

ECONOMIC STAKES AND SYMBOLIC CONFRONTATIONS IN LATE 19TH - CENTURY ROMANIAN MUSEOLOGY

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Abstract: *In the 19th century, Romanians made inventories of anything they found, without being aware of the history that would be likely to integrate those artefacts. As the criteria for making these typologies were not clearly defined, all kinds of beginnings and origins were identified, while diachronic or staging analyses were not particularly looked after. But the so-called “curiosities” had their public, the exceptions to the rule and the bizarre objects being still strongly promoted. A thing that amazes us seems thus to be instructive by itself, and there is no more need to include it into a temporal succession, into a causal chain.*

Later, including the exhibit into a typology grew more interesting, as it confirmed a species, an evolution, and an epoch. This was a typical attitude for late antiquaries. Their researches did not illustrate an already formulated meta-narrative, they only gathered its premises. Step by step, they passed from the mere fascination with facts, characters and vestiges coming from illo tempore, to the intention of remaking the history of an exhibit, starting from its present and going back, following its story. The inventories betray the way in which history is perceived at one point, the way in which given samples are included in one sort of sources or another. For instance, changing the status of an object from “curiosity” to “source” – contributing to the reconstruction of a past – supposes progress in the adjacent sciences and the appearance of new information, allowing a real capitalization of an otherwise picturesque object.

The transition was not an easy one, the objects brought in the museum standing there for effigies of lost worlds, while not offering much information about them. Initially too few and too disparate, the exhibits were moving with difficulty from the phase of reminding of a given epoch to that where they could actually participate in the completion of a collective biography, of a narrative puzzle. The taste for something was one thing, the curiosity about it was something else and its systematic investigation was a completely different thing. Only at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, the positivist school operated a separation between the “monument” and the “document”, providing the latter with a rather textual than material connotation.

Keywords: *Romanian museology, 19th century, positivist school, reconstruction of the past, curiosity, archaeological trips*

In a report of the manager Alexandru Russo, dated 22 June 1870, the inventory of the Antiquities National Museum was divided into four categories: an antiquity one, an ecclesiastic one, a numismatic one, and a last one of rarities and curiosities (ANRB, file 140/1870, 280 recto). One should notice that it was organized neither chronologically nor thematically, but according to the nature or utility that the exhibits had once had. If we draw a typology of the acquisitions made in the second half of the 19th century, as it results from the documents that mention them, we find out that there were: 1) items found by mistake, particularly on the occasion of railway works; 2) those discovered by treasure hunters; 3) acquisitions determined by archaeological trips; 4) private donations; 5) notifications by benevolent persons to the ministry (objects without owner); 6) the propositions of some members of the archaeological Committee; 7) antiquaries and

“connoisseurs” who had started their activity for a long time, by their own, with no State support; 8) investments policy for the completion of the museum inventory; 9) the ex officio interventions of the authorities to save endangered objectives; 10) some officials’ desire to help a poor collector, a friend, a political client, buying from him with budget money.

Besides the interest for history, there were also material stakes, which played an important role as well. One could therefore easily notice a slightly contentious succession of persons that tried to get an at least temporary monopoly on the inventorying and the acquiring of the future exhibits. More precisely, this person, claiming a new talent, invoked a higher professional training, attacking thus the preferential regime that the rival had in exploiting historical vestiges. For instance, under Al. I. Cuza, the topic was somehow

dominated by Dimitrie Pappasoglu, who explained his pretensions by the fact that his travels as a military had favoured a detailed understanding of worthy objectives. One can especially notice his desire to obtain a certain primacy in the field, on the grounds that he was the only one who knew patrimonial topography. He will be rivalled by Cezar Bolliac, and Bolliac will be contested, in his turn, by Odobescu (Odobescu 1955, 107-118). The latter had had many enemies because of his lecture on the history of archaeology, delivered at the University of Bucharest in 1874. Trying to make a separation between antiquaries and archaeologists, he used to talk to the students about the “fantasies of the antiquarilo-explorers, who have no other reason than a childish curiosity, whitewashed with fake erudition, acquired after having browsed some dictionary” (Odobescu 1961, 143)¹.

For us to understand in what precise phase the establishment of this museum is, we should make a distinction between the curious, the antiquaries and the collectors: 1) the curious, eager to accumulate objects as diverse as possible, made of the *difference* and of the variety a mini-show, transforming the collection into a menagerie, a carousel, a circus; they were greedy for rarity and uniqueness, looking rather for the unusual than for the beautiful (Rheims 1959, 5); 2) the antiquaries were easily fascinated of the age of monuments, being preoccupied to save their memory at a descriptive and graphic level; we owe them the first field researches and the first attempts to catalogue and to classify; 3) the collectors preferred specialized, thematic accumulations, the catalogues made by them lying at the origin of some museum conceptions; for them, the acquisition of a whole series of items, up to the last one, was in a way a reason to live (Rheims 1959, 3-4). Unlike the classical collector, the *self-educated* one fed the illusion that he would contribute to the formation or preservation of the historical or artistic heritage of the country (Pety 2001, 80). He actually boasted it, opening a small museum home for those who were interested by his explorations (Pety 2001, 80)².

For the western area, a differentiation is important between the well-developed culture or practices of collection, on the one hand, and the institutional

development that was not perfect there either, on the other hand. In France, the National Antiquity Museum had been established in March 1862, and opened for real in 1867. The 4 March 1874 Decree, on the organization of the national museums, did not stipulate either anything special about the storage of items. But the French museums knew how to create competition between the donators, tempting them with special honours: commemorative plaques, busts, portraits, special rooms, the possibility to associate, as co-donor, a close relative (Long 2001, 52-53). As Véronique Long noticed, the museum could become the mausoleum of a family, perpetuating somehow its memory (Long 2001, 53). The very acceptance of the donation, after the report made by the specialists in the field, granted the donator a significant degree of notoriousness, explaining why the number of donations during one's lifetime (containing few objects) exceeded that of posthumous ones (much more significant from a quantitative point of view). The historians of the field show that the year 1870 would be an important benchmark at the European level: especially in the West, the *collectionism* transformed from an elitist hobby into a social vogue (Pety 2001, 74-75). Furthermore, Gustave Flaubert mocked this kind of Bovarysme by means of his heroes, Bouvard and Pécuchet, suddenly passionate about Celtic archaeology and firmly convinced that they had discovered a druidic pot in a nettle shrub (Flaubert 1997, 108-109).

The discourse by which private persons offered their collections to sale contained several arguments, by which they hoped to raise awareness of the authorities: the personal effort on the long run; the increase of the national wealth; the danger for the objects to be dispersed or even taken out of the country; the privations and difficulties of their daily lives. This kind of pleas contained a significant self-laudatory segment. They were counting upon the identity between the donator and the donated things, the qualities of the collection being symbolically transferred on the collector³. We are not interested in how the immediate *addressee* (the minister of Cults) received these words. It is important how the *receiver* – that is the current researcher of these documents – understands to “translate” these little pleas; it is important to be aware, more precisely, of how was created the confusion between the *probity* of the person who made donations, the

¹ The book appeared in 1877. Comparing the antiquary to the archaeologist, Odobescu said that the difference between them was actually that between a house painter and an artist (Odobescu 1961, 63).

² Part of the category of the “self-educated” are most of the persons we talk about in this study.

³ The relations between donator and donations are analysed in Văduva 1997, 97.

authenticity of the thing on sale and the *truth* of the museum reconstructions that the object in question was part of.

Yet, the donations did not involve the gratuity they involve today. They were negotiated in two forms: sometimes, the supplier said he donated some objects out of patriotism, willingly decreasing a price – supposedly much higher if he was to sell his earnings to foreigners; other times, the plea suggested that the acceptance of the donation by the ministry would have been a charitable (compensatory) gesture towards the poor donator. The fact that the passion to collect was a possibility to get both money and posterity can be inferred from a letter of Dimitrie Pappasoglu, dated 27 September 1875, perfectly compatible to our assertions: “...During forty-five years, collecting all kinds of antiques that I could find in the districts of Romania, I respectfully propose to sell them to You, for the enrichment of the State museum, and I am honoured to note down in the enclosed catalogue the separations, the kind and number of those antiques. So if you, Minister, condescended to agree to buy them, I promise to ask You the most moderate prices, as I want to offer them for the use of my natal country, *kindly asking You to order for my name to be recorded in the register of the museum*” (RNAB, file 120/1875, 218 recto-verso). If that collection was that important, why did he not sell it to a better price? The civic spirit offered a covering discourse, as many of the collected objects, though very old, were not of aesthetic, but only of historical relevance, limited anyway to the Romanian area. Pappasoglu is somewhere between the specialist collector, the provincial collector and the occasional collector. Guy de Maupassant used to be ironic with this kind of people, who collected everything they came upon (“everything that is old, everything that is rare, everything that is ugly”), transforming their home into a bazaar or a deposit of ceramics (Pety 2001, 78). The collections of this kind did not legitimate the social ascension of the owner, getting him another type of respectability, a scientific one (Pety 2001, 78). Anyway, he was not looking for the beautiful, but for the old, he was not writing history, but only comments upon its material traces (Pety 2001, 78).

In May 1888, Pappasoglu wrote again to Minister Titu Maiorescu, proposing him to buy a collection with “8 separations” (ANRB, file 11/1888, 35)⁴.

⁴ Titu Maiorescu’s apostil recommended for this demand to be simply archived, as “there are no fund provided in the

The memoir brings forth nothing new, as it were somehow typified and resembled the previous offers. Resuming, we can find out in the texts some subterfuges by which the one who makes the offer looks after his interest: 1) a so-called complexity of the collection – “any kind of antiques” as he said – which makes us believe that randomness played a first rank role in its construction; in fact, the “collection” was rather a cabinet of curiosities, with vaguely or not at all ordered things; 2) according to him, his rarities defended us from the enemies abroad, Pappasoglu prophesying in the letter dated 2 January 1867, that those objects “will enlighten those writers who are enemies of our nationality, who often told the world that we are slaves” (Mihai, Bichis 1984, 262)⁵; a proof that the *so-called danger of alienating some antiques was a bluff* – by means of which the collector hoped to receive from the Romanian State the prices he requested – can be found in the same letter, where Pappasoglu asks Odobescu to sell in Paris 180 of his exhibits (Mihai, Bichis 1984, 262)⁶; 3) he says he had collected those exhibits “buying them from the labourers of the land *who had preserved them for us for twenty centuries*”; this is the myth of a progressive countryside, who had always defended the timeless features of the Romanian nation; as if the only occupation of the peasant was to preserve artefacts, so that the modernity could grant them later an identity meaning; 4) the assimilation of the traces of the past with some “sacred monuments of our glorious ancestors”, confers the small vestiges a semi-cultural value; 5) the Salvationist myth: by his labour, the patriot collector chased the agents of the foreign antiquaries, remaking his people owners of relics that they would have otherwise lost: “historical objects that the inhabitants usually sell to the foreigners and alienate them”; he avoids however to attack his compatriots who collaborated with the agents because, as “special men of the Ministry”, they threatened too that they would sell their fortune abroad if the State had not bought it in due time; 6) the idea that acquiring a

budget”. The purchase of the Pappasoglu collection was tergiversated for a long time. Girgore Tocilescu, the manager of the National Antiques Museum solved the problem only in 1906, after the death of the owner. See Ștefan 1984, 117.

⁵ This is a letter of Dimitrie Pappasoglu to Alexandru Odobescu, from the time when the latter was charged with the organization of the Romanian participation in the Universal Exhibition of Paris. See Mihai, Bichis 1984, 262.

⁶ The wish to sell ancient objects abroad was already expressed then, in 1867, and only after decades of pressures, when impatience would have seemed naturally justified. The famous “foreign agent” who buys anything at any price was from the very beginning a discourse trick.

well-structured collection would involve saving the sums of money that are usually spent on “trips and per diems at places where the workers find them”, the allusion to the “rivals” being obvious; 7) the construction of the personal merit: a) he pretended to believe in the significance of those objects, the national conscience existed only in his mind, while the contemporaries woke up much later; b) he always sold a “half a century old” collection, suggesting that he had willingly dedicated himself to a great ideal and that he had thus the right to a civic and cultural posterity (ANRB, file 11/1888, 35 recto); 8) he criticized the previous minister of Instruction and eulogized the current one, showing that the destiny of a big collection depended only upon the patriotism of the one who held, at that moment, the portfolio of Culture; for instance, although Alexandru Odobescu had hardly been installed as minister of Culture and Instruction on 26 May 1863 – and stayed there for only 5 months –, Pappasoglu conveniently compared him with the reproachful predecessor, Christian Tell; 9) he repeatedly announced the intention to donate something, in order only to test the authorities’ availability, but he rejected the financial offer the Ministry made, thinking to try later, when the minister would be replaced or when the need for money would become quite pressing; when he saw he had no other variants, he accepted the money he had initially refused, suggesting that he gave up for the sake of his beloved country.

We wonder: to what extent the criteria of the donator were perpetuated in the structure of the Museum of antiquities? Did the collections bought from private persons partially determine the organization of the national museum, somehow forced to adopt the former owner’s principles of coherence? Francis Haskell says that in the 19th century, the small collectors were the ones who set the pace for the great trends (Haskell 1986 & 1993, 133). And thinking about our antiquaries, who wanted to sell the State everything they had collected during a lifetime, we realize that acquiring such a collection involved buying other, somehow related ones. This was the only way to render the inventory items thematically or at least chronologically compatible. A new exhibit could open a new field of interest, obliging the curators to look for similar objects, as precedents or descendents of the prototype. Thus, the initial collection remained isolated, as its exhibition was not justified by anything. The time when the presence of an object in a museum was legitimated by its very status of “rarity” was gone.

Dimitrie Pappasoglu had tried his luck with several ministers of Instruction, and we invoke his arguments to the extent to which they are relevant for the present research. In this line, on 19 January 1870, he wrote to George Mârzescu about his intention to donate his collection of antiques and numismatics. In exchange, he asked for a supplement to the pension (ANRB, file 140/1870, 18 recto)⁷. With this intention, in October 1869, Pappasoglu had sent to the ministry the catalogue of his collection, being subsequently visited by Alexandru Odobescu and Cesar Bolliac, the chairman of the Archaeological Committee (ANRB, file 140/1870, 18 recto-verso). But they came without the catalogue in question, for a courtesy visit, promising to return. As two months passed and the two did not come back, Odobescu was considered the guilty one. According to Pappasoglu, he would have resisted the operation “...for details that should not be mentioned when it comes about one’s country, as such an important collection of historical antiques that I have collected myself in Romania for 40 years, should not be lost or left to dissipate...” (ANRB, file 140/1870, 310 recto-verso). Pappasoglu urged therefore the minister to obtain from Bolliac an evaluation of the collection, so that the minister could afterwards intervene in the Parliament. Furthermore, he resorts to a little but effective blackmail, saying that he could sell the exhibits to “foreign amateurs who incessantly come to ask me to sell these monuments of our ancestors, collected from Romania exclusively...” (ANRB, file 140/1870, 18 verso). We do not know how real or how fictive these rivals were, but this feeling of guilt was a way to attract the authorities. On 3 February 1870, Bolliac promised he would go again to Pappasoglu, to finally classify his collection (ANRB, file 140/1870, 29 recto). Anyway, Pappasoglu and Bolliac were rivals, continually proposing to the ministry exhibits in exchange for which they hoped to receive money. We can see one of these situations in the letter that Pappasoglu sent to the minister of Culture, Titu Maiorescu, on 10 July 1874, offering the Museum Dacian and Roman pots for 1,500 francs, “...a much better price than what I have learnt that M. Cesar Bolliac asked for his pottery! Collected by him with all the facilities that Your ministry ensured him!” Pappasoglu wrote, indignant (ANRB, file 139/1874, 263 recto-verso).

⁷ He says that the former minister of Culture, Alexandru Crețescu, had advised him to sell his collection for a pension supplement.

In November 1872, August Treboniu Laurian asked for the help of the ministry of the Interior for the collection of “antique monuments”, as he called the objects likely to be exhibited in the National Antiquities Museum. He wanted to do that for free, “...while the persons that would come to help me with the indication of places and the collection of monuments should be remunerated by the Government *in accordance to the value of the objects discovered*” (ANRB, file 132/1872, 183 recto). The ministry was informed by Laurian’s demand, but it invoked financial problems (ANRB, file 132/1872, 181 recto-verso). Certainly, to price each old object was a proof of effectiveness and pragmatism. The State was thus diminishing the informal trade with antiquities, noting that the payments made “in accordance to the value of the discovery” – as stipulated in the Regulation of April 1874 – increased the importance of the relations that the discoverer had with the members of the archaeological Committee. Many times, indeed, privileged purchases were made from the collaborators and employees of the Ministry of Culture. They were trying to capitalize different personal objects, some of them of museum interest, but not all of them. The most famous case is that Cezar Bolliac. On 14 January 1874, he tried to sell to the National Antiquities Museum the complete collections of “Buciumul” and “Trompeta Carpaților”, his own political newspapers, used to attack real or imaginary enemies (ANRB, file 132/1872, 23 verso).

On 7 February 1874, the minister rejected the proposition, motivating this with the lack of money (ANRB, file 139/1874, 25 recto). On that occasion, Bolliac had also asked for money for some “Dacian pottery, unique in the world”, freshly returned from the exhibition of Vienna. Although the word “donation” was used, this did not involve the gratuity that we infer today. In the meaning of the time, the donation was the pretext of a stipend, masked under the word “compensation”: “...the *compensation* that the committee will consider to be the proper one for the expenses and efforts made to find, dig up and organize this vast collection...” (ANRB, file 139/1874, 23 recto-verso). These are the words of Cezar Bolliac, chairman of the Archaeological Committee: a body that had to guarantee the quality of the objects that the State purchased (Potra 1944, 246)⁸. In this capacity, he asked the

minister of Culture to appoint a committee – made of the members of the ministry in question – to attest his application. And this is quite clear that the word “efforts” hid other financial claims, but for objects found during other trips paid from the budget as well! He often made trips of archaeological prospecting, all of these journeys and per diems being covered by the Ministry of Culture. And although many inventories were made, many of the objects that were discovered were subsequently part of those private collections that he proposed the museum to buy. Bolliac was a member of the archaeological Committee and, at the same time, a soliciting-client in relation to it. Actually, the ambiguities of the “Regulation for the exploration and purchase of antique objects” from 1874, allowing this, stimulated the archaeological enthusiasm (ANRB, file 139/1874, 99)⁹. Theoretically, the objects belonged to the person who had paid for their research and discovery. When the explorer was subsidized by the Ministry of Culture (transportation, digging, per diem), the antiquities were the property of the National Antiquities Museum (ANRB, file 139/1874, 97 verso). But if the audacious tripper funded his own “excursions”, the vestiges he found remained, according to article XII, his property (ANRB, file 139/1874, 97 verso). Out of the many personal donations that the “special men” proposed to the Museum, under the pretext that they had collected them over their life, with many sacrifices and expenses, we deduce the impossibility to stop the transformation of the official person into a private one. Especially that some of the exhibits were given up to the researchers by the authorities: “...as a souvenir and a sign of gratitude for his service...” (ANRB, file 139/1874, 97 verso). Thus, in a document from 21 December 1876, we find out an inventory made according to the notes of the curator A. Russo: several objects, collected and taken by Bolliac during the campaign of 1869, were missing. The ministry was asked to intervene in order to recuperate: a pot, a bust, a Bacchus with a satyr and “Ampelos” (ANRB, file 128/1877, 1 recto). The same demand for restitution was sent to Bolliac himself (ANRB, file 128/1877, 2 recto). On another occasion, Bolliac proposed for sale 208 Dacian pots, but, discontent with the price established by the committee, on 24 March 1874 (ANRB, file 139/1874, 113 recto)¹⁰, he withdrew the offer

⁸ These trades took place either in accordance to the catalogues that indicated the prices of the latest sales in Paris, or “by mutual agreement”.

⁹ The regulation in question had been debated in the meeting of the Council of Ministers on 3 April 1874, following the report of the Ministry of Culture and Public Instruction. It was said to be enforced after the Prince’s approval.

¹⁰ The Committee offered him 3,600 lei.

(ANRB, file 120/1875, 224 recto). Like in other occasions, his refusal was a method to play for high stakes and to negotiate, unsuccessfully this time. That is why, the next year, he was however ready to give up some of his conditions. He accepted the sum of money offered by Titu Maiorescu on 1 October 1875. But another problem appears, a more serious one: Bolliac came back with several objects (240 instead of 208), but the important items, recorded by the committee at the moment of the evaluation of 1874, were missing. In other words, the new proposal was quantitatively bigger, but obviously smaller from a qualitative point of view. Bolliac had “adapted” a new list of objects according to the dissatisfactory sum of money he had been offered. Titu Maiorescu asked Alexandru Odobescu to verify whether the pots brought now were the same as those brought the previous year (ANRB, file 120/1875, 224 recto). In case there were no differences, the minister of Culture offered, on 1 October 1875, 2,200 francs in the shortest time, and other 1,600 francs from the budget of the next year (ANRB, file 120/1875, 224 recto). But the small investigation required by Maiorescu was not favourable to the supplier, Odobescu noticing, on 6 October 1875, that “...in the collection from last year, the Manager of the Museum numbered, when I was there, 62 pots of 50-52 centimetre high, out of which almost no one was broken. In this collection today, there are only 14 of this size and almost all of them are mutilated...” (ANRB, file 120/1875, 249 recto). In an embarrassing position now, Bolliac asserted, on 7 October 1875, that Odobescu did not know what he had seen and that he mistook the items for sale with those he had seen in his private collection, home: “...I affirm, Minister, that these pots were not measured in any way, and, therefore, the indication of twenty five or fifty centimetres has no basis and that this idea could not be justified, even if all the pots dug up from all over the Dacian land were measured. My pot with Dacian serpent, etc., is not clear to have been among these pots a year ago. M. Odobescu must have seen it at my house. And as for the others, as far as I have seen in a document that the Manager of the Museum showed me, as they were all confused there I understood nothing, I cannot answer...” (ANRB, file 120/1875, 247 recto-verso). But the report made by the manager A. Russo confirmed the accusations; he sent to the ministry “...the declaration of M. A. Odobescu, member of the Archaeological Committee, in which he shows that although the number of objects brought now is overwhelmingly bigger than the one last year, yet, they were not the same,

as most and the most important of the 62 big pots were missing. When M. C. Bolliac was immediately announced about that, he declared that the evaluation M. A. Odobescu made would be inexact, as he would not owe other pots of the size M. A. Odobescu spoke about, and, consequently, he does not want to sell them any more, but only offers the museum a number of 220 items of this collection, while taking back the rest of it...” (ANRB, file 120/1875, 248 recto). Trying to obtain an honourable solution for this affair, Bolliac gave up all claims and gave the museum most of the things. Obviously, he took back about 20 of the big pots (ANRB, file 120/1875, 247 recto). Such stratagems were frequent, the collectors cheating each other many times. Bolliac, for instance, had been the victim of such a prank: exchanging objects with M. A. Sturdza himself, he received from M. Mitiță some antiques bought from Germany, but which the owner presented as coming from Romania (Tudor 1961, 23).

Although the specialists had an up-to-dated scientific language, their practice proved that it was rather difficult for them to leave the classicist paradigm. Detailed historical reconstructions were expected, but only pasts that could make the subject of an epic poem were worthy to evoke. Hence there are numerous references to the Dacians and the Romans, as well as to the medieval pantheon. The discourses accompanying the genesis of the National Antiquities Museum highlighted a phase of transition of the modern historical culture, when the rivals of the topic oscillated among several options: 1) the fascination with the idea of *precedence* as a synonym for age; something that existed long before us, and gives us a complex because of this; 2) the taste for *evanescence*, with moralizing accents, meant disapproving the vanities, always ridiculed; 3) the receptivity of ethnographic nature towards *difference*, discovered after the passion of the Enlightenment for exotic civilizations, for their mores, institutions and thought; 4) the “heraldic” and ahistorical type of interest for the origins, for Arcadian epochs, ignoring centuries of evolution, in order to fix oneself into one moment, one symbol, or one fact; this functions as a totem, as all the history of those who claim themselves from it, originates there; it insists on events of origin, which are not direct causes, but “irradiate” some precedents as one chooses, out of which the modernity prefers one or another, imposing a model-past, worthy to be continued; it is materialized in the passion to collect monument-objects, like medals, coins and portraits of

important people; 5) affiliations of “genealogical” type, with “arborescent” evolutions, but not prolonged to the present; emphasis is put on fragmentary determinisms, established between periods associated from a causal point of view, under the pretext that they would be ideationally close (for instance, Mihai Viteazul [Michael the Brave] continued Ștefan cel Mare’s [Stephen the Great’s] pan-Romanian “programme”, while the 1848 generation took over Mihai Viteazul’s “project”); one does not accept one single narrative line, but due to the very specific ramifications of genealogy, more and more characters are included in the great story of the nation and, above all, in its pantheon; 6) the “history of the present”, which went back in time step by step, different epochs seeming to “collaborate” with the “purpose” to become actual; this is a defence reaction in front of the reality that the modern collective identities are not atemporal, but have a stringent historicity.

In the mid-19th century, the interest for museums had suddenly risen, but not necessarily because of the need to have more historical knowledge. The confusion between museumification and thesaurusification had less expected results, leading either to the taking away of valuable exhibits, or to the intensification of the illegal trade with old objects. In April 1863, Dimitrie Pappasoglu asked prince Al.I.Cuza to authorize him to collect all the old objects dissipated in the ruins of cities. The antiquary thought that in this way were inventoried the relics that “are destroyed by the workers who find plenty of them and sell them in different fairs” (ANRB, file 219/1863, 73 verso). But we can easily see that neither the vandals nor the savours cared very much about the identifications *in situ*. Consequently, although the classification of vestiges was frequently mentioned, the following decades brought forth especially quantitative increases, that transformed the National Antiquities Museum into a “deposit” (Popescu 1964, 347)¹¹. The museology of the 19th century has a long history, modernity remembering only the *utility* of science, but not its *semiotics*. The “archaeological trips” described by Bolliac amuse us today, but they are, however, the echo of a very old cognitive exercise: people once thought that they can find out new things if they discovered analogies between texts and objects,

¹¹ To be more precise, the “deposit of the College of Sfântul Sava of Bucharest” is mentioned in the fragmentary quotations of an older article, belonging to Samarian 1944, 287.

correspondences in general (Choay 1998, 43). Hence the effort of many “curious” individuals to find, in concrete terms, a place mentioned in documents, chronicles, legends. At that stage, the travels stimulated rather the empathy with the past than its understanding. The fact of bringing it out to light and making it visible created, in their opinion, the obligation to re-contextualize it, by necessarily correlating it to the present (Schnapp 1993, 233). The direct contact with remote periods was looked for, and particularly an *antiquité vivante*, that the imagination of the explorer should revive with the help of samples he had found himself (Schnapp 1993, 220-221). Initially, the antiquaries thought that the artefacts aimed at confirming the written sources, subsequently reaching the conclusion that they offered more information than the chronicles. As the latter ones were susceptible of falsification, it was a further motivation for those vestiges, talking by themselves, without the mediation of any text, to be searched for. Aiming at the credibility that physics or biology enjoyed, the antiquaries had found a method that could have been deemed experimental: going there, having contact with the object of knowledge, drawing the artefact in the context of its discovering (Schnapp 1993, 291-292). Drawing was the same with recomposing that thing and defining it. In this tradition, our connoisseurs went on trip, accompanied by painters. For instance, Alexandru Odobescu’s trip with the Swiss painter H. Trenk in the counties of Argeș and Vâlcea is well known (Odobescu 1967, 361-408)¹². But, as he was not going to excel in these preoccupations, Odobescu criticized one of his rivals of the time, Cezar Bolliac. In his lecture at the Ateneu, on 17 December 1872, he said: “This is not in a few hours walks, with some people that the bailiff of the village has quickly brought together, for a tip and some brandy; this is not in the hurry of a summer pleasure trip, that a mound should be studied, for the results to be useful to science...” (Odobescu 1955, 93). The museum concepts were then identified with the opinion of one individual or another, being not associated with institutions, reviews and trends of thought, with famous methodologies. We can understand this from the report on the treasure trove of Pietroasa, which Alexandru Odobescu had presented to the Academy two years before, on 22 March 1887. Reprimanding the antiquaries, in order to oppose someone, Odobescu underlined their attitude towards artefacts: “... the position of the antiquary is totally different. [...] he didn’t even

¹² It starts on 18 June 1860.

try to find out the time when and the place where it was made or the people who might have made them” (AAR 1887, series II, IX, 414-415).

At a more pragmatic level, the “archaeological trip” was one of the modalities by which the State was attracted in inventorying some “antiquities” whose discovery was however hypothetical. The custom was to ask for a bigger sum of money, hoping that the minister would eventually grant a satisfactory one. Everything was made at the risk of the ministry: sometimes, the archaeologists by chance saved valuable pieces that provoked the establishment of new sections of the museum; other times, their amateurism led to the destruction of Roman camps in Oltenia and Muntenia (Popescu 1964, 346). There is no point to criticize today their failures, it would be much more useful to reconstruct the circumstances in which they made some errors. Reading the reports of the prefectures, we notice that the attitude towards an old object, a Dacian pot let us say, has its own history. First of all, the farmer who discovers it might empty this of mud and use it, quite serenely, in his household. The gesture characterizes, according to Ph Ariès, the premodern epochs, dominated by the indifference towards time or by the feeling of temporal continuity with very remote periods. In order to identify the possible vestiges, the Ministry employees resorted, however, to the locals, who were used to treat them rather as topographic marks, as component parts of the landscape. For them, the historical monument had no age, being counted among the “there since always” aspects (ANRB, file 140/1870, 292). Not accidentally, the questionnaires and all the interventions of Bucharest provoked the collective memory, urging the villagers to become aware of the pasts which they had cohabitated with. In the same spirit of the appeal to the collective memory, about a mound in the commune of Mărășești “old people say that at the time when Costin Catargiu was the owner of these lands, some locals, hoping to find some treasure in this mound, started to dig, and digging in the middle of it they found two pistols, about the preservation of which nothing is said” (ANRB, file 244/1874, 18 verso). Losing familiarity with these relics was a first symptom of modernization: the things found by accident were regarded, later, as “curiosities” (something that was irreducible, hard to translate in self-referential terms), good to sell in a fair, because they were looked for by the “town boyars”. This passage from home utilization to financial capitalization was another sign of the cultural distance from remote ages, as well as of the

increasing fear of the authorities. As for the possible clients, the old things were souvenirs, collectables, and, rarely, sources of information. The treasure hunters are, them too, the sign of a period when the *old* starts to be a good business, because it is not at hand any more. For the moment, the remains were regarded as strange objects (not commonly used any more) and not as “sources”. In time, only the “curiosities” remain completely out of place and non-upgradeable.

The treasure hunters had created, unwillingly, a new sensibility, attracting the authorities into a “he who finds the first” competition. And, looking for a *modus vivendi*, the treasure hunters asked the minister of Culture to give them a specialist who should be there when they dug, so that they could not be accused of endangering what was left of that historical site. In order to please them and to defend the monument from other aggressions, Bolliac went there and took stones out from the basement, for the approximately 200 persons coming from different cities “in chariots, with pastrami and bags of corn flour” to be convinced that the ruins hid no treasure (Bolliac 1871, 1). The signs of a change of mentality appeared very slowly, with some indices: until 1892, those who asked for the permission to explore certain areas were very rare; after that year, when a new regulation concerning the digging appeared, their number increased significantly (Ștefan 1984, 117-122)¹³.

Naturally, the hunters of the ...treasure hunters were authorized by the State to recuperate from the locals, by financial counteroffer, the future museum exhibits. One of them was D. Pappasoglu who, in a memoir to the Ministry of Culture, in August 1863, exposed the situation: “...stopping the damage of selling them to the agents of the foreign amateurs, or to the museums of other states...” (ANRB, file 219/1863, 72 recto). Considering that this phenomenon was often invoked, we could assume two things: first, that it was extended enough, secondly that it legitimated the reactions of those with apparently contrary interests. Were those agents so numerous and so dangerous? Or were they just used as a scarecrow in the discourse strategies of the Salvationists? It seems that they wanted to get the support and

¹³ For more details, see *Legea pentru descoperirea monumentelor și obiectelor antice*, approved by King Carol I on 17 November 1892 and published in *Monitorul Oficial*, 187 (24 November/6 December 1892), 5490-5491. This is also signed by Take Ionescu, as minister of Culture, accompanied by Alexandru Marghiloman, as minister of Justice. Also available in *Colecțiunea legilor* 1901, 49-51.

subsidies of the State, exaggerating the stakes of their activity. Later, those who acquire the discourse of museology will appear, benevolently giving back the found objects. On 21 December 1872, A.T. Laurian proposed for some farmers to be awarded 200 lei, for having collected antique coins and offered them to the State (ANRB, file 132/1872, 202 recto). He also asked that in the future, the written media would announce that the presentation of such vestiges would be rewarded with financial compensations, after verifications made by specialists (ANRB, file 132/1872, 202 verso). Discouraging the private investigations, that destroyed the spatial and temporal context in which the exhibits could be identified, the authorities offered 40 lei to some peasants from Horezu, the county of Vâlcea, in exchange for 200 Roman coins. This was a situation that Alexandru Odobescu underlined in the same conference at the Ateneu mentioned above: “[...] There is a country, gentlemen, where the cult of archaeology is part of ordinary people’s customs. This country is Denmark. There, whenever a farmer, while ploughing, came across an old pot, a stone hammer or a bronze knife, he takes it, proudly, to the national museum of Copenhagen, where his discovery is deposited with great honour near the donator’s name. [...] I wish we could arouse such a feeling among our people” (Odobescu 1955, 93).

The ruling of 1874 had been, of course, a step forward, which reflected, if not relevant progress, at least consistent preoccupations. We should not feed on the illusion that such a decision modified over night the field in question. Observing the relation between the centre and the province could reflect the extent to which an intention of reform was applied or not at a real level. Even at the end of the 19th century, the civic and patrimonial education was problematic in the Romanian society, still haunted by an imagery of the treasure. In 1893, the authorities of Iași were forced to start an investigation in the village of Focuri, where the peasants had dug, looking for the so-called treasure-troves. But the officials realized that the only “discoveries” were an old pot and some pieces of fired clay. Yet, on 3 August 1893, the sub-prefecture of Bahlui justified its intervention, saying that the diggings had been made “...in the presence of several inhabitants of that village, on the assumption that there were money, as some people said that a fire had been seen burning in that place...” (ANRI, file 39/1893, 30 recto-verso). This was not an exclusively rural vice, the urban area exemplifying itself the taste for such

“investigations”. For instance, on 14 July 1900, the Ministry of Culture and Public Instruction sent a report to the prefecture of Iași, invoking the complaint of a pensioner woman of Bucharest who held a land in the city: “the neighbours of her plot made, stealthily, diggings on her property, with no permission from her or the Ministry, and discovered old, valuable objects. I would kindly ask you to investigate whether diggings were really made in order to discover valuable antiques, and in case this is true, to proceed in accordance to the law for the discovery of antique monuments and objects” (ANRI, file 48/1900, 1 recto). The researches did not confirm any treasure discovery (ANRI, file 48/1900, 2 recto). *We will see that, often, a long period of time passed since the promulgation of a statute to its application.* Thus, a report of the manager of the National Antiquities Museum from 23 May 1888 informed the minister of Culture that the local administration of the county of Romanați had taken no measure of protection in the case of the ruins outside the villages. Aiming at a rapid, reparatory reaction, the manager Grigore Tocilescu was granted 200 de lei to purchase, in the name of the Museum, several antique objects found by farmers (art. 8 of the budget; ANRB, file 11/1888, 40 recto). A useless action.

Just like the collections, the value of a museum was so much higher as the visitors were more numerous. So it needed a theatricalization of the legitimating discourses. And the more theatrical it was, the faster it acquired an aura of “public utility asset”. Thus, the theft of the “hen with chicks” was rather a success than a prejudice. It brought the Antiquities National Museum to the attention of the public, deceiving the people that it sheltered really extraordinary things. So, summarizing the policy of acquisitions of the Antiquities National Museum in the span of 1870-1900, we can notice an oscillation between two contradictory tendencies: the former would be the redundancy of the selected items, the high frequency with which some of them are mentioned; the latter, on the contrary, demonstrates the interest for the singularity of the artefact. We initially observe aspects of *repetitive* nature, i.e. a *topicalization* of knowledge (resulting from the similitude of the items taken into consideration and from the spontaneity of their recovery). Much later, as years went by, some elements of *progressive* nature grew clearer, some people making them, by a semantic abuse, serve the idea of historical *continuity*. As the identity motivations prevailed, “moments” rapidly

transformed into “monuments”. Then, the assiduity with which some discoveries return in question could suggest several things: 1) the *typologization*, the retroactive construction of some “species” of exhibits; 2) the *continuity* of a former civilization, its long-lasting existence; 3) the great *relevance* that an object, found and refound, had had in a remote period. Afterwards, the difference between the *rareness* of an ancient object and its *uniqueness* emerged. Rareness

recommended it as an exception to the rule, as a very particular case, that temporarily encumbered the academic definitions: briefly, it was fortuitous and atypical. Uniqueness, on the other hand, resulted from the certainty that a given exhibit was like no other in the world. Even so, it was possible that it were the starting point for long series of imitations, remaining the model of several generations of related items.

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