

# THE HISTORY ALIENATION IN ROMANIA IN '60-'80 OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

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## ALIENAREA ISTORIEI ÎN ROMÂNIA ANILOR 60-80 AI SECOLULUI XX

**ABSTRACT:** *Between the end of the Second World War and 1989, there is no area of activity in Romania in which the ideology did not intrude changing the initial message. This fundamental characteristic of the totalitarian state is very clear. It is a fact the use of the history museums, by the political authority, as a propaganda mean. The museum, which was considered too many times a political institution, was transformed in a very efficient instrument of ideological modeling. Here, the people went beyond the abstract of the books and came direct and visual contact with a national history, as it was presented in the history sections of the exhibitions. The museum became very quickly a high point of interest for the political authority because it was a direct and very efficient way of informing the citizens on their historic past, according to who had the power. The historic past was permanently a terra incognita, because from one era to another new interpretive valence were added, and we do not talk about the scientific interpretation, but of political and ideological interpretations. In consequence, the Romanian museums knew in this period several changes. Soon after the communists took complete control over power, the change of the Romanian museum became an important objective in the Romanian culture. Starting with the 1948, all the museum which were already open were transformed, while the new ones were in accordance with the new ideology.*

**KEYWORDS:** Alienation of History, Museums, Exhibition, Propaganda, Ideology

**REZUMAT:** *Între sfârșitul celui de-al doilea război mondial și anul 1989, nu există o zonă de activitate în România în care ideologicul să nu se fi intruzionat. Aceasta este de altfel o caracteristică fundamentală a statului totalitar. În acest context, muzeele de istorie au fost utilizate propagandistic de către autoritățile politice ale vremii.*

*Muzeul de istorie, considerat de prea multe ori o instituție politică, a fost transformat într-un instrument foarte eficient de modelare ideologică a populației, în special a celor tineri. În interiorul instituției muzeale oamenii treceau dincolo de abstractul cărților intrând în contact vizual direct cu o istorie națională, așa cum a fost ea prezentată în secțiile de istorie ale expozițiilor permanente.*

*Muzeul a devenit foarte repede un punct de interes important pentru autoritatea politică, deoarece era un mod foarte eficient de a informa cetățenii despre trecutul, în funcție de contextul ideologic și nuanțele regimului de la București. Trecutul istoric a fost în permanență o terra incognita, deoarece de la o epocă la alta s-au adăugat noi valențe interpretative și nu vorbim despre interpretarea științifică, ci despre interpretări politice și ideologice.*

**CUVINTE CHEIE:** Alienarea istoriei, muzee, expoziție, propagandă, ideologie

Between the end of the Second World War and 1989, there is no area of activity in Romania in which the ideology did not intrude changing the initial message. This fundamental characteristic of the totalitarian state is very clear<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Originile totalitarismului* (București: Editura Humanitas, 1994) p. 448–476.

It is a true fact the use of the history museums, by the political authority, as a propaganda mean. The museum, which was considered too many times a political institution, was transformed in a very efficient instrument of ideological modeling. Here, the people went beyond the abstract of the books and came direct and visual contact with a national history, as it was presented in the history sections of the exhibitions.

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Actually, the history exhibit in the Romanian museums, during the communist regime was nothing but a permanent change in accordance with what was happening in the Romanian historiography. There is also a close connection between the evolutions of history and the content of the history exhibitions. The themes and the accents presented in the historiography were presented in the exhibitions. These evolutions were closely connected with the political regime existed in Romania in one period or another. All this along the four and the half decades led to several changes which lack in real scientific support. These overlap the great steps of the external and internal Romanian politics. Except the first part of the 50's, perhaps the most intense ideological control, translated in a continuous change of the Romanian museums, was in the 80's, in the context of an exaggerated cult of personality, which regarded the secretary of the Romanian Communist Party.

During the extended plenum of the CC of PCR on 1<sup>st</sup> of June 1982 Nicolae Ceausescu presented a point of view regarding the "*actual state of socialism edification to theoretical problems, ideological and to the political and educational activity of the party*"<sup>2</sup>. There was stated an idea which was not understood at that time, but which referred directly to the Romania museums. He spoke about "*the unification of the museums in one center of history, which will contain all the important documents, while the museum from other centers will contain document referring to the area in which the museum is*"<sup>3</sup>. The content of the speech is contradictory. The evolution of the situation clears up the statement, actually regarding the unification of the permanent history exhibitions from the Romanian museums, which except a few arguments of local history, were meant to underline the national history as a whole.

Shortly after, Gavrilă Sarafolean, member of the editorial office of the Magazine of Museums and Monuments, was entering into a vast activity for the entire museographic front, to translate "*in life the precious instructions given to the cultural institutions by the general secretary of the party, tovarish Nicolae Ceausescu, to become a center of revolutionary, patriotic education, for our men*"<sup>4</sup>. It is hard to believe that this kind of mobilization was made in its own name. It was more an ideological impulse.

Not long after this moment were to come the necessary instructions, actually the new unique theme for the exhibitions, capable to contribute directly to the configuration of the "new man". In April 1985 museums were receiving the document *The framework theme for the county history museums*. Leaving aside the cacophony in the title, this document contained a unique theme, which left little space for the specific of the county, being elaborated by the Propaganda Section and Press Agency of the Central Committee, of the Romanian Communist Party, led by general Constantin Olteanu, together with

<sup>2</sup> Ceaușescu 1982, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> Ceaușescu 1982, p. 67

<sup>4</sup> Sarafolean 1985, p. 19.

Council of Culture and Socialist Education, institution led by Suzana Gâdea and second in command, Iulian Antonescu.

The document sent to all the museums was 45 pages long. From the very beginning this was a disproportion, from the point of view of the balance of the shown objects, since the majority of the exhibition was dedicated to the contemporary history. From 45 pages, only 11 were given to a history, other than contemporary. Actually about 27% of the new exhibition was for the ancient, medieval and modern history, while 73% was for the contemporary history, which according to the theme, started with "8<sup>th</sup> of May. *The birth of the Romanian Communist Party*"<sup>5</sup>. With few exceptions, the whole part of the contemporary history was dedicated to the communist party. The theme of the other ages, cabined in 11 pages, from which 2.5 ancient history, 4 medieval and 4.5 modern history, with the mention that in the last case, a page was exclusively given for the explanations for the "*birth of the political party of the labour class*"<sup>6</sup>.

The big ideological themes of that age were very well put in work, while promoting the exhibitional theme. Actually, the official historiography was promoted. The theme of the continuing living of the Romanian people in this geographic area of contemporary Romania was a red thread along this project. In the very first sub-theme which was supposed to be exhibit "The ancient history or the Romanian people" this thing is very well presented. Even though the theme was referring to the beginnings of the Romanian history, we see that actually the theme is about the Paleolithic and Neolithic, ages which have nothing in common with the notion Romanian people.

The next major sub-themes were dedicated to Dacian people, underlining the idea that they are our ancestry. In this chapter, the importance of the Romans was reduced, because according to the official theme they did not have to be mention as ancestry of the Romanian people. At most what was to be mentioned was the idea of the two nations combined, but with an obvious small number of Romans.

The part dedicated to the medieval age, was meant to underline the idea that the Romanian people had developed as a united nation<sup>7</sup>. It is true that the entire theme was subordinated to this idea. Sub-titles like *The economic affairs between the Romanian countries, The establishment of feudal states the Romanian Country, Moldavia, Transylvania and Dobrogea, The united fight of the Romanian countries for independence, The cultural bounds between the Romanian countries*, etc, underline this constant attention. Other ideological traditions, like the negative influence of the foreign domination and its role in the development of the countries, was present in sub-chapters like *Depredation of the countries*<sup>8</sup>. In the exhibitional project dedicated to the Medieval Period are very well known ideas like: the exacerbation of the peasants in their fight for freedom, the scumble of the leaders role, others then Nicolae Ceausescu, as they are presented in a painting by Sabin Bălașa, the several attempts to unite the countries, and others, all of this presented in the official documents of the Party, starting with the program of the Romanian Communist Party, the speeches held by the leader from Bucharest, or in the works of the official history men. It is interesting how the problem of continuity, an important aspect of the historiography and ideology during the Ceausescu regime is being solved. They took for granted the idea launched by the Party, that after the roman army retreated, Dacia remained a state with no organization whatsoever and very weak in front of the migrations<sup>9</sup>.

The modern time is not that affected by the ideology, at least that is what the project shows. The formation of the modern state is underlined. With all this important aspect of the Romanian history is omitted, while minor aspects for the history, but important for the Communist Party, are underlined. We refer here to the "Falanster" from Scaeni, "The position of the socialist worker movement regarding the

<sup>5</sup> MȚCO, inv. 8692.

<sup>6</sup> MȚCO, inv. 8692.

<sup>7</sup> MȚCO, inv. 8692.

<sup>8</sup> MȚCO, inv. 8692, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> MȚCO, inv. 8692, p. 12.

war of independence”, the birth of the labour party in Romania. All this had to be presented in the exhibitions. If until 1893, the birth of PSDMR, part that talks about the modern history is accepted, but from that historical moment, going on with the XX century, the exhibit follows almost exclusively the ideology. For example, the period between 1893- 1914 had to be represented by the following sub-themes: *Professional and political worker’s organization, The socialist propagandism, The peasantry movement, The social democrat worker’s party from Romania and its place in the social- economical life, The great peasantry fight from 1907, International solidarity*. In this way it was suggested that these were the most important historic moments that are worth presented in an exhibition.

The XX century was the one who suffered the biggest changes of all. What is surprising in the document and then in the exhibition is the fact that the period between 1918- 1944 is described in four pages, while the period between 1945- 1985, the rest of 30 pages. This thing will be reflected in the exhibitions as well. Even more striking is the proportions given to the communist period. So for Dej’s period we have only two pages, while for the Ceausescu regime we have 28 pages. And what is even more interesting is the fact that the two pages about the period between 1945–1965, 1.75 of the pages is about the period between 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1944- 30<sup>th</sup> of December 1947 and only 0.25 is about the Dej regime. Actually, this period of contemporary history is almost inexistent, the name Dej is not even mentioned.

This comparison is important to understand the trend of that period in the Romanian history. The cult for Ceausescu had to be present in the museums as well as mean of education for the young generation, through the example he gives.

Those 28 pages about “*The Golden Age*”, star, of course, with the IX<sup>th</sup> Congress. From this moment on everything was presented in detail, being mentioned even the pictures and the texts are about to be exhibited.

Obligatorily, the text which was meant to be at the beginning of the expository part dedicated this historic period, leaves no doubt on the importance of years during the Ceausescu regime. “*The period started by the IX<sup>th</sup> Congress, is the most important period from the point of view of achievements, which are closely related to the activity of tovarish Nicolae Ceausescu, general secretary of the Romanian Communist Party*”<sup>10</sup>. The announced is as clear as it can be for the visitors, regarding what is going to exhibit and in which way. Along with this text, of course that it had to be exhibit the picture of Nicolae Ceausescu at the grand stand at the IX<sup>th</sup> Congress of P.C.R.<sup>11</sup>.

From now on, the entire theme will try to plea the opening text of the exhibitional part, dedicated to “Nicolae Ceausescu period”. Various comparisons, pictures presenting Nicolae Ceausescu talking to the people, the argument for the solid unity, the industrial revolution in the 20’s, the welfare of the people, due to the development of work, education, culture, all these presenting people with smile on their face.

The theme of the exhibits is very explicit. All the museums had to reorganize their exhibits, so they can be a tribute to the president of the state. Most of the museums all over the country changed their main history exhibits, one of them completely and others only for that period of contemporary history. That is way in that period all the museums look-a- like. For visitors was enough to see one museum and he could say he saw them all. Few particular aspects accepted by the C.C. of P.C.R. did not change much the idea of the exhibition. So, in this manner the will of the general secretary of P.C.R., from Mangalia in 1–2 June 1982, to unify the museums all over the country comes true.

It seems like the thing would stop here. Few months later it proved to be wrong. Educating the young Romanian people, through the model presented by Ceausescu in the exhibits, was not enough. The cult for personality had to be underlined with other means too. This thing led to an exhibition

<sup>10</sup> MȚCO, inv. 8692, pp. 17–18.

<sup>11</sup> MȚCO, inv. 8692, p. 18.



named: "*Nicolae Ceausescu period-the age of the greatest achievements of the Romanian people 1965- 1985*". Starting from the title, given by the CCES, the sense and the content of the exhibition is clear.

At the beginning of June 1985, museums all over the country received an address signed by second in command at CCES, Iulian Antonescu, in which museums were invited to organize their exhibitions with the title mentioned above, until 10<sup>th</sup> of July 1985. The main coordinates for the exhibit were presented in 32 pages. All the pictures, the achievements presented Nicolae Ceausescu as the main character. Nothing around him, just the people, an impersonal, amorphous, mass which he wanted to control and keep close to him.

Along the years 1985–1986, many museums had to change their contemporary history exhibits, and not only that according to the pattern. The end of the exhibitions according to the new orders was an ordeal for the curators. Before opening the exhibits were visited by ideological commission from different levels. Each of them had something to add, so that after they left, the curators had to change things according to them. There were cases when a commission came and said something, another one came to change what the first one said, and the third one came to agree with the first one.

The last years of the regimen were as dark as Romanian museography. In the last five years the role of the museum as an instrument of propaganda grew. The cult of personality manifested directly in museums. New orders came from the propaganda and press section of C.C. from P.C.R.

The last attempt to update the exhibits was released few months before the fall of the Ceausescu regimen. So, on 28<sup>th</sup> of February 1989 a new document given by the same section of propaganda from C.C. and P.C.R., signed by General Constantin Olteanu. Museum got the document in the first days of March 1989. The order was as clear as possible: "*We send you the selected texts from the meeting of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, of democratic organizations, given by the general secretary of Romanian Communist Party, tovarish Nicolae Ceausescu, in November 1988, for the update of the history exhibits in county museums*"<sup>12</sup>. As clear was the deadline to finish this action in the museums. The deadline was 30<sup>th</sup> of March 1989. Not all the museums were receptive at this new idea. The document was received on 4–5 of March 1989, leaving only three weeks to complete the task. Many of the museums did nothing regarding this document, leading to several inconveniences for the administration<sup>13</sup>.

In 12 pages it was written in details all the necessary movement to change the exhibition. With no exception all the texts were from Nicolae Ceausescu's speech delivered in the plenary of CC of PCR, from 28–30<sup>th</sup> of November 1988. Even subtle changes were proposed. For example, it was asked to replace the existing phrase "*the carpato-danubiano-pontic space*", with "*the birth and living space or the Romanian people*" or "*the first Dacian centralized country*" with "*the centralized and free state of Dacian people*".

The main idea underlined by this investigation course, is that like other fields, the Romanian museography was used along the years as a propagandistic mean. This made these institutions to live in very small and controlled horizon. The curators were used in propagandistic way, sometimes without their will. There are few things that you could do in a museum and not to be controlled. Even so, museums were a huge resource for research. In a totalitarian political system, like the one in Romania, in order to survive, museums had to go on under the terms given by the political regimen.

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