

Modernization of Romanian Society in 19th Century. Institutional
System, social rules and practices

Habilitation Thesis

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Abstract

My scientific and research activity that I have led until now followed several trends to be presented in the following pages. The results that I have obtained were materialized both in the frame of implemented projects as well as in the academic teaching activity in the form of general and special courses and seminars.

I. The research dedicated to the creation, organisation and evolution of modern institutions, of the Romanian modern state in its forms

II. The research dedicated to the process of Romanian society's modernization in the 19th century

III. The research dedicated to the gap between rules and practices. Moral, morality and accepted principles of morality

IV. The research of woman's history from the Romanian society of the 19th century

V. The research of the Romanian national state-building process in its maximal form

VI. The researches relating to the evolution of social history historiography in Romania

The February 11th 1866 coup d'état replaced a political regime which proved to be incapable to solve the issue of the reports between reforms and the national and liberal frame resulting from the 1859 Union. Cuza became the promoter of a political regime based on his own personal power and on a Constitution which had replaced the power of the nation with his and his supporters' power. The coalition directed against the sovereign included all those dissatisfied by his policy, starting with the radical liberals regrouped around Ion C. Brătianu and C.A. Rosetti, and finishing with moderated liberals, such as Ion Ghica and Ion Bălăceanu or those of conservative approach such as Lascăr Catargiu and Manolache Costache Epureanu. The effective removal of Cuza was possible only at the moment when the leaders of the army have joined to the plot, persuaded of the necessity to change the political regime. The 11th of February moment still didn't solve the issues and opened a period which, although short, was an extremely

tensed one, due to the political and diplomatic entanglements which didn't took long to appear.

The Union has been recognized only during Al. I. Cuza reign and the Major Powers, especially Turkey and Austria, promptly requested the return of the Principalities to the existing situation prior to the 1859 Union. Inland, as soon as the sovereign had signed his abdication, the power has been taken by a provisory government formed by Lascăr Catargiu, the general Nicolae Golescu and the colonel Nicolae Haralambie which was the chief of the Army, the first one being the leader of the conservative group and the second representative the leader of the radical liberals. The compromise between different political groups which haven't achieved yet the consistency of some parties was visible also as far as the composition of the provisory government lead by Ion Ghica was concerned; the government included also the conservative Dimitrie Ghica at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, C.A. Rosetti at the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education, the major Dimitrie Lecca at the Ministry of Defence, the liberal moderate Dimitrie Sturdza at the Ministry of Infrastructure Public Works, the conservatives Petre Mavrogheni at the Ministry of Finance and Ion C. Cantacuzino at the Ministry of Justice, and the prime minister also held as interim the External Affairs portfolio.

The Romanian politicians were aware of the entanglements created and in order to diminish them the Parliament reunited in the evening even of 11th February have proclaimed unanimously as sovereign of Romania prince Philippe of Flanders, the youngest brother of Leopold II, the King of Belgium. Although the nomination of a foreign prince from a royal family in Europe respected the 1857 decisions of the Ad hoc Assembly, the designation of the Belgian prince proved to be less inspired. The Emperor Napoleon III which hasn't been consulted in advance has rejected the Romanians version because the chosen one was the nephew of Louis Philippe, the ex king overthrown following the 1848 Revolution. Under these circumstances even Philippe de Flanders refused to come to Romania.

The provisory government, not officially recognised by the Major Powers, was trapped between the diplomatic pressures of foreign governments and the situation in the country marked by uncertainty. Ion Bălăceanu and Ion C. Brătianu are sent to Paris in order to find a solution which after consulting the Emperor, have proposed Carol of

Hohezollern-Sigmaringen as future ruling prince. His father, Carol-Anton, had freely given up the throne of his principality in favour of the King of Prussia, whose Prime Minister he had become for three years. Although an artillery officer in the Prussian Army, the future Carol I was rather French, cousin of Napoleon III, his maternal grand mother came from the family of Josephine de Beauharnais, wife of Napoleon I, which adopted her and the paternal grand mother was a niece of Joachim Murat, the famous marshal of the First Empire.

The arrival in power of Carol in Romania couldn't be possible without the consent of the Emperor of France, the most powerful man of Europe in 1866. The outbreak of the war between Austria and Prussia has created new issues as Carol, a Prussian officer, could have been arrested and executed as a spy if he was discovered on Austrian territory. Therefore the voyage to Romania was made incognito, travelling with Brătianu with a false passport under the name of Carol Hettingen. But on the other side, the military operations and political consequences of the war have distracted the European diplomacy from the Romanian events and had offered the time needed by the Romanian political circles.

The modernisation assumed firstly the synchronisation of Romanian institutions with the European ones and overcoming the gap separating Romania and Europe from this point of view. Secondly, the creation of a new mentality was necessary, according with the principles moving the institutions we have spoken about namely there was a need to raise the awareness of their application in the concrete conditions of the Romanian society.

Those who have engaged themselves to patron the modernisation endeavour, liberals and conservatives altogether, have proved that they understood and assumed both the political and civic responsibility, of the necessity to cover the distance that separated Romania from Occidental Europe. The sense of the modernisation was clearly formulated and it aimed a European path that the Romanians have followed, with the inevitable laggings behind, stumbles or even failures. There was a consensus as far as the final objective was concerned, if we think at the concrete action of government in the periods in which the country was led by the National Liberal Party or the Conservative Party. Moreover, the means used by some and the others were similar, to the extent that the

modernisation was implemented through measures decided above, by the political and intellectual elite, and disseminated towards the periphery through legislative initiatives. The main difference which appears and that we can underline was related especially to the rhythm of the modernisation. While the liberals wanted a rapid action, a rapid development in order to overcome the gap separating Romanian from the Occident, the conservatives were the adepts of a graduated modernisation, in the natural “rhythm” of social evolution, without leaps and shocks. This is the reason for which the liberals are the ones who permanently had the initiative, proved to be more dynamic, and the conservatives followed them and took care of the administration, organisation as such of the various fields of activity. We need to be perfectly clear. One cannot draw a line between the two orientations in the sense that some were progressive and the others were reactionaries.

The conservatives had at their turn initiatives and the liberals knew how to organise effectively certain sectors and still the latter detached themselves through their dynamism whilst the first ones have lost ground continuously until First World War.

The legislative work offers us the image of a complementary action in which the liberals continued the conservatives and the conservatives took into account the liberal measures. In this respect we can provide the examples of the laws on protectionist customs duties (1886-liberal, 1891- conservative), on industrial encouragement (the liberal one in 1887 and the conservative one in 1912), on trades (1902-liberal, 1911-conservative), on education, hospitals and we can continue to mention some more.

At the end of the 19th century theories appeared promptly criticizing the modernisation work and these were originated from two directions. First of all we mention the criticism formulated by Titu Maiorescu and endorsed by the “Junimea” society, the well known theory of forms without content. The members of “Junimea” weren’t questioning the necessity to modernise the country as a social, political and cultural phenomenon, as they will enter politics as members of the Conservative Party and will be part directly in the government, although they will have an active role in the implementation of the objectives related to modernisation. Their criticism was oriented toward the negative elements which due to the rapid rhythm risked to be assimilated as positive aspects and hence to burden on the practical action. One cannot neglect the political dimension, the

target was the liberal adversaries, but through their ideas the Junimea members wanted to correct some inconsistencies and not to eliminate the process as such. Secondly, we must recall the criticism formulated by the traditionalist movements which manifested themselves at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, called “semănătorism” and “poporanism”. Unlike the Junimea members, the representatives of the two movements rejected firmly the idea of modernisation and the inevitability of this action for a society such as the Romanian one. Moreover, the modernisation was considered a true danger which threatened the true values, the authentic ones, of the Romanian people, preserved by the Romanian village. The traditionalists denied the role undertaken by the elites starting with the 1848 revolution, as well as its major objective, without defining at any point this specificity and these values that are left in a vague description, out of which we can interpret freely any concept. Even if the adepts of the poporanism asked themselves at some point the question to identify some alternative solutions, especially the adepts of the semănătorism were unable to formulate a clear answer. Although their criticism was fierce and forceful it remains only a theoretical one and proposed no viable alternative.

The Romanian historiography of the post-communist period had developed even if sometimes chaotically and without priorities, freed from the ideological pressures of the ruling regime until 1990. The historiography diversified a lot of new research themes and subjects appeared in an obvious disproportion compared to the necessity to revisit some themes treated until saturation but almost exclusively from the perspective of the class struggle. This was a natural phenomenon, if we take into account the fact that the disappearance of ideological constraints allowed the free manifestation of historians’ curiosity, and the young persons, trained only in a scientific and academic approach, were attracted again by the new issues and had the ambition to further work, continuing their efforts and finalising the analysis.

One of the new trends taking shape more and more in the recent years is the one related to woman studies. The American and Occidental historiography imposed starting two and a half decades ago this field within the historiography debate; it isn’t a coincidence that at the beginning of the ‘90s two important syntheses were published at

the same time, in America and in Occidental Europe: Women History in the USA and Women History in Occident.

Historical science together with other humanistic disciplines, such as philosophy, sociology or anthropology plays an important role in the composition as complete as possible of women's place and image in the society. Moreover, the researchers, ether men of women, have the merit to have imposed in the field a new historiographic category, namely the gender. The gender is a component of the social reports based on the difference between sexes and it is an essential means in the significance of the balance of power. The gender – used in the academic language in order to designate realities generally and exclusively feminine, without evaluating the masculine ones - has consecrated a vast interest area, known generically as “gender studies“.

The “traps” are harder to avoid by those external to the historiographic field and it is our belief that lately is it noticeable that a certain attempt to invent a political genealogy to the present feminine movement by identifying some “roots” deeply extended to the 19th century, attempt due to some contemporary young and very young female activists otherwise motivated by goodwill. Graduates of Letters especially, coming from other humanistic sciences than history, they support the idea of a far fighting experience, using examples completely inadequate. We need to be perfectly clear. We don't consider that the historians hold a monopole of any nature and we are completely supporting a multidisciplinary approach. But we consider that clarifications are necessary. The most eloquent one is for us the case of Sofia Nădejde, whose maiden name was Cocea. She was a supporter of the socialist movement originated from the ranks of the Iasi intellectuals in the second half of the 19th century. Married to Ion Nădejde, one of the “generous” convinced by Ionel Brătianu to adhere to the Liberal National Party, she will remain faithful to her youth ideals, which she will serve in her publications, not very large, but gathered in a volume and published in successive editions during the communist regime. Her notoriety rather exaggerated that she had enjoyed until 1990 is due to the objectives of the class struggle, which imposed the retrieval of women and men altogether on the same barricades. The post 1990 use of her personality results from the ignorance of the period and especially from the easy access to the information; as the volumes of Sofia Nădejde are accessible to everybody. Moreover,

an aspect mentioned by Simone de Beauvoir is overlooked, namely the fact that the representatives of the socialist movement were fighting for the elimination of the person's exploitation and not especially for the feminine emancipation which is not a purpose in itself. In other words Sofia Nădejde also is no exception; the feminine emancipation is directly linked to a general emancipation of those who are working. There is no mention, for instance, of Stratilescu sisters, Eleonora and Tereza, who had attended as young persons the socialist debates but who will become after 1918 important thinkers of the Romanian feminine movement. Sofia Nădejde is not, as it may seem, the great-grandmother of the Romanian feminism.

The Romanian historiographic contributions are more and more consistent and point out an increasingly better coverage of the subjects related to the generous theme of women's history. Lately four important volumes of studies published at Cluj, Bucharest and Iași indicate the creation of research centers which managed to gather the interested professionals and more importantly to offer the possibility of discussions on projects on various stages of elaboration, projects in which also collaborate foreign researchers preoccupied by the Romanian issues. Within this context we can mention the contributions of some Romanian researchers established outside Romania, such as Maria Bucur and Matei Cazacu; these are two of the most quoted names. The studies published in various literature periodicals present both the activity of some feminine societies, organizations and associations, as well as aspects related to the women's education, legal status, men-women relations in the urban social environment etc. We still find unfortunately the use due to ignorance of some concepts and the temptation of a triumphal approach that we believe to be obsolete.

The unification process of the provinces inhabited by Romanians was part of an European process of national identities redefinition and the political action in itself which offered substance to it had to take into consideration both inner energies and international situation.

In the Romanian case, the unification of the Principalities in 1859 has marked the emergence of the political and institutional core around which the projects of unification will gather. The adoption of the constitutional monarchy system in 1866, attaining the independence of the young state and the proclamation of the Kingdom in 1881, had

represented main steps in the organization of an action that will follow more and more the attaining of the objective.

The process wasn't a linear one and was filled with obstacles, many of these related to both political-diplomatic realities specific for the Center and South-eastern Europe at that time, but also to the intrinsic nature of a process in which the particularities have proven to be more important than the whole. It can be said that a trend of "kingdom -centered" existed, to some extent a natural one if we consider that the Old Kingdom represented the political core, the center without which the unification would have been more problematic. But this trend of "kingdom - centered" was exaggerated by the political elite from Bucharest, fact that had determined the justified reaction of the Transylvanian and Basarabia elites. Sextil Pușcariu rejected firmly in a dialogue with Ionel Brătianu his opinion related to the recognisance that the Transylvanian inhabitants would have been obliged to show toward the Old Kingdom due the unconditioned unification. "The watchword is very dangerous and unfair. We have made as many sacrifices as them." Also Constantin Stere although a refugee in the Kingdom as a very young person and integrated in the adoption environment expresses his reserves toward the probable neglect at Bucharest of the specific desires of the Basarabia's inhabitants.

In our opinion, "the kingdom-centered trend" that we have mentioned was influenced by the different perception that the Romanian elite of the Old Kingdom had on the two Romanian provinces that will be unified in 1918. Moreover, even after the Union the Bucharest governments had reported differently at Transylvania and Basarabia when they analyzed the issue of integrating them in the new state and the difference at the level of public policies (educational, cultural, economical, etc.) was reflected also at the level of masses. In other words, certain evolutions in the inter-war period cannot be understood without analyzing the senses that the relation between center and periphery experienced between 1859 and 1918 in the Romanian space.

It is our belief that the researches in the field of social history can underline certain constant facts and particularities, can provide data and useful interpretations both the historiographic research and to the related disciplines in the field of social sciences. In

this paper we intend to present some aspects that we consider valid for the outlining of conclusions concerning the researches in the field of social history in Romania.

Even if after 1990 the studies from the above mentioned field had a visible growth, still social history didn't appeared then on an empty soil. But unfortunately the period of the communist regime was dominated by the official ideology that had perverted also the scientific initiatives. The central aspects became the class struggle and the exaggeration of production relations, the personalities had melted in the anonym crowd which acted only on ideological orders, excepting some social structures and mechanisms. The peasantry did nothing but rebel or prepare to do so, while the working class identified even in periods in which the industry was missing or was less present in the Romanian economy, was organizing the revolution that cannot be something else than victorious. Depersonalization of social history had lead finally to a loss of identity that had repercussions at first on social groups, on their relations, and than at a certain moment had started to influence the manner in which the professional reported to his own field of research. Social history was diluted as well as other fields of historiographical research, into the dense substance of exacerbated nationalism in the last two decades of the communist regime in order to hide the practice of neo-Stalinism. One of the main consequences in the scientific field was the loss of professionalism in an initiative that tended to be more political and ideological than historiographical. Accuracy and criticism of the primary sources, their analysis and interpretation didn't matter anymore except the ideological end.

Despite all these, there were also some professionalism centers, historians rather than institutions, as the structures were more easily controllable. In Iași, Cluj, Timișoara or Bucharest in universities and research institutes of the Romanian Academy, individual or small team projects were possible. To that extent, we can notice also a delimitation of historical periods based on the interest manifested by the regime. If the professionals of ancient history found their refuge in archaeology, the specialists of the Middle Ages in studies of genealogy and historical demography or in articles dedicated to medieval institutions, the modern history specialists preferred either the cultural history of the illuminism and romantics, either the political history, but the latter one was easily redirected toward a thesis-based and ideological interpretation. Unfortunately, the

contemporary period as it was delimited chronologically by the Romanian historiography fall almost completely under the crash of obedience. Of course, we are not considering an erratic, absolute border when we mention the phenomenon that we examine. Exceptions existed but the phenomenon is important in itself. The remembrance of some cases risk leaving aside some other significant cases. We cannot propose an inventory of such exceptions; however we try to present some examples, such as the historian Ilie Corfus who in his paper on agriculture in Muntenia in the first half of the 19th century demonstrated, in opposition with the official doctrine, that the peasantry didn't experience an aggravation of its dependency, but, contrary to this thesis, it manages to oppose successfully the attempt of the lords to increase the plots of land that formed their privilege. Ilie Corfus isolated at the historiographical level and also due to his political history, although he was a researcher at the "Nicolae Iorga" History Institute of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest, approached in a professional manner the sources he had discovered at the National Archives and his rich experience as a Middle Ages expert allowed him to decipher them. A critical history of the historiography during the communist regime still awaits his Benedictine and we are convinced that such a research will discover other aspects, other authors and other successes.

The moment of the December 1989 Revolution had changed at once promptly and radically the situation from a historiographical point of view; finally the change happened here as well, as it did for the whole Romanian society. The academic and research institutions were reorganized; a modernization of the curricula and the research plans was attempted and successfully reached, in other words, the reconnecting of the Romanian historiography to the international circuit was started. We still can ask ourselves to what extent a modernization of the historiographical debate was achieved, at least in the first decade of freedom. The change at first at an institutional level was produced by professors and researchers that could be grouped generally around 50 years of age in 1990. In other words, a generation that on one side had suffered the ideological pressures of the communist period and on the other side had the chance in certain moments of relaxation of the regime and due to personal contacts to travel in the Occidental Europe and US and to benefit from short training, research internships, grants, academic and university exchanges etc. The contact with the Occidental historiography allowed them to

be aware of certain evolutions in the field, even if sequentially and in most cases without the possibility to experiment them in Romania. This experience helped them still to know to which directions the reform was to be oriented. The confrontation between new and old was tensed still at least in the first months of 1990, and the vanities and pride feelings specific to the field had deepened sometimes the debate. We consider that the situation created by the political influences must also be mentioned; the tampering lead to the quick appearance of private and public universities even shadow research institutes used as refuge-institutions for those who were compromised before 1990. We mention again the fact that we cannot establish a clear, absolute delimitation. We have identified honest person among the ones who held positions before 1990 in the academic field, as well as some persons who traveled abroad were suspected that they were sent by the regime with various missions.

This generation of our professors from the faculty for instance dedicated their work at first the institutional mission that they have assumed a very important one, and so generations of young people had benefited of history science after 1990. Many of their members didn't have the time to reflect on historiographical priorities as they were needed in an extended civic level, not only in a scientific one. "All was to be built" one can state rephrasing the words of Ion C. Brătianu. There was no public debate within the historians' world related to clarification of some objectives more or less important. Things seem to be already clear and we consider that we extrapolate the situation of social history to other fields of historiographical research, with some variations. But this situation has produced on a long term distortions and laggings behind, while the start was failed beyond the punctual enthusiasm and even some valuable achievements. To some extent it was natural to see this happening. After a long period of exaggerated planning, control and imposing measures of all kinds, the reaction of total rejection appeared of all aspects that might be classified as resembling to the ones already mentioned. From the lack of variables until total relativity there was a step to be taken and it was quickly done. We can provide an example for this purpose: the beginning of the modern period. Until 1990 the question was simple enough: the modern period started in 1821. In other words, the Romanian society from the Principalities went to sleep in the middle Ages and woke up next day in the modern period. After 1990 an answer was not offered, various replies

were seek (1774- the Peace Treaty of Kuciuk-Kainargi; 1822 – return to Romanian princes; the reign of Alexandru Ipsilanti at the mid-18th century etc.) without reaching a conclusion and basing the whole effort again on a strictly chronological milestone. The consequence was that the Fanariot century was handed over by the Middle Ages specialists to the modernist historians and vice versa, is was poorly studied and passed in a historiographical loop while the issue of the modern period beginning was circumvented. Surely some other examples can be identified, applicable to other fields and historical periods.

The historiographical work of research that we propose will develop the themes already mentioned and in the same time will identify new subjects such as the historical biographies, still neglected until now by the Romanian historiography.