

Iorga's attack on mediocrity, cronyism, patronage, and pretension, the editor notes, was remarkably similar to that launched in the 1860s by the charge of Junimea's Titu Maiorescu that Romanian culture was totally derivative, merely "forms without foundation" (p. 12). Indeed Iorga began an intense collaboration between 1900 and 1904 with the Junimist journal *Convorbiri Literare* (which from 1902 to 1906 was under the editorship of the historian Ioan Bogdan, his close associate and brother-in-law), though he himself was never a Junimist. At same time, he wrote extensively for the conservative journal, *Epoca* (edited by Nicolae Filipescu; these pieces were collected in 1903 as *Cuvinte adevărate*), contributed to the short-lived *România Jună* (1899–1901), and became involved in the peasantist review, *Sămănătorul* (which he edited from 1905–1906; most of these articles were published as *O luptă literară. Articole din Sămănătorul*, two volumes, 1914–1916).

A further key moment in Iorga's development occurred in 1902, when he spent time at Blaj in Transylvania, where he was impressed by the Transylvanian peasantry in comparison with those in the independent Romanian Kingdom, and by the threat of "denationalization" from the Magyars in Transylvania and from the Francophone elite and the Jews in the Regat. (This was the subject of a final series in *L'Indépendance Roumaine*, collected under the title *Scènes et histoires du passé roumain. Un procès de désnationalisation*, 1902.) This led, logically, to the March 1906 theatre protest and then to the events of 1907.

As the editor notes, Iorga's "generous illusion" that a new society was about to emerge and that egoism, greed, clientism, and sacrificing all moral scruples for economic, social and political gain would be overcome proved mistaken (p. 9). Romania, of course, failed to change from an oligarchical state in which the largely peasant population was effectively shut out of political life (pp. 10–11). This led to the explosive peasant uprising of 1907, in which Iorga came down strongly for the peasantry and which demonstrated that a good deal of what he had been arguing prior to this was true.

The editor is somewhat pessimistic about what he finds here, especially the striking analogies between Romania today and over a century ago. Much of the intellectual elite is still rewarded for mediocrity and toadyism, tends to sugar-coat or simply avoid controversy, and relies on connections for advancement rather than real achievement. (pp. 7–8). Critics are still identified as "traitors to the nation" and "poor patriots" and, like Iorga, reproved for "naming names" in their work. The jury remains out on Romania today, but time is slipping away. The need to reform the national "civic spirit" is just as great today as it was then. N. Iorga was not afraid to point it out when the emperor didn't have any clothes. Healthy cultures need more people willing to do that. Attacks on the "Establishment" are usually not welcomed, as Pippidi's introduction shows in the case of 1899–1907. But intellectuals faithful to their calling to speak the truth to power must not betray their trust. Hopes for a new beginning in Romanian public life have been so often bungled that there is good reason for pessimism. However, there are still signs among younger scholars and courageous survivors of older generations that we can be hopeful for the future... for the time being.

Paul E. Michelson

Andrei Pippidi, *Case și oameni din București*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2008, 209 pp.

This fascinating book collects a series of articles in *Dilema Veche* under the rubric "SOS București"; and is an important addition to the much too small shelf of books dealing the history and architecture of modern București. The purpose of the series was to draw attention both to the oft-neglected attractions of Romania's capital (overlooked through ignorance and the bustle of life in a city of 2 1/2 million people) and to historic structures threatened by mindless development and the pursuit of economic gain to the detriment of other values (what the author calls the "aggressive ravishing" of București's historic fabric).

This is a passionate book detailing one outrage after another. These range from the scooping up of classic buildings by the Romanian *nouveaux riches* (who then proceeded to modernize these structures out of recognition including air-conditioning units in every window), to the conversion of

others into restaurants, bars, and strip clubs, to the undermining of older buildings both structurally and aesthetically by constructing ugly apartment and office blocks around them, to the destruction of perfectly sound structures because they are not listed on the preservation registry or are listed with the wrong address, to the intentional facilitation of the mouldering away of these (often abandoned) buildings, making demolition the only “logical” solution. (Pippidi recounts numerous cases of such buildings whose roofs were allowed to collapse, leading to the disintegration of the walls, and, as if this weren’t quick enough, a surprisingly large number of fires that finished the job. “What the devil are the firemen doing?” he asks.)

The neglect of historic București covers a wide range of issues: there are far too few identifying plaques for classic buildings or buildings with historic associations (houses of artists, writers, and other significant occupants); there is no coherent plan for preservation (Pippidi’s brief analysis of the Piața Palatului area, pp. 21 ff., is a sample of the thinking that ought to be done); property rights are controverted because of Romania’s communist past, which has led to many injustices and facilitated numerous shenanigans (such as the SITRACO scandals described here); the poverty of the capital’s statuary (caused in part by political vicissitudes, though recent additions seem to have degraded rather than improved the situation); usage concerns such as the plastering of billboards and advertisements on every conceivable surface; the naming and renaming of streets (which Pippidi points out has significant educational and historical purposes); and apparently mindless efforts to expand București territorially, even though Romania is already much too “macrocephalic”.

Along the way, the author gives us many interesting details about the multiple Bucureștis, that is of the many cities build on top of and intertwined with each other: the oriental, the French, the German, the Balkan, the modern, and the contemporary. These include the exotic București and the “giant village” București described the Western visitors in the early 19th century, the “Paris of the Orient” București of the early 20th century, and the „avantgarde” București of the interwar era. One had better look quickly; much of this will disappear in a very short time. Paradoxically, this is both a un book to read and at the same time a deeply depressing one as well.

Sadly, Pippidi (and others, such as those who attempt to document the stealth razing of București, “the Pippidi Mafia”, p. 173) are often depicted as Don Quixotes tilting against imaginary foes when the degradation and demolition of much of the capital’s 19th and early 20th century heritage is very real. Yes, there is a degree of nostalgia here, but surely modernization and economic priorities need not mean turning every bit of green space into parking garages nor need they imply that aesthetic and historic concerns and what might be called “spiritual continuity” should be ignored. One can only hope that the existing regulations of historical monuments will start being enforced before historic București is wiped off of the map by speculators aided by the ignorant and the crass, and the complicity of the Direcția de Cultură și Patrimoniu (which Pippidi aptly suggests should be renamed the “Direcția demolărilor”).

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