

HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY DURING ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA'S REIGN

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The seven years of the reign of Alexandru Ioan I are emblematic for modern Romania's emergence and development. Progress has never been so important in such a brief lapse of time and it concerned each and every area of social and public life. For the generations that followed this reign stood, by its achievements, for a remarkable period of innovation and advancement.

Culture stepped into a new phase of its evolution. Universities were successively founded in Iași and Bucharest. Education penetrated the society on a scale never attained before, the 1864 Law of the Public Instruction endowing it with modern organizational reinforcement. Even since 1859 the prince had asked that the public instruction should be "available for all classes", since "people's well-guided education is judged as the best guarantee for order, progress and illuminating patriotism".

In this respect, the Paris Convention – in accordance with the requirements expressed by the 1857 ad-hoc Assemblies, especially Moldavia's, that had adopted a multi-form programme of institutional modernization – created the conditions for culture to evolve freely. The consequences were mainly felt in an almost explosive development of the press. In those years, the main concerns of the Romanian society and of those who assumed the leadership of a nascent Romania's destiny were centred upon the publication of Romanian literary works and of a great number of translations; many conferences and lectures, as well as the establishment of some cultural institutions and foundations accelerated the process which led to the constitution of a future academical society, whose premises were stimulated by the same fruitful reign.

It was a favorable period for historiography too. The historical discourse was indispensable for the political discourse. The revelation of the past was maintaining national enthusiasm, was putting together all the energies. It is enough to run our eyes through the speeches of the time to see in what measure the past, oftentimes idealized, was present. However, it was not only a matter of contributing to national awakening, of feeding up the patriotic feelings so necessary for every state's work of affirmation and development, since Romania was, at the same time, integrating into a *new* world. Many young people had been and were being educated in highly-reputed institutions of the West – only in France, in 1863 there were about 500 students, moreover 400 pupils in Parisian high-schools – which accelerated the rhythm of the renewal.

In what concerns the historical science, an improvement of its content was absolutely necessary. The chroniclers' age had been exceeded during the previous decades. Kogălniceanu and Bălcescu, as well as Bariț, in Transylvania, had laid the bases of a modern historiography, but their work had to be continued in order to achieve connection and affiliation to the historiography of the developed countries, so that Romania's historiography should be validated. Some romantic accents persisted for a while, but modernization efforts would soon bring results, some historians of the next generations being accepted within the international historian's community, if we only mention Xenopol, Iorga or Pârvan.

The interest for history was general. Awards-granting was an element of the process. In 1859 Grigore-Bibescu Brâncoveanu instituted an award of 300 ducats which was to be granted every two years for the best "original Romanian book of national Romanian interest" concerning a variety of fields, of which history was holding the first place. In 1860 the topic of the contest was *Treatise on the Roman colonies in Dacia*. Also in 1860 Scarlat Rosetti offered an award for "the achievement of a history of the Romanians".

An intensely disputed matter was the foundation of an Academy within which historical science was to hold its own position; the year 1860 was relevant in the respect, since a whole series of projects were published. Those belonging to George Sion and August Treboniu Laurian proposed that the intended savant society should also have historical concerns and should put historical documents in order, or to collect “all the documents that refer to our history”, to analyse them “with criticism” and publish them. In his turn, Ioan Maiorescu suggested that “the study of the national history” should be one of the future society’s lines of activity. In the same year Evanghelie Zappa made a donation which, together with that made by the prince himself lay at the basis of – in V. A. Urechia’s words – the future society’s *independence!*

Also in 1860 a commission was created, “made up with the aim to collect all the necessary material in order to write the country’s history”, whose members were Laurian, Odobescu and Cernătescu, as well as Eliade and Ion C. Brătianu. The commission worked out the project of an academic society which was to include three sections: a “literary and lexicographical” one, an “archaeological and historical” one, and in the future a third one, for sciences. The motivation was relevant, asserting that the development of such institutions was “*a sine qua non* condition, so that the Romanians might claim, for good reason, the title of a European nation.”

During the reign of Alexandru Ioan I, besides Kogălniceanu’s “Arhiva Românească” (The Romanian Archive) and “Magazinul istoric pentru Dacia” (The Historical Magazine for Dacia), edited by Bălcescu and Laurian, a new series of historical magazines were published: “Tezaurul monumentelor istorice din România” (Thesaurus of the historical monuments of Romania), directed by the tribune Alexandru Papiu Ilarian and “Arhiva istorică a României” (Romania’s Historical Archive), edited by the Bessarabian Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, who, like Papiu, had settled down in the free Romania. Many other magazines appeared too; among them it is worth mentioning Odobescu’s “Revista Română” (Romanian Review).

In spite of his active political involvement, Kogălniceanu maintained his concern with historiography. It was the time of Papiu Ilarian, Hasdeu, Eudoxiu Hurmuzachi – the hard working collector of documents from foreign archives –, of the dynamic Vasile Alexandrescu-Urechia, as well as of George Sion, who translated Doinisie Fotino, whose *Ancient History of Dacia* was published precisely in 1859 and even of Ion C. Brătianu, who was interested in history too. They were all working on an enormous uncared for field, endeavouring for the modern reconstruction of the national history and its integration into the universal history.

In what concerns archaeology, even since the Organic Regulations, it had begun to arouse an interest among the intellectuals of the time, since its aim was to upturn the past, to bring to life the extremely diverse vestiges from the Romanian ground, thus contributing to the reconstitution process indispensable for the national awakening and modern organization.

The past and its ruins were also a favorite romantic theme approached by the poets of the time, for instance by Eliade, Cârlova or Alexandrescu.

Laurian, Bălcescu and Bolliac among others, joined together for archaeological voyages along the Danube or about monasteries; Laurian and Bolliac had even a conflict of scientific paternity at a certain moment.

Pre-eminently in Wallachia, but also in Moldavia people like the *ban* Mihalache Ghica, brother of prince Alexandru Ghica, Vladimir Blaremburg, married to a sister of the two Ghicas, or Nicolae Mavros involved themselves into numerous excavations, motivated, it is true, mainly by their collecting passion and characterized by dilettantism. Mihalache Ghica and Mavros are the ones who succeeded in making up important collections of coins and objects found during these excavations. In 1836 Vladimir Blaremburg published in “Muzeul Național” (The National Museum) – a significant name – articles dedicated to the antiquities of Wallachia, with a special emphasis on the Oltenia region (Reșca, Celei, etc.).

To Mihalache Ghica we also owe the first museum of natural science and antiquities, based on the donation made by Ghica, with this very purpose, at the end of 1834, the first year of his brother’s reign. “Curierul Național” (The National Courier) wrote: “Such important, useful and patriotic deeds definitely arouse the love and respect of the contemporaries and make the historians, belonging to the generations to come, put such a deed and its author on a valuable level.”

Afterwards, the discoveries, including the accidental ones, were sent to this museum, since in 1837 an order of the prince was issued that “all the antiquities found in this country, remainders from places of historical value, should be taken and brought to the National Museum”. Significantly the order also stipulated that it was forbidden “to dig up the ground in order to pull out objects of antiquity” because “this spoils and encumbers the systematical work in such discoveries”. The most important accidental discovery occurred also in 1837: that of the famous treasure of Pietroasa.

For several decades the director of the museum was Carol Wallenstein, who died in December 1858. After a period of ad-interim management, the Italian Carlo Ferreratti was appointed director of the museum. Although he was a zoologist – since the institution was still a museum of natural science and antiquities –, he showed great consideration for antiquities. In the meantime, in 1862, a donation of exceptional value was added to the existent collections: the great donation (which included 4,000 coins, as well as many other objects) made to the museum by the general Nicolae Mavros. The same year the commission charged with “the reception of the collection” – made up of nine persons, among which my great grandfather, Dimitrie Berindei – proposed that the museum should be divided into two units, one of natural science and one of archaeology and fine arts; the proposal was accepted. There followed Alexandru Ioan Cuza’s decree by which, 140 years ago, on November 25, 1864, the Regulations for the administration and organization of the Bucharest Museum of Antiquities were approved. The museum had four departments: numismatics and private heraldry, general history, Romanian history – with an ecclesiastical sub-section –, and the curiosities’ section.

The management of the Museum was entrusted to the Archaeologic Committee made up the same day, with Mavros as president and Odobescu, Laurian and Urechia as members, completed after a week with Bolliac, director of the State Archives and in 1865 with Dimitrie Berindei. The inauguration of the Museum in the new premises of the University, a work of the architect Orescu, should have taken place on January 24, 1865, but in fact it occurred on August 29, 1865. Anyway the Museum of Antiquities remains an achievement of the Prince whose name is connected with the Union, and also an important moment in Romania’s modern cultural ascension.