resulted from the economic situation, the capital of the company was reduced to 50% (17,500,000 lei)²⁶. In 1943, the Bank of Râmnic merged with Vâlcea Bank, taking all its assets and liabilities. After the merge, the social capital was increased to 27,500,000 lei (10,000,000 lei brought by Vâlcea Bank and 17,500,000 lei by the Bank of Râmnic)²⁷. The company went into liquidation on the 4th of June 1948²⁸.

On the 4th of April 1930, it was founded in Rm. Vâlcea, from the initiative of 18 traders and industrialists "*Albina*" *Popular Bank*. Savings and Credit Co-operative, with unlimited duration, it had the headquarters at no. 154, Traian Street. It was the bank of the craftsmen and industrialists from the locality, and in the first summoned council, **Mitică Dumitru Simian** was appointed for the position of president.

Crângăși Bank, joint-stock company with the headquarters in Rm. Vâlcea, was founded in 1930, by the members of **Simian family**²⁹. In the archive documents, it is registered as a *family bank*, and in the statistics, it is not mentioned after 1934.

The archive information brings us interesting data about other economic activities too, which were carried out by Simian family members. Thus, **Romică Oprea Simian** was a great landlord. He owned two farms in Vâlcea County, one at Bujoreni, with a surface of 42 hectares, and another at Sărăcinești, in the commune Olănești, with a surface of 60 hectares, and a farming property of 165 hectares in the commune of Leșile, Argeș County³⁰. Romică Oprea Simian administrated personally these farms, being very preoccupied with the apiculture. He was the

²⁶ Idem, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry from Vâlcea fund, file no. 57/1931, ff. 2-3.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, file no. 29/1934, f. 107.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, file no. 20/1948, f. 13.

²⁹ "Official Gazette", no. 298/22nd of December 1938, pp. 11,462-11,463.

³⁰ SJAN Vâlcea, personal records Simian Romică-Oprea, file no. 17/1928-1946, ff. 70-72.

vice-president of „Albina” Association of the Beekeepers from Rm. Vâlcea. In 1934, on the occasion of the traditional fall festival “The Fruit Week”, he was awarded a prize for the displayed apicultural products³¹, which were distributed both in Vâlcea County, and in Bucharest. He was the owner of a nice house at no. 32, on Carol I Street, Rm. Vâlcea, he also owned a house in Olănești, one in Bucharest, and a private automobile. As regarding his brother, **Nae Oprea Simian**, he was a founding member and shareholder at 5 banks from the locality, he was the owner of a building on Mircea Vodă Street, from Rm. Vâlcea, and he managed to build, in the centre of the town, on Carol I Street, a lovely Andalusian house, which today hosts the Art Museum of the town.

The most famous member of the Simian family was **Dinu Simian** (we assume that he was the son of Dumitru I. Simian and the brother of Mitică Dumitru Simian). He was: a lawyer, landlord, liberal deputy (1922-1926), president of PNȚ Vâlcea (1927-1938), national-peasant deputy, elected between 1928-1937, vice-president of the Chamber of Deputies during Vaida-Voievod governing³² and deputy-secretary for the Internal Affairs, during the same governing (1937-1938)³³. The headquarters of PNȚ Vâlcea organisation was, during his presidency, his own house (the place where today there is Union restaurant)³⁴. Due to his political and economic activity carried out in Vâlcea, **Mitică Dumitru Simian** also became a well-known figure. Mayor of Râmnic, between 1922-1926³⁵ and 1931-1932 (from the National Union, led by Nicolae Iorga), president of the Traders Council, from Vâlcea County, president of the Chamber of Commerce of Vâlcea County, deputy after the elections from 1939, Mitică Dumitru Simian was a great landlord, an expert accountant, the owner of a building on Col. Ap. Dumitrescu Street, inherited from his father, Dumitru I. Simian, and another one on Traian Street, both in the locality. His father, **Dumitru I. Simian**, great landlord, made his debut in the politics as a member of the National Liberal Party, later joining the ranks of the Conservatory-Democrat Party of Take Ionescu, the branch from Rm. Vâlcea.

The information that we have after 1948, about the Simians, are dispersed and come from different sources. Thus, about Nae and Aurel Oprea Simian Brothers, we have found that they fled to Argentina, in 1947, along with their families. Aurel Oprea Simian had only one daughter, Ancuța, who died in 1944, due to a heart disease. Arrested around 1950, Dinu Simian was sent to the prison of the officials from Sighet. The family of Dinu had a tragic destiny. Dinu Simian

³¹ *Ibidem*, file no. 16/1931, unnumbered.

³² “Îndrumarea Vâlcei”, Rm. Vâlcea, no. 2/1 September 1932, p. 1.

³³ Radu Livezeanu, *Scurtă privire asupra vieții Organizației Partidului Național Țărănesc din județul Vâlcea, între anii 1919-1998*, Rm. Vâlcea, Conphys Publishing House, 1999, p. 45; Diana-Mihaela Păunoiu, *Rezidența regală a Ținutului Olt (1938-1940)*, Bucharest, Romanian Academy Publishing House, 2012, p. 89.

³⁴ Corneliu Tamaș, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 183.

died at Sighet; Tañti Simian, his wife, passed away in 1971, after a fight with the cancer, his son, Sergiu, was sentenced to work in the Canal, and died shortly after he was released, and his daughter, Mira Simian, great poetess and painter, left Romania in 1946, along with her husband, Ștefan Baciu³⁶. Mitică Simian killed himself in 1948, jumping from the balcony of his house, when he saw the Security members from Vâlcea coming to arrest him. He had two children, Doralina and Radu³⁷.

Haberdashers at first, stand owners, deputies, traders or bankers, the Simians affirmed themselves as a significant presence in the socio-economic dynamics from the town of Rm. Vâlcea. The Knowledge of the market, their ability to use the loans and the art to make the capital shift rapidly, were just few of the qualities that made them famous in the economic and financial areas that were developing in the locality.

³⁶ Gheorghe Dican, *Comorile Casei Simian*, available online at http://www.muzeu-valcea.ro/buridava/B10_27.pdf.

³⁷ Mihai Pelin, *Opisul emigrației politice*, Bucharest, Compania Publishing House, 2002, p. 300.