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French Influences on the Historical and Nationalist Thought of Nicolae Balcescu: An Inquiry into the Structure of Romanian Nationalism

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FRENCH INFLUENCES ON THE HISTORICAL AND NATIONALIST THOUGHT
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by

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Ion Matei Costinescu

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In the past decade nationalism has been conceptualized as a cultural artifact, a product of invention and social engineering. Yet despite the flourishing interest in questions of national identity, we still have no theory explaining the reasons why nationalism presents itself in a manifold diversity of forms and aspirations. One way of accounting for the malleability of modern nationalism is to approach it as a product of dialectical interactions between various national ideals. In this respect, the case of Romanian nationalism is particularly instructive. Its nineteenth-century proponents consciously borrowed and adapted French cultural mores and ideological forms since they believed that Romanians would find national salvation by achieving cultural and political synchronicity with France. The focus here is on the historian and nationalist theorist Nicolae Balcescu. Balcescu was but part of a long-term ideological project seeking to endow Romanians with a western identity and a nation-state of their own, patterned on the French model. He believed this would remedy the Romanians' historically powerless condition. Focusing on the critical relationship between text and context, this study explores the structure of Romanian nationalism during the nineteenth century.

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CHAPTER I

TURNING WESTWARD: LATINISM, HISTORICISM AND THE RISE OF FRANCE IN ROMANIAN NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Introduction

<u>General Considerations</u>

This study examines French influences on the historical and nationalist thought of Nicolae Balcescu. Born in 1819 in the Danubian principality of Wallachia, Balcescu was an archetypal revolutionary idealist of the 1848 generation, also known in Romania as the *Pasoptisti*.[1] The revolutions of 1848 have justly been called the "revolutions of intellectuals" for their ideas reflected and gave programmatic orientation to the widespread demands for social, political and national emancipation that characterized this critical juncture in Europe's transition through modernity.[2] If, as some have argued, nationalism and national ideas are "constitutive of modernity" then surely Balcescu deserves to be considered a founder of modern Romanian culture.[3] Partly this is due to his pioneering work as a historian possessed of a philosophical spirit which he succeeded in fusing with erudition and critical methodology. More important, however, was his role as a theorist of progress and nation. Though the concept of a Romanian nation already

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[1] Forty-eight = patruzeci si opt = pasopt; Forty-eighter = pasoptist; plural = pasoptisti.

[2] Louis Namier, <u>1848: The Revolutions of the Intellectuals,</u> (Garden City: New York Doubleday, 1964).

[3] Liah Greenfield, <u>Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity</u> (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 18.

enjoyed an intellectual tradition of its own, Balcescu went a step further and conceptualized the nation as an ideal to be realized in and through historical practice. In the process he endowed Romanian nationalism with the coherence and dynamism of a doctrine rendered all the more potent by virtue of its inherent relationship with a concrete political objective: the creation of a unified and independent Romanian state.

Consequently, one of the primary aims of this thesis is to elucidate the modalities whereby Balcescu deployed history as a mobilizing project ascribing authority and legitimacy to the nation state. As such, this project also serves as a case study. For it is well known that during the nineteenth century historians played a pivotal role in articulating national ideologies. To substantiate this point we need only evoke the memory of Jules Michele in France and Heinrich von Treitschke in Germany as prophets of national palingenesis. Their ideas, as well as their sway upon the educated public of their day, has been sufficiently well documented to necessitate no further discussion here save one observation pertaining to Balcescu. Though he was a thinker of high caliber, Balcescu never achieved the fame bestowed upon other national prophets such as Michelet or Giuseppe Mazzini. Balcescu's absence from the pantheon of national icons can be ascribed to several causes. In the first place, Romania never ascended to the kind of predominance in world affairs that would invite extensive foreign scrutiny of its cultural and intellectual life. Most importantly, for reasons to be explained more fully in this work, Romanian intellectuals have, since the seventeenth century, often adopted ideological forms from their Western counterparts. The import of foreign ideologies was not, as some have long argued, an adoption of "forms without substance" because in the process these

ideologies were transformed and grounded in local realities.[4] However, in a small nation

such as Romania not fortunate to enjoy the power and sense of messianic mission which,

say, France acquired after the Great Revolution, the penetration of Western concepts

engendered fears that the nation would become or come to be perceived as a cultural

dependency. Balcescu himself, though freely acknowledging his intellectual debts to

France, was no stranger to gross exaggerations when it came to emphasizing the genius

and originality of the Romanian people.[5]

Theoretical Considerations

These experiences of cross-cultural exchange between France and Romania are

worth further study not only because of their intrinsic interest. They can also advance our

theoretical understanding of modern nationalism. During the 1960s and 1970s, the then

prevalent modernization theory argued that nationalism is a form of belief produced by

the economic, technological and cultural transformations into and of modernity.[6] In the

past decade, however, modernization theory has been challenged by a conceptualization

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[4]Famous phrase coined by literary critic Titu Maiorescu (1840-1917). It refers to a longstanding argument that Western norms are unsuited to Romanian circumstances.

[5]For example, Balcescu judged the fifteenth century Wallachian army to be the oldest standing army in Europe. He maintained that "in those centuries which we call barbaric our ancestors adopted institutions based on principles which only now the writers of Europe consider to be most rational." Nicolae Balcescu, Opere, ed. Gheorghe Zane (Bucuresti: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste Romania, 1974), I:45.

[6]Karl Deutsch, Nationalism and Social Communication, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966).

of nationalism as a cultural artifact. Nationalism is now held to be a product of invention and social engineering.[7] But despite the new flourishing of interest in nationalism engendered by the new "constructivist" approach, the sense of national belonging remains a vexing problem. We still lack a theory explaining the reasons for which nationalism presents itself in such an astonishing diversity of forms and aspirations. In a modest way, this study proposes to show that the malleability of nationalism can be explained if we conceptualize the growth of nationalism as the product of dialectical interactions between various national ideals. At its worst this process produced tensions expressed through wars of conquest. At its very best, however, it created kindred spirits such as Michelet and Balcescu. Such men embodied the fundamental unity of European civilization underlying its various national forms.

Balcescu's Historic Significance

In classic nineteenth-century fashion, Balcescu regarded history as the most important of all disciplines.[8] Hence the key to Balcescu's nationalism was history. In his vision, history was far more than the glue binding the nation together. It was the means of spreading the nationalist creed. And it is the very prominence which history occupied

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[7]See, for example, Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Rise and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1983). See also Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, eds., The Invention of Tradition (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[8]Dan Berindei, "Nicolae Balcescu: personnalité marquante de l'historiographie Roumaine" Revue Roumaine d'Histoire 8(1969): 957.

in Balcescu's thought that renders his work into a focalizing lens through which to explore the intellectual structure of nineteenth-century Romanian nationalism.

Balcescu's significance rests on two distinct yet interrelated achievements. These will constitute the main themes of this study. First, his work gave historical and ethical justification to the idea of a Romanian nation. In this respect he was one of the first Romanians to endow the nation with republican content. Moreover, Balcescu was a progressive social theorist. He was the first *Pasoptist* to identify class conflict as an obstacle to national unity, as well as a potent tool of historical analysis. Thus he was the first Romanian scholar to undertake systematic analyses of the historical and economic roots of the class struggle in the Romanian principalities. This research found a logical corollary in Balcescu's proposals for agrarian reform and redistribution of land to the peasants. Furthermore, the results of his detailed inquiry into the social and economic circumstances of the Romanian lands, titled Question Economique Des Principautés Danubiennes and written in 1848, were incorporated into the mainstream of the European social literature of the period.[9]

Balcescu's intellectual interests, as well as his contact with other luminaries of European thought, helped integrate the Romanian revolutionary experience in its wider European context. This leads us to the second and most important theme of this thesis. Balcescu's efforts to endow Romanians with membership in Europe's community of

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[9]Balcescu's research was incorporated in Das Kapital through the medium of the French author Elias Regnault. Michelet too consulted Balcescu's work. This was done in preparation for his Légendes démocratiques du Nord. See Nicolae Raus, "Gindirea Revolutionarilor Romani de la 1848 si Rolul ei in Cadrul de Miscari Europene," Anale de Istorie 29(1983): 98-111.

nations is but part of a long-term effort by Romanian intellectuals that continues to this day. As such, Balcescu's thought reveals the fundamental tensions underlying the formation of a Romanian identity torn between the "demands of a rigorous national ideal and the legitimacy of universalism."[10]

Like many intellectuals of his generation, Balcescu was also a man of action. He was, in the estimation of Jules Michelet, *"un érudit de première ordre et en même temps un esprit pratique, très juste, très éclairé."*[11] This was a fitting tribute. For Balcescu pursued his goals with that unusual combination of idealism and ruthless determination that makes an effective revolutionary. In the insurrection that broke out on February 22, Balcescu fought alongside the people and students of Paris. After spending three days on the street, he still found time to pen a hurried letter to his friend the poet Vasile Alexandri so that he too may know that "the great nation has arisen and that the liberty of the world has been redeemed."[12] By way of conclusion, which few historians have been able to resist describing, Balcescu included a souvenir, a piece of velvet that he himself had torn from the throne of Louis-Philippe during the assault on the Tuilleries.

That Balcescu was in Paris that memorable day was no accident because France had long functioned as a cultural and political model for Romanian intellectuals. However,

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[10]Title of an article by Andrei Plesu, "Rigorile Ideii Nationale si Legitimitatea Universalului," <u>Secolul XX</u> 1981(1-2-3): 89-196.

[11]Jules Michelet, <u>Légendes démocratiques du Nord,</u> ed. Michel Cadot (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), 305.

[12]Balcescu, <u>Opere,</u> IV:33.

that the Romanian national movement came to regard "cultural synchronism" with France as the way to Romanian political emancipation needs a more detailed explanation.[13] Such a discussion is essential to understanding Balcescu's milieu. Most significantly, it points to the modes whereby the tensions underlying the formation of Romanian national identity expressed themselves. This identity was constructed by successive generations of ideologically committed scholars among whom the *Pasoptisti* played a pivotal role.

<div align="center">The Historical Construction of Romanian Identity</div>

Historical Background of the Problem

Though fundamentally a single ethnic group, Romanians had never, except during a brief interval in 1600, been united in a coherent and independent political unit. Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania - the three political entities which later unified to form the modern Romanian state - had an exceptionally tumultuous history which unfolded under the shadow of Ottoman, Habsburg and Russian rivalry for dominance in the region. In the absence of viable political structures to protect the *ethny*, Romanian elites have traditionally employed historiography and philology to structure a language of identity and self-assertion. It would be a mistake to assume that this discourse constituted a direct reflection of the way the mass of the Romanian population perceived its identity. Nor was this discourse always effective in supporting the political claims of

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[13]Doina Harsanyi and Nicolae Harsany, "The Discreet Charm of Little Sister: France and Romania," East European Quarterly XXXVIII(June 1994): 183-192.

the elites. Nonetheless, it was instrumental in solidifying the cognitive base of ethnicity during long centuries under foreign domination.

The Chroniclers

The first significant representation of Romanian identity dates back to the seventeenth century. It originated among nobles attached to the Wallachian and Moldavian courts who were finding the tribute demanded by the Porte to be increasingly onerous. In an attempt to counteract Turkish hegemony, Romanian elites began encouraging Russian and Austrian intervention in the affairs of the Ottoman Empire. Among these nobles were a number of Chroniclers (hereafter *Cronicari*) who undertook a cultural offensive aimed at obtaining European support for their cause. Couching their appeals in terms of the humanistic discourse on antiquity and, drawing on the common linguistic background of Romanians in all three principalities, these writers urged Europeans to show proper respect for their Roman origins by coming to the assistance of Rome's direct heirs. "We Romanians", argued Prince Serban Cantacuzino, "are Romans by belief and valor, not only those here [Wallachia], but in Transylvania who are still purer, and the Moldavians, as well as those in other parts who speak the same language."[14]

Cantacuzino's assertion merits closer examination. It shows that the *Cronicari* instituted a definition of Romanian identity whose very claim to virtue was based on

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[14]Cited in Stefan Pascu, The Making of the Romanian Unitary National State (Bucuresti: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste Romania, 1989), 24.

ethnogenetic notions. In doing so they firmly linked Romanian identity with history as a field of knowledge. This is one of the reasons that accounts for the durability of this definition. But this approach was not without pitfalls for it engendered an almost obsessive quest for the meanings presumed to be inherent in these origins. In this connection it might be worth paying closer attention to Cantacuzino's rhetoric, particularly his emphasis on the Roman purity of the Romanians. Here we observe the birth of a concept that enjoyed a long though by no means always distinguished career because the obsession with purity became a matter of unending debate.

Although the union of the ancient Dacians and the Roman colonists who settled in Dacia following Trajan's conquest in 106 A.D. did indeed form the Romanian people, Aurelian's withdrawal of the Roman legions at the end of the third century left the population to face the barbarian invasions alone. As the Daco-Roman territories (corresponding roughly to present day Romania) were overrun by successive waves of barbarians, the embryonic Daco-Roman state disintegrated and the Romanians disappeared from written sources for several centuries. The difficult problem of establishing the whereabouts of the original Daco-Roman population during this long interregnum was made even more difficult by the reappearance at the turn of the fourteenth century of political entities, that is the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, containing a population that continued to speak a Latin-derived language.[15] In turn, as

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[15]For a concise summary of the various theories accounting for the location of the Romanian population following its disappearance from written sources see Stephen Fischer-Galati, ed., Romania (New York: Frederick Praeger, 1957), 2-5.

Eric Hobsbawm astutely observed in a slightly different context, this led to perennial disputes concerning the "precise mixture" of pre-Romans, Romans, "Greeks immigrant Slavs of various kinds and various waves of central Asian invaders from the Avars to the Ottoman Turks" that made up the ethnicity of the Romanians.[21]

The challenge of proving the veracity of Romanian ethnogenesis and continuity on the former Daco-Roman territories became even more acute at the turn of the eighteenth century. This venture was taken up by an extremely clever Wallachian scholar-prince, Dimitrie Cantemir. Responding to the demand for documentary proof characterizing the search for an erudite history, Cantemir turned *latinity* and *continuity* into the very "canons" by which Romanian history should be investigated.[22] In other words, Cantemir believed that proof of Romanian ethnogenesis resided in the Roman conquest of Dacia. He also maintained that the people's uninterrupted presence in the original Daco-Roman territories was by no means disproved by the absence of written sources. Rather, Cantemir urged his readers to accept the Latin origin of the Romanian language as sufficient proof of an uninterrupted Romanian presence in the Carpatho-Danubian space.

To be sure, Cantemir's canons contained considerable heuristic potential and in

[16]Eric Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Program, Myth, Reality (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 63.

[17]Alexandru Zub, Istorie si Finalitate, (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Romane, 1991), 41.

their time constituted a sophisticated model of historical explanation marking the transition from Humanist to Enlightenment historiography. In a political context, however, they acquire a different significance. Cantemir's reign was marked by increasing pressure from the Ottoman court. Partly because of the unreliability of tribute, the Porte was attempting to replace native rule with the highest bidders among the Greek merchants of Constantinople. This political threat may well explain why Cantemir's canons crystallized into a system of rules that would henceforth govern and limit the discourse on the nation. Still, it would be an act of genealogical misappropriation to argue that the representation of Romanian identity as instituted by the *Cronicari* stretches in an unbroken line to the Romanian nation state. In fact it probably never occurred to the *Cronicari* that they were fashioning a new language of power that would set them even further apart from their peasant compatriots. Nevertheless, the distinct historical experience of Romanians living in Transylvania did cause the appearance of a genuine national movement there during the eighteenth century.

The Transylvania School

Transylvania was integrated into the Habsburg Empire at the end of the seventeenth century. This incorporation preserved its status as an autonomous principality attached to the Hungarian crown. The rights and privileges of the traditional estates were confirmed in 1691 by Leopold I. His *Diploma Leopoldinum* - which was to serve as the foundation of public law for more than a century - bestowed the prerogative of local government upon the legally recognized Magyar, Szeckler and Saxon nations. Here it is

important to note that at this time the idea of nation retained a basically medieval character. The concept of nation did not automatically include everyone of the same ethnic origins. Rather, it denoted persons possessing special rights and immunities. The primary criterion for legal recognition was social status.[18] However, the majority of Romanians were peasants, most of them serfs. Thus they were effectively excluded from Transylvania's body politic. The existing estates system prevented them from joining an already established "nation" or forming one of their own. But despite being condemned to social and political inferiority, the Romanians did have one institution working in their favor.

The Orthodox Church to which they belonged was seen by the Habsburg monarchy as an instrument that could potentially counter the centrifugal tendencies of Magyar nobles. Coinciding with this political goal was the triumphant march of the Counter-Reformation in the Habsburg Empire that began in the latter half of the seventeenth century. The idea of unifying the Habsburg realm through Catholicism found its Transylvanian expression in the Uniate or Greek-Catholic Church. The large segment of the Orthodox clergy who seceded from the Metropolitantate of Ungrovlachia in 1701 so that they may join the Uniate Church was not motivated by questions of dogma but by the promise of social advancement. In exchange for relief of their constitutional and fiscal disabilities, the Romanian clerics had only to accept the Pope as nominal head of the church and such doctrinal changes as the existence of purgatory and the use of unleavened

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[18]Keith Hitchins, The Idea of Nation: The Romanians of Transylvania, 1691-1849 (Bucuresti: Editura Stiintifica si Enciclopedica, 1985), 12-15.

bread in Communion. As traditional Orthodox canon law and liturgy remained unchanged, the acceptance of new doctrinal demands required little change in their religious practice.[19] Emboldened by the example of their priests, a segment of the Romanian peasantry soon followed suit and joined the new church.

The union between the two churches engendered a Romanian cultural renaissance. In the schools and monasteries of Blaj, the center of the Greek-Catholic faith, young Romanian men acquired an education in classical languages, philosophy and history. These Transylvanian scholars pursued research uncovering additional evidence concerning the Latin origin of the Romanians. Thus they began "to seek in their past the form of an ideal state."[20] Elaborating on the framework first established by the militant bishop Innochentie Micu Klein, the authors of the landmark 1791 memorandum *Supplex Libellus Valachorum* affirmed Romanian rights to participate in public affairs by virtue of their original inhabitancy of the realm and demographic superiority.[21] Klein's ideas were expanded by the historians of the Transylvania School.

It was these scholars who gave the concept of a Romanian nation a more modern connotation by framing Romanian demands for social and political emancipation in the Enlightenment language of political rights and recognition.[22]. Moreover, inspired by the

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[19]Ibid., 22-23.

[20]Cornelia Bodea, The Romanian Struggle for Unification, 1834-1849 (Bucharest: Publishing House of the Academy of the Socialist Republic of Romania, 1970), 13.

[21]Ibid., 14.

[22]Hitchins, The Idea of Nation, 82.

realization that its Latin origin can prove its development in the Roman colony of Dacia, these historians established the theoretical foundation for the study of the Romanian language. The most extreme version of the Latinist argument asserted that the Dacians were either exterminated in the war against Rome or fled the country following defeat. Allegedly, the Romanians descended solely from the Roman colonists brought by Trajan to repopulate the territory. By this reasoning, the Romanians were nothing less than "true-born Romans from true born Romans."[23] The Latinist argument was not without political benefit. In an empire descending from the Holy Roman Empire and dominated by an aristocratic class, the argument that the Romanians too were noble by virtue of descent gave substance to the polemics in support of Romanian national rights.[24]

Despite such obvious political advantages, the Latinist argument was by no means universally accepted. Orthodoxy had long been the traditional framework for Romanian identity. Most Romanians perceived themselves to be part of a universal Orthodox community and the Habsburg attempt to unify the empire via Catholicism rendered a .purely Roman origin inconvenient to those resisting the encroachments of the "Roman" faith. The Orthodox faithful preferred to emphasize the indigenous or mixed character of the Romanians. Be that as it may, the evidence uncovered by the Transylvania School concerning the Latin descent of the Romanians was too solid to be ignored. And in

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[23]Petru Maior, Istoria Pentru Inceputul Romanilor, ed. F. Fugariu (Bucuresti: Editura Albatros, 1970), 279. A new edition of this work first published in 1812.

[24]Katherine Verdery, National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 30.

helping establish this notion, the Transylvania School unwittingly paved the way for a closer relationship with France. For if Romanians had the same Latin roots and ancestry as the French did, "then they were not mere imitators of a great culture, but its younger, unfortunate sibling."[25]

Beginnings of French Influences in the Principalities

French Cultural Influences

Balcescu's intellectual formation took place in the context of increasing French influences in the Principalities. The influences engendered a veritable revolution in the realm of ideas that transformed the very notion of Romanian identity. The penetration of French ideas dates back to the latter half of the eighteenth century. First, however, it must be noted that in Transylvania French influences were always considerably weaker than in Wallachia or Moldavia. Though committed to the idea of Romanian latinity, Transylvanian intellectuals never succumbed to the frenzied Francophilia that engulfed Wallachia and the Moldavia's educated public. As subjects of the Habsburg crown, they were much more likely to pursue their studies in Vienna. They naturally looked upon this city as a cultural capital and potential political ally against the Hungarians. Moreover, for those Transylvanians who militated in supports of Romanian rights, the works of the *philosophes* meant less than the hope of enlightened reform on the Josephine model. By contrast, their counterparts in Wallachia and Moldavia would increasingly come to regard

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[25]Harsanyi, "The Discreet Charm of Little Sister," 186.

France as a cultural and political model.

The first contacts with French culture were mediated in a rather unusual fashion. During the eighteenth century Wallachia and Moldavia were ruled by a series of Greek princes from the Phanar district of Constantinople. These princes were appointed by the Sultan and the position was usually awarded to the highest bidder. The period of Phanariot rule constitutes one of the contentious issues in Romanian historiography. For some historians, following an interpretation first elaborated in Wallachia by Nicolae Balcescu in 1845, this period appears as a time of corruption, intellectual stagnation and above all economic exploitation by a rapacious foreign elite.[26] But other scholars, following the lead of Nicolae Iorga whom many still consider to be the dean of Romanian historians, have sought to rehabilitate the Phanariots. Though well aware of the crippling outflow of economic resources during the period of Phanariot rule, this interpretation nonetheless credits these princes for introducing a reforming spirit hitherto lacking in the principalities. After all, it was Prince Constantine Mavrocordato who in 1746 emancipated the serfs. By this way of thinking, the Phanariots complemented their role as social modernizers with that of reformers of culture. True, the cultural development that the Phanariots encouraged was primarily of Greek and Byzantine provenance. They founded Greek schools, imported Greek books and even went so far as to establish a Greek academy.[27] But the much-repeated accusation that the Phanariots were trying to impose an alien Greek civilization over the native Romanian culture has

[26]Balcescu, Opere, I:105-108.

[27]Harsanyi, "The Discreet Charm of Little Sister," 184

no grounds in reality. For one thing, it overlooks the degree of affinity between Greek and traditional Romanian intellectual and religious life which were Byzantine in origin. Moreover, the Phanariots were men of cosmopolitan taste and outlook. They were servants of a multinational empire and, as John Campbell observed, Westernism had managed to gain a following among the Greeks. This was particularly true among wealthy merchants,who maintained close ties "with the trading bourgeoisie of France and England, and the Phanariots, many of whom became acquainted with the Occident through their education and position as administrators and diplomats in the Ottoman empire."[27] Moreover, if one also considers that French was the international language of diplomacy, it is hardly surprising that the Phanariots began to employ French secretaries for their chancelleries and tutors for their children. This is how French became the language of choice in court circles. In turn, this opened the way to French literature. Mavrocordato himself amassed a vast library containing many works in French. At the same time, Greek translations of French works began to appear in the Principalities.[28] This is how Romanian boyars began to read French works in Greek.

This trend soon gained momentum and before long Romanians began reading French in original. Though living under Turkish rule, the Romanians had succeeded in preserving a native aristocracy because the Turks never settled in the Principalities as landowners, nor made any attempts to convert the native population to Islam. This is why

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[27]John C. Campbell, French Influences on the Rise of Romanian Nationalism (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1971), 7-8.

[28]Ibid., 10-12.

the Romanians were able to preserve an intellectual life of their own.[30] Romanian intellectual life was traditionally Byzantine and religious yet it too began to assimilate Western influences. No doubt this was due to the combined stimulus provided by the *Cronicari*, the Transylvania School and the Phanariots.

By the turn of the nineteenth century French books were commonplace in the homes of wealthy boyars. Members of the high clergy also began to read French authors. In 1800 the bishop of Ramnic took the unusual step of ordering the Encyclopedie for his private library. Voltaire too became popular though the Patriarchate had banned him as dangerous to the Orthodox faith.[31]

A further stimulus to the spread of French influences were the periodic occupations inflicted on the Principalities by the Russians as they vied to expand their influence in the Balkans at the expense of the Ottomans. The customs and manners of St. Petersburg high society were French in tone and this may very well explain the introduction of French dances and cardgames among Romanian elites. French journals, books and periodicals also began to reach the Principalities in ever increasing numbers by way of Vienna, commerce which was encouraged by the Phanariots.[32]

The increasing familiarity with French literature stimulated the beginnings of new literary efforts by the Romanians themselves. For the first time there were attempts to

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[30]Ibid., 9

[31]Harsanyi, "The Discreet Charm of Little Sister," 183-184.

[32]Ibid.

translate French works in Romanian. This was no easy task because the language of the ecclesiastical literature which had flourished in Bucharest and Iasi since the fifteenth century was rather archaic. Clearly this underscored the need to create a new literary language and, by extension, a native literature fashioned by the new standards. What these standards entailed was first and foremost a departure from Greek canons. The lead was taken in Moldavia by Metropolitan Veniamin Costache who began to break Greek dominance by founding a new religious seminary in 1813. This was followed by an establishment of a news school in Iasi under Gheorghe Asachi. Influenced by the Transylvania School, Asachi established a curriculum that moved towards a national ideal by including instruction in Romanian. A similar yet more sweeping process took place in Wallachia. In 1819, Gheorghe Lazar (1779-1823), a Transylvanian by birth and education came to Bucharest to direct a new school by the name of St. Sava. The College of St. Sava, subsequently attended by Balcescu and other *Pasoptisti,* became a leading center for the propagation of new national teachings. Pedagogically, Lazar went much further than Asachi. He replaced Greek with Romanian as the sole language of instruction and included course on national history.[33]

These educational initiatives signify the start of cultural nationalism in Wallachia and Moldavia. To be sure, this nationalism was still embryonic and politically immature, not to mentioned confined to a relatively small educated public composed primarily of aristocrats. Partly this was because the Greek hold on education had yet to be completely

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[33]Kurt Treptow, ed., A History of Romania (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 230-31.

broken. To this end a heavier emphasis on French proved extremely useful. Under the direction of Ioan Heliade Radulescu, Lazar's successor, French became an integral part of St. Sava's curriculum. This is because the first state *boursiers* sent to study in Italy and France had returned to Bucharest and were ready to take positions on the faculty of the college.[34]

Here was a cadre of young pedagogues who, not beholden to Greek or religious influences were committed to introducing the Western ideal of rationality in, as they saw it, the grim backwaters which surrounded them. These first students who returned from Paris in the 1820s were but a first trickle of an increasing flood of young boyars who flocked to Paris to acquire an education. Thus a new generation came into being. Later these young men came to earn the disparaging nicknames of "filfizons" or "bonjourists". Such names were in some ways well deserved. Many of these young boyars never applied themselves to serious study. They preferred to lead a life of leisure and imbibe the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the great city. Yet their frivolity was no obstacle to their acting as agents of profound changes in cultural and social mores. At the time most Romanians boyars still wore caftans and oriental pantaloons the "bonjourists" sported French dress. And while their elders still socialized reclined on pillows and companionably puffed on their hookahs, the new generation preferred to congregate in salons. It must have been quite a spectacle when the two generations mingled together, particularly since the "bonjourists' endeavored to "devise a spoken and written language that contained

[34]Dan Berindei, "Paris et Vienne: Centres de formation des cadres intellectuelles roumains ou XIX siècle," Etudes danubiennes 5(1989), 72-82

enough French words to render it socially acceptable but literarily impossible."[35]

Inevitably and most importantly, the more reflective natures among these youths were bound to work out the full implications of their affinity for all things French. They came to completely reject the Greek features of Romanian society, which they conceived as "Oriental", and determined to transform the Romanian principalities into a modern state on the French model. Their determination to radically alter the features of Romanian society can be ascribed to two distinct yet interrelated influences. The ideas of the Enlightenment and, more importantly, of the French revolution were a central component of their intellectual formation. And the modes whereby these ideas were translated in a Romanian context go a long way towards explaining the ambiguities that lay at the very roots of modern Romanian culture. This leads us to the second factor which compelled these men to undertake to undertake the task of modernizing Romanian society. For the reception of French revolutionary ideology in the Principalities cannot be separated from the new social and political circumstances that emerged there after 1821.

French Political Influences

The French Revolution in its Napoleonic incarnation opened the Romanian principalities to new influences that ave strong impetus to the already germinating sense of national consciousness among the Romanians. In 1796 the Directory for the first time appointed a French consul in Wallachia for the purposes of spreading revolutionary

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[35]Campbell, French Influences on Romanian Nationalism, 81.

propaganda.[36] Then Napoleon himself, following his victorious Italian campaign, entertained the rather fanciful notion of a campaign against Vienna using the Principalities as a base of operation. Napoleon's campaigns was followed with much interest by all politically conscious Romanians, that is to say a small number of dissatisfied boyars. Why should this be so? Primarily this was because as a social category the boyars were legally divided into three "classes", with most wealth and power accruing to the first-class boyars. For the relatively underprivileged second and third-class boyars, the seeming ease with which Napoleon redrew the map of Europe created a new sense of liberating potentialities conducive to social and political change. From 1821 onwards, several delegations of Moldavian and Wallachian boyars made their way to Paris in an attempt to enlist support for Romanian liberation from Turkish-Phanariot rule. Initially, these schemes stopped way short of envisioning a full transformation of Romanian politics and society. For the most part they envisaged emancipation from Turkish rule and equality of status within the boyar class, in other words a "republic" tailored for aristocrats with the rest of the population excluded from political participation. Nevertheless, these reform projects for the first time introduced the notion of constitutional rule. These constitutional projects were modeled on the French charter of 1814.[37] Though their liberal credentials were rather modest, these constitutional projects represent the beginnings of a profound process of social and political upheaval.

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[36]Georges Castellan, A History of the Romanians (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 115.

[37]Campbell, French Influences on Romania Nationalism, 20-21.

CHAPTER II

MODERNIZATION AND THE GROWTH OF THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

Revolt and Reconstruction: Wallachia and Moldavia, 1821-1848

Uprising of 1821

It was not until 1821 that the transforming influences associated with the expansion of revolutionary France in the rest of Europe began to significantly impact the Romanian principalities. The first explosion was triggered by the 1821 uprising led by Tudor Vladimirescu. This affair was a rather complicated business. It was triggered by an attempt to launch a Greek national uprising in the Ottoman Empire with an incursion in Moldavian territory by Greek forces gathered in Russia under Alexander Ypsilanti. Ypsilanti was a descendant of Phanariot princes and has spent a substantial amount of his career as an adjutant to Tsar Alexander I. He was also a member of the *Hetairia*, a conspiratorial society aiming to liberate Greece from Turkish rule. Ypsilanti planned to cross into Wallachia and Moldavia in the hope of garnishing additional support from the numerous *Hetari* sympathizers among the Romanians. He thereby hoped to transform his venture into a crusade of all Balkan Christians against Ottoman rule.[38] Since the success of their endeavor would most certainly have reopened the Eastern Question, the *Hetari* were reasonably assured that they could count on Russian support. This, in fact, was one

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[38]Treptow, A History of Romania, 232-33.

of the arguments they used to persuade Romanians to join their insurrection. But the problem was that many Wallachian boyars disliked the Turks and the Greeks in equal measure. After all, the Phanariots themselves were Greek and it was with them that the Romanians had to deal with as immediate overlords. Moreover, while they would have been happy to overthrow Turkish and Phanariot rule, the Romanians had no way of making sure that they would not be exchanging Ottoman for Greek overlordship. Enter Tudor Vladimirescu, an educated boyar of some wealth and commander of a local militia called the *Pandurs*. The *Pandurs* had participated in the Russo-Turkish war of 1816-1812 and were later used for purposes of internal order. Both Tudor and the boyars desired the restoration of a native prince. In addition, the former was also concerned with ending the flagrant corruption among public servants and improving the agrarian situation.[39] Though legally free, most peasants did not own land and still owed labor services to their landlords. Yet the most striking aspect of Tudor's agenda was revealed in his Pades proclamation. The proclamation conferred power on the very people who had gathered at Pades, *Pandurs* and peasants. They represented a "people's assembly" and claimed to speak for the entire population of Wallachia.[40] In his proclamation Tudor had called for the election of a native prince and the ousting of all exploiters. Still, it is difficult to tell what kind of uprising Tudor intended to lead. Was it to be primarily a war of national liberation or a social revolution? The many peasants who answered his call probably did

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[39]Ibid., 234.

[40]Castellan, a History of the Romanians, 118.

not care much whether their exploiters were Greek bureaucrats or Romanian boyars. They were simply attracted by Tudor'sreputation as a champion of the people who dismissed corrupt officials and took their side against landlords.

The question of whether Tudor was raising the standard of social or national revolution is complicated by his very actions. He made efforts to dampen the social protest he had unleashed by proposing instead legal reform. Moreover, he repeatedly claimed that his demand for a native prince and a national army were only intended to strengthen Ottoman rule.[41] Presumably he made this argument in order to forestall Ottoman intervention. But again there is no way to be certain that he would not have been content with a native prince ruling at the pleasure of the Porte, especially if that prince was himself.

It was this policy of conciliation with the Porte that finally convinced Ypsilanti that Tudor could not be trusted. Accordingly, Ypsilanti drew Validmirescu into a trap and executed him after a hasty trial. Nonetheless, Ypsilanti's uprising failed because he proved incapable of obtaining a firm commitment of support from the Russians. Without having to worry about a Russian intervention, the Turks promptly invaded and easily defeated Ypsilanti's undisciplined army. Ypsilanti himself was forced into exile.

For the Romanians this episode had great importance. Validimirescu's uprising convinced the Turks of the need for a native prince. Consequently, the revolt helped crush

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[41]Treptow, A History of Romania, 235.

Phanariot power. They also acquired in the person of Tudor a genuine popular hero whose memory would easily be fashioned into a nationalist myth.

The Turks moved speedily to conciliate the Principalities. In 1822 they restored native rulers on the thrones of Moldavia and Wallachia. These native rulers were certainly no reformers. Yet they inaugurated a period of stability by curtailing the flow of resources out of the two provinces. They also tolerated greater Romanian cultural development and continuing educational reform. In doing so they created conditions for the "full-blown emergence of Romanian nationalism."[42]

Paradoxically, foreign intervention in Romanian affairs actually increased in the decades following the return of native rule. Relations between the Russian and Ottoman empires continued to be tense due to the continuing persistence of the Greek question and also because the Tsarist government was angry for not being consulted regarding the new political arrangements in the Principalities. In 1826 Russia and Turkey signed a convention at Ackerman stipulating that the election of Romanian princes must be confirmed by both powers. But this agreement did not last. Russia and Turkey went to war again in 1828. The victorious Russians occupied the Principalities and for all practical purposes turned them from a Turkish into a Russian protectorate. By the 1829 Treaty of Adrianople, as part of a comprehensive settlement including the Geek question, Russia compelled Turkey to confirm the administrative autonomy of Wallachia and Moldavia, with provisions that the native princes be elected for life and the right of the Porte to

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[42]Ibid., 235.

intervene militarily strictly curtailed.[43]

The Organic Regulations

The occupation of the Principalities by the Russians was a very important period in Romanian history. Since Nicholas I was bent on modernizing his empire he intended to do the same in all territories under his influence. In the Principalities this task fell to general Count Pavel Kisseleff who proved to be a most capable military governor. Not content to repairing the damage caused by the recent war, he soon embarked on an ambitious program of social, political and economic reform. His first and most important task was the drafting of the first real constitutions for Wallachia and Moldavia. These statutes were known as the Organic Regulations. They gave Wallachia and Moldavia virtually identical constitutions and also established a customs union between the two principalities. These measures were most significant for they rendered a political union between Wallachia and Moldavia into a practical possibility. The regulations also instituted a political regime not unlike the constitutional monarchies in Western Europe. Executive power was vested in the prince who was to serve for life but was elected by an Extraordinary general Assembly composed primarily by boyars and high clergy. Legislative prerogatives were vested in a National Assembly of a similar social composition. The National could pass budgets but not depose the prince. Other stipulations created the nucleus of a national army and a judiciary theoretically

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[43]Castellan, A History of the Romanians, 244-45.

independent of both prince and legislature.

On the strength of these provisions one might well regard the Organic regulations as an enlightened piece of statecraft. Indeed, given the previous political history of the Romanians it is difficult to conclude otherwise. But the socio-economic prescriptions of the Regulations caused mixed results. They were intended to modernize the economy and as is usually the case with economic reform they came at a price. Though the regulations promoted free trade and the growth of a communications infrastructure, they did little to improve the conditions of the peasants. In fact, the social prescriptions of the regulations distinctly benefitted the boyars. In landed matters the noble had direct control over one-third of his estate while the peasants became tenants on the remaining two-thirds with the obligation to work a fixed number of days per year for the landlord. Moreover, peasants lost rights to common privileges such as pastures. Not surprisingly, agrarian discontent continued to be serious problem.[44]

Another source of discontent was the close control which Russia exercised over the two provinces. This was particularly true for the increasingly nationalistic younger generation. More and more educated abroad, they began to demand a democratization of society and politics. These demands did not stem from economic or political imperatives. Many of these men came from socially privileged backgrounds. Rather, these demands were caused by the European and especially French intellectual trends which influenced these young men.

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[44]Ibid., 246-52 passim.

Intellectual Developments, 1830-1848

General Background

The intellectual and political evolution which this new generation of Romanians underwent in Paris during the 1830s and 1840s was, on the most general level, inspired by the ideas of the French Revolution. What needs to be kept in mind is that these ideas were mediated through a peculiarly French commemoration involving a selective appeal to the facts, symbols and personalities involved in this momentous event. The July Monarchy which came to power in 1830 following the Three Glorious Days was legitimized by the memory of the constitutional monarchy of 1789. Consequently, the liberal defenders of the Orleanist regime could not or would not accept the revolutionary catechism of "*liberté, égalité, fraternité*" because it was associated with the radical phase of the Revolution.[45] On the other hand, French republicanism had enjoyed a resurgence following the 1830 revolution. The republican critics of the July Monarchy drew their inspiration from the First Republic and therefore urged an acceptance of the Revolution *in toto*. Reflecting in part the French confusion concerning the legacy of the Revolution, the Romanians would come to elaborate their own interpretation of revolutionary ideology. This interpretation was encapsulated by the slogan "Justice, Fraternity" which would become the ideological and programmatic code of the *Pasoptisti*. As is usually the

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[45]For a comprehensive study of this issue see Stanley Mellon, The Political Uses of History: A Study of Historians in the French Restoration (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958).

case with such dicta, its meaning was contested, sometimes bitterly by various factions in the revolutionary movement. This was particularly true when it came to working out the implications of the demand for "justice". Those who found the classical liberal tradition and constitutional monarchy most more congenial understood the term to denote primarily equality under the law. Others conceptualized "justice" in more political terms to imply the expansion of suffrage. But of course not all were prepared to go so far as to advocate universal manhood suffrage to say nothing of extending women the right to vote. Finally, a few forward- looking thinkers such as Balcescu would come to understand "justice" not only in social terms, meaning redistribution of land to the peasants, but more importantly as the right of Romanians to achieve full nationhood. As to the second part of the slogan, there is little doubt that the cry for "fraternity" represented the hope for the eventual unification of the Romanians, or at least those living in Moldavia and Wallachia into a single state.[45]

Then too in the overheated atmosphere at the *College de France* these youths were swept away by the Romantic rhetoric of *people, nation* and *patrie* so ably exposed by Michelet and the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz. To be sure, figures such as Michelet and Mickiewicz went beyond the narrow confines of advocating nationalism solely as a political dogma. They embodied an entire Romantic sensibility that included a deep appreciation of the past, republicanism and, not least, the cult of revolution. Hence, the

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[45]Marin Bucur, "Liberté, égalité, fraternité: Sacralisation et Contestation dans les discours politique roumain d'après 1848," Revue Roumain d'Histoire 28(1989), 15-24 passim.

Romanian students absorbed an entire Romantic ethos that configured the mental topography of Romanian nationalism well into the twentieth century. To understand the structure of Romanian nationalism it thus became necessary to capture its Romantic substratum.

Romanticism and Romanian Nationalism

European Romanticism was a movement of complex origins and often contradictory modes of expression. A comprehensive description of this rich and variegated phenomenon would lead us well outside the purview of this study. For our purposes however, Romanticism, can best be approached as an expression of the heightened historical consciousness initiated by the French Revolution. One reason for the growth of what may be termed this new historicizing culture can be found in a paradox that lies at the very core of revolutionary ideology. The French Revolution presented itself and was perceived as a radical break with the past. Yet in doing so it endowed the past with great symbolic force if for no other reason than the need to represent the Old Regime as the antithesis of the new world which would be founded on liberty and reason. This trend towards valorizing the past was reinforced by the tendency of the revolutionaries to look for inspiration to the great figures of antiquity "not so much as historical personalities but as models of reason and virtue."[47] On the other hand, their enemies also

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[47]Vasile Cristian, Contributia Istoriografiei la Pregatirea Ideologica a Revolutiei Romane de la 1848 (Bucuresti: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste Romania, 1985), 19.

found in the past ammunition to undermine the revolutionary project. Following the lead of the English political theorist Edmund Burke, conservatives portrayed the Revolution and its excesses as a misguided and ultimately disastrous attempt to alter the "natural", "organic" process of social and historical development through the arbitrary application of the abstract principles of the Enlightenment. Burke's famous <u>Reflections on the Revolution in France</u> did by no means enjoy universal acceptance. It did, however, succeed in setting the terms of the subsequent debate concerning the meaning of the Revolution by focusing the discussion on the ethical dimension of historical practice.

These developments must be considered in conjunction with the deep social and political cleavages caused in France by the rapid succession of Ancien Regime, Revolution and Empire. There was an urgent need for social and political reconstruction. Yet the fundamental principles of socio-political organization upon which this reconstruction would be based remained bitterly contested. At the root of the problem was a legitimation crisis. The revolution had established the nation-state in material form but the nation had not yet gained ascendancy as a new form of social legitimacy. Social legitimacy is understood here in a dual sense as a principle of political organization and a symbolic field enabling society to project and define its identity.

Not surprisingly, the Bourbon restoration of 1815 rekindled the arguments concerning the meaning and value of the Revolution, exacerbating the tension between the principles of dynastic property and national sovereignty. There also continued to be a need to explain and come to grips with the upheaval of the preceding quarter century.

All these factors combined with the restrictions placed on political activity during the Restoration to displace politics into history. In effect, "history became the language of politics."[48]

From this, as Cerri Crossley explained in a penetrating study, it was but a logical step for history itself to broaden its ideological uses and become actively involved in the reconstruction of society.[49] To be sure, history as a discipline has enjoyed an intimate connection with ideology and power. What needs to be emphasized here is the greatly expanded ideological role history came to fulfill. Consequently, conservative ideologues such as DeBonald and Joseph de Maestre set about to construct an idealized past centered around Monarchy and Church to serve as theoretical justification for the absolutist tendencies of the Restoration. By contrast, the first Romantic historians such as Augustine Thierry and Francois Guizot consciously decided to transform history into a tool of further social and political change. The manner in which they represented the national past was designed to support the political aspiration of the bourgeoisie.[50] The victory of the 1830 revolution turned the luminaries of Restoration historiography into pillars of the newly established order. By then, however, the practice of using history as an instrument of social change was already well established.

Historiography's new militant spirit found a powerful echo in the development of

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[48]Mellon, The Political Uses of History, 5

[49]Cerri Crossley, French Historians and Romanticism: Thierry, Guizot, the Saint Simonians, Quinet, Michelet (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

[50]Vasile, Contributia Istoriografiei la Pregatirea Revolutiei de la 1848, 22.

a new branch of Romanticism during the 1830s. Some scholars have characterized this movement as Democratic Romanticism.[51] Democratic Romanticism acquired great impetus following the Three Glorious Days which, by evoking memories of the Great Revolution, had sparked widespread demands for democracy. This type of Romanticism helped solidify an "European-wide ideological front" with intellectuals playing prominent roles as spokesmen for social and national emancipation.[52] Poets, writers and historians such as Byron, Hugo and Michelet and Michelet set themselves in sharp contrast to the passive, contemplative branch of Romanticism personified by such figures as Chateaubriand and inaugurated a "messianic" and "positive" stage of Romanticism.[53] Messianic Romanticism stimulated the growth of Romanian nationalism in two very significant ways. In the interest of clarity these developments will be analyzed separately but one should keep in mind that their relationship was dialectical. The first such result was a heightened historical consciousness that provided fertile soil for the development of Romanian nationalism into well defined cultural/intellectual movement as well as into a coherent political doctrine. A significant contribution to this trend came from Germany where figures such as Herder and the Grimm brothers initiated a European-wide "discovery" of folklore. This "discovery" found a powerful echo in the Romanian lands.

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[51] Alexandru Dima, "Romanticismul European in Trasaturile lui Dominante," in Alexandru Balaci ed., Romantismul Romanesc si Romantismul European (Bucuresti: Societatea de Stiinte Filologice, 1970), 23.

[52] Ibid., 24-25.

[53] N. I. Popa, "Romantismul Francez si Romantismul Romanesc," in Romantismul Romanescu si Romantismul European, 99

Collected and published by historians such as Mihail Kogalniceanu and poets such as Vasile Alecsandri and Alecu Russo, Romanian folklore came to be regarded as a national treasure. It was now held that folklore gave voice sufferings, hopes, artistic expressions and desire for liberty of the Romanian people.

The second and no less significant contribution to the blooming of cultural nationalism was the already present native Romanian historicism. As the long tradition inaugurated the *Cronicari* makes abundantly clear, the Romanians already possessed a "historicizing culture.[54] This native historicism combined with the with the general European trend towards historicism given a philosophical base by Vico, Herder and Hegel to result in a "discovery" of the national past. From the dim mists of the past figures such as Stephen the Great were resurrected in the guise of national heroes. Poets and writers now aspired to described these heroes as "'the people" would have seen them. These personages became embodiments of national dignity and it was hoped that their memory would reawaken the spirit of revolt and faith in the future of the Romanian people.

This new confidence in the future of the Romanians is indicative of another aspect of the relationship between Romanticism and the national movement. Scholars have remarked that one of the fundamental myths of the Romantic mentality was the idea of a historical mission. The concept denoted the "convergence point" between human and divine and was adopted by Romanian thinkers from various philosophical and ideological

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[54]Alexandru Zub, "Logos und Ethos in der Rumanischer Kultur," <u>Speculum</u> 32(1981), 172.

currents, especially from the works of Lammenais and Michelet.[55] From here it was but a natural step to try and bring the future closer through political action. It must, however, be remembered that for many if not the majority of the *Pasoptisti* political action remained inextricably connected with literary or scholarly pursuits. Balcescu himself provides a case in point.

<p align="center">Balcescu: Education of a Revolutionary</p>

<u>The St. Sava Days</u>

Balcescu was born in a family of impecunious boyars. This did not bode very well for his future prospects of social advancement. His widowed mother was nonetheless sufficiently well connected to be able to secure him admission to the prestigious St. Sava College. The college provided the finest education available in Wallachia at the time. It was also was also his good fortune that the college flourished in a time of considerable intellectual ferment. Many of the faculty were engaged with the burning issues of the day and were instrumental in setting the intellectual and political agenda of Romanian nationalism. In short, Balcescu was right where the action was and this no doubt accounts for his precocious politicization. Therefore our discussion must also examine the cultural and political milieu in which his education took place.

At St. Sava Balcescu underwent training in a curriculum that included French,

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[55]Florian Roates, "Inferente Europene in Gindirea Istorica Romaneasca de la 1848," <u>Revista Istorica</u> 1(1990), 79-82

Greek, Latin as well as philosophy and history. He also acquired two mentors who were to influence his political views. The first mentor was the well-known J.A.. Vaillant. A French pedagogue of Jacobin sympathies, Vaillant directed a boarding school associated with the college and was the author of several French-Romanian grammars and dictionaries. Since he did not think the Romanian professors were sufficiently well prepared, Vaillant proceeded to hold all his course in French and endeavored to prevent his best students from attending other classes at the college. He did so in order to insure that they received a modern education that would, if they so desired, prepare them for further study abroad. Vaillant's actions caused a huge controversy that well illustrates the political and cultural milieu prevailing in Wallachia during the Organic Regulations. On the side of Vaillant were a sizable number of influential boyars who wanted their children to acquire french education. Arrayed against them were the champions of the national language and, oddly enough, the Russian consulate who feared Vaillant as a subversive radical.[56]

No less radical in political outlook was Balcescu's other mentor, the Transylvanian Eftimie Murgu. A distinguished philosopher and philologists, Murgu belonged to a wider group of intellectuals who aimed to create a national literary language closer to that spoken by the common people. Both Murgu and Ioan Heliade Radulescu, Lazar's successor at the helm of St. Sava, were enthusiastic promoters of Latinism. Convinced of the need to "purify" the language, Radulescu championed the Latin alphabet

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[56]Campbell, French Influences on Romanian Nationalism, 100.

as a means of purging Greek and Slavic influences. Radulescu was also a prolific translator and he encouraged others to do the same. Many works he translated were French in origin and this was no accident for he regarded these translations as integral to his efforts to bring Romanians closer to their Latin roots.[57]

He also hoped that acquaintance with foreign books would help Romanians would help Romanians develop new ideas conducive to the growth of a native literature. To this end in 1829 he founded *Curierul Romanesc* (Romanian Courier) and in 1833 *Curierul de Ambele Sexe* (The Courier for Both Sexes). These journals published poems, translations and literary criticism and achieved their stated goal of stimulating native literary efforts.

In 1833 Radulescu founded the so-called Philharmonic Society. The name of this group, which Murgu also joined, suggests a preoccupation with music. Yet music was rather low on the agenda. The Philharmonic Society had much more ambitious goals. It aimed to bring moral and cultural enlightenment to all social classes by means of an ambitious educational program that included courses in moral philosophy, rhetoric and the study of French and Romanian. Here again St. Sava helped a great deal by providing instructors and facilities. The Philharmonic Society also made great efforts to establish a national theater. Unfortunately, as yet there were not many Romanian playwrights. Still, the Philharmonic Society made progress in this direction by helping translate and staging plays by Molière, Voltaire and others.

These developments gradually incurred the displeasure of Russian officials. What

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[57]Ibid., 42.

bothered them most was that these cultural initiatives went hand in hand with a growing penetration of French ideas, which they associated with liberalism and revolution. Rightly or wrongly, they could not help but regard them as undermining their influence in the principalities. Accordingly, they resolved to tighten their political control. Russian consuls became increasingly meddlesome and tried to boost their influence by playing off the native prince against the assembly. This policy of interference culminated in an attempt by Russia to introduce an additional article to the Organic Regulations stipulating that constitutional amendments would henceforth not be permitted without Russian consent. The Russians succeeded in getting their way but at the price of triggering the first political manifestation of Romanian nationalism.

The Revolutionary Movement of 1840

In 1838 a National Party was formed from the politically minded members of the Philharmonic Society, including Eftimie Murgu. The party was led by Ion Campineanu, a sincere liberal who had led the fight against Russia's attempt to modify the Regulations. His courageous stand rallied under his banner a more youthful group ably represented by the poet Vasile Alexandri, D. Bratianu, the Golescu brothers and Mihail Kogalniceanu This, in short, was the cultural and political milieu in which Balcescu's formal education took place. In 1838 Balcescu was only nineteen years old but had already thoroughly absorbed the new national teachings. He thus hastened to join the National Party. It is testimony to his intellectual potential and early to devotion to the

cause, as well as to the manpower shortage and relative isolation the National Party, that Balcescu was accepted in this group of older and more experienced men.

The National Party had several goals. First and foremost was national unification and independence. Yet it also produced a constitutional project that is worth a closer look. The proposed constitution contained the classic liberal provisions of equality under the law and freedom of the press. Remarkably, it also proposed free education for all and emancipation of the Gypsies. For the time these were very progressive proposals. Having acquired a Moldavian counterpart, the National party set towards implementing this goal.

The strategy involved a two-pronged approach. Campineanu first went to Paris where he helped organize the *Society for the Education of the Romanian People*. Its members were Moldavian and Wallachian students who ostensibly aspired to diffuse "culture" among the Romanians. The society had two headquarters, one in Paris and the other in Bucharest. The students in Paris pledged to send newspapers and other publications for the edification of the public at home. This was the official aspect of the society. The secret, political goal of the organization was implemented in Paris. Availing themselves of such progressive newspapers as *Le National*, Romanian students tried to draw attention to the social, political and economic changes they intended to implement in order to modernize the Principalities.[58]

Paris also served as a point of contact between Romanian and Polish revolutionaries. Campineanu's plans were impressive in scope. He envisioned a simultaneous uprising in all Romanian lands, including those under Habsburg rule. To

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[58]Bodea, The Romanian Struggle for Unification, 51.

this end he instructed Murgu to dispatch Balcescu to the Banat. He hoped Balcescu might be successful in fomenting revolution there. His grander, scheme, however, was conceived in collaboration with Czatorysky and envisioned an uprising of the poles in conjunction with the Romanians. Together, the argument went, the two peoples had a better chance of standing up to Russia. Obviously, Campineanu hoped the Poles would supply the military expertise that the Romanians lacked. But in the final analysis any chance for success rested on support from the French and English governments. Campineanu hoped that these powers would support the cause of "constitutionalism" in Eastern Europe. Unfortunately neither Palmerston nor Louis-Phillippe had an interest in reopening the Eastern Question by meddling in the Principalities, nor did they intend to provoke Russia by supporting Polish independence. Lacking international support and increasingly watched by Russian and Wallachian authorities who were alerted by his frequent contacts with the Poles, Campineanu's plans collapsed. He was arrested but some of his followers did not give up. In 1840 Murgu, Balcescu and Vaillant founded another secret organization. The program of this organization anticipated 1848 by combining demands for national emancipation with an emphasis on social problems. But the authorities were on alert and the inexperienced conspirators were quickly arrested.

Balcescu was sentenced to three years imprisonment in the Vacaresti monastery. This was a typical nineteenth century scenario, a pattern subsequently followed by many twentieth century radicals. A term in prison an exile was but a stage in the education of aspiring revolutionaries. Balcescu conformed to this pattern in all respects for he undoubtedly used the time to reflect upon his experiences and strengthen his resolve.

Immediately upon his release in 1843 he founded yet another secret society in collaboration with Ion Ghica and Christian Tell. The name of this society was *Fratia* (Brotherhood) and it was based on an explicitly republican ideology aiming to establish a democratic state based on universal suffrage. It also rested on the belief that national and social reform could only be achieved by means of revolution.[59]

In conjunction with his political activities, Balcescu resumed his scholarly and literary pursuits. Together with the Transylvanian A.T. Laurian in 1845, he founded *Magazin Istoric Pentru Dacia (*Historical Review for Dacia). This review was established with the express purpose of collecting and editing primary sources pertaining to the history of the Romanians. In the same year, Balcescu co-founded the *Literary Association of Romania.* The main concern of the society was philology and history since these disciplines were the traditional weapons in the fight for national emancipation. These scholarly pursuits also provided legal cover for revolutionary activities. Balcescu himself explained that the government left them alone since they did not overtly engage in politics.[60]

Balcescu and the Society of Romanian Students in Paris

The *Literary Association of Romania* also established a counterpart in Paris. Known as the *Society of Romanian Students in Paris,* the official purpose of the organization was to help aspiring *literati* become competent writers and to promote study

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[59]Vasile Maciu, "Micsarea Romaneasca pentru Republica in Epoca Revolutiei de la 1848," Studii si Anale de Istorie 26(1973), 437-58.

[60]Bodea, The Romanian Struggle for Unification, 81.

abroad in all fields for promising young men. The real purpose of the society, however, was to advance the national cause. The timing for this was auspicious because the messianic Romanticism emanating from the *College de France* was gaining. Among other things this philosophy held that "Europe's nations would awaken and bloom when the true French spirit would be regenerated, that is a Romantic version of France of 1789."[61] Since the Romanians were so closely related to the French, it followed that they were in the best position to liberate themselves by way of France's revival.[62]

Accordingly, the small group of Romanians set about to win public support, or at least the support of French intellectuals, for the "plight" of their less fortunate Latin brothers. In this they were helped by the ongoing press campaign in favor of the Poles. Though the Poles had always been the favorite East European underdogs, this particular campaign helped place all the social and political movements in Eastern Europe under the same symbol.[63] Their efforts acquired impetus owing to the July 1846 arrival of Balcescu in Paris. Having finally saved enough money for the journey, Balcescu arrived in Paris to put the finishing touches on his education and labor on behalf of the national cause. He helped channel a steady stream of information concerning the history and current circumstances of the Principalities, particularly in republican newspapers such as *La Reforme*. The Romanians were also fortunate enough to obtain the support of several

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[61]Harasanyi, "The Discreet Charm of Little Sister," 187.

[62]Ibid.

[63]Bodea, The Romanian Struggle for Unification, 118.

French journalists, notably Paul Bataillard and Hippolyte Desprez. In editorials and travelogues published primarily in the *Revue des Deux Mondes,* these men championed the Daco-Roman thesis of Romanian ethnogenesis and presented the Romanian people in the henceforth enduring cliche as a Latin island in a Slavic sea. The same articles contained arguments in favor of Romanian political unification and urged France to support the democratic aspirations of the Romanians. By far the greatest coup achieved by the *Society of Romanian Students* was acquire the patronage of Alphonse de Lammartine, whose poetry had been an inspiration to them all.. His good name helped make the Romanian cause respectable and proved critical in eliciting the support of other noted figures such as Michelet and Edgar Quinet. By 1847 the famed historians had already published several pieces on the Principalities.

Balcescu's signal contribution was to consolidate the society's ideological program. His concern with establishing a firm ideological foundation for the society stemmed from a radicalism that made him particularly receptive to the growing clamor raised by French republicans and other members of the Left. Having absorbed the republican critique of the July Monarchy, it was no great stretch for him to regard the Organic Regulations as the Romanian equivalent of the *juste mileu*. And the increasingly vocal demands for electoral reform culminating with the start of the famous *Banquet* campaign in the summer of 1847 heightened his awareness that political change in France might give him an opportunity to advance his cause at home. These circumstances made it imperative to set forth a Romanian revolutionary agenda ready to be implemented the moment revolution erupted in France.

CHAPTER III

DÉNOUEMENT

Balcescu as Theorist of Progress and Nation

Nationalism as a Revolutionary Force

On January 1 1847, Balcescu held an important speech at a meeting of the *Society of Romanian Students* in which he outlined the society's ideological program. Entitled *"Privire asupra starii de fata, asupra trecutului si viitorului Patriei"* (General Survey of the Past, Present and Future State of Affairs in the Homeland), the speech conveys much about Balcescu's conception of nationalism as a revolutionary force. Without rejecting the old dictum "Justice, Brotherhood" elaborated five years earlier, Balcescu replaced it with the slogan "Homeland, Brotherhood, Liberty" because he believed it better expressed the threefold national, social and political revolution he and his colleagues hoped to lead. For Balcescu this slogan was nothing less than the declaration of a new faith.. He reminded his audience that they lived in a time of transition in which old ideas had lost their power.[64] The goal of Romanian revolutionists, affirmed Balcescu can be no other than "the national unity of all Romanians."[65] All their labors, he concluded, "must be directed towards the creation of a nationality, towards a social reform of all Romanians based on the sacred principles of justice and equality.

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[64]Balcescu, <u>Opere,</u> I:176.

[65]Ibid.

Romanianism is our banner; we must summon all Romanians under it."[66]

This quote conveys an important nuance in Balcescu's nationalist thought. Though he was no stranger to the organic approach to political and intellectual problems, for Balcescu the nation was neither an organic unit nor a timeless entity. It was an idea to be achieved by inculcating a new ethos in the mass of the population through written and spoken propaganda. In short, the nation needed to be constructed and to this project he dedicated his life's work.[67] To this we now turn our attention.

History as Mobilizing Project

The key to Balcescu's nationalism was history. In his view, history performed two functions. First, it was the glue that bound the nation together. Second, it was they key to spreading the nationalist creed. This idea owed much to his Moldavian colleague Mihail Kogalniceanu. Kogalniceanu developed this notion in the 1843 famous opening lecture of his history course in Iasi. In the manner of a thinker who well understood the connection between knowledge, ownership and power, Kogalniceanu argued that national history is

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[66]Ibid., 177-78.

[67] It is true that his exploits as a revolutionary are also noteworthy. Following the proclamation of the Second French Republic in 1848, he returned to Wallachia. There he helped draft the Wallachian revolutionary program, known as the Islaz proclamation. Subsequently he served as foreign minister in the provisional revolutionary government and even tried to raise an army among the Romanians of Transylvania in order to combat Russian intervention in the Principalities. But these actions did not have lasting results and need not concern us here. Far more important was his nationalist doctrine.

absolutely necessary for the defense of our rights against foreign nations. Without history, any hostile nation could reproach us with the words: "the beginnings you have are unknown, the name you bear is not yours, neither is the land which you inhabit; this has been your fate, to remain like you always were: forsake your origins, change your name or accept the one I give you, arise and leave the land you inhabit because it is not yours, and cease struggling in vain because you cannot improve your lot." Indeed all these words have been flung at us by foreigners who gave denied our origins and our name, partitioned our land because we have not had the consciousness of our nationality, only because we have been unable to establish and defend our rights.[68]

By this logic, perhaps no other people stood in such great need of knowing their history. The same idea can be found in Balcescu's 1845 Puterea Armata si Arta Militara in Principatul Valahiei (Armed Might and Military Science in Wallachia), a pioneering work that sketched the social composition and organization of the Wallachian army from 1290 to 1830. Here Balcescu asserted that Romanians lacked a true national history because previous historians had only chronicled the lives of rulers. No one, Balcescu claimed, "has accurately described our social institutions, ideas, sentiments ...and intellectual culture."[69]

This was indeed a farsighted call for a more comprehensive historiography that would combine social and political history with ethnography. Balcescu repeated his call for a new type of history in "Cuvint Preliminariu Despre Izvoarele Istoriei Romanilor" (A Preliminary Word Concerning the Sources of Romanian History) which was published in *Magazin Istoric Pentru Dacia,* the review he founded with A.T. Laurian in 1845. There he described how Michelet and the Grimm brothers had used folklore as a historical document. Like many Romantics, Balcescu believed that history originated in poetry and song. The first historians, he believed, were poets and this made poems into a great

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[68] Cited in Paul Cornea, ed., Propasirea (Bucuresti: Editura Minerva, 1984), 619.

[69] Balcescu, Opere, I:45

historical source. The same held true for popular traditions and legends for they showed the people's private life, ideas and customs.[70] It was this legacy, as well as their shared language, which despite the adversity of fortune through the centuries, that had preserved Romanian identity and kept them rooted on their ancestral lands. History was to function as a means whereby this tradition of culture would be embedded in the minds of future generations, reviving the fighting spirit of the Romanians and their quest for independence. Indeed the strength of Balcescu's conception of history was that it was predicated on a vision of the future. He believed most emphatically that the future would see the inchoate national consciousness of the Romanians, as expressed in language and popular traditions, brought to full maturity. In turn, this vision was underpinned by a philosophy of history that posited the achievement of nationhood as the inevitable consequence of historical progress.

The Nation as Social and Historical Phenomenon

Towards the middle of the nineteenth century, the concept of nation had become part and parcel of European political discourse. The idea of "nation" was often used in conjunction with the idea of the "people", but there was no clear distinction between the two. [71] An exception to this rule was to be found in Germany where the terms "Volk" and and "Vaterland" were not identical. Balcescu too drew a distinction between "people" and

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[70]Ibid., 96.

[70] Gheorghe Zane, Nicolae Balcescu. Omul Opera, Epoca. (Bucuresti: Editura Eminescu, 1970). 16.

"nation". For Balcescu nation or nationhood constituted a "people" who had already reached a certain stage of development, the sense of a "people" who had attained consciousness of itself. In short, the nation was the concrete expression of "people's moral solidarity, an assertion of their consciousness."[72] In order to stand this definition needed to be justified on both evolutionary and ideological grounds. Not only was it imperative to explain the mechanism whereby a people attained moral solidarity; as important were the social and political institutions that could best give this solidarity material form. In this connection Balcescu's explanations were partly influenced by Augustine Thierry and the Italian historian Caesare Cantu. Yet the historian with whom Balcescu showed the greatest affinity was Jules Michelet. The approach which they both took towards the concept of nation was similar in thy they described the "nation" in terms of its genesis and development as a socio-historical phenomenon.[73] Moreover, both historians strove hard to imbue the nation with republicanism.

In his 1831 Introduction to Universal History Michelet described world history as a flight from nature and struggle against matter. Underlying the often-confusing sequence of events, Michelet believed, lay a divine intention that the purpose of world history resided in the progressive triumph of human freedom over necessity. This was to be accomplished through the power of the mind which has already enabled humanity

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[71]Ibid.

[72]Vasile Curticapeanu, "Conceptul de Natiune in Opera Istoriografica a Generatiei de la 1848," Revista de Istorie 36(1983), 545-559.

to conquer nature by giving ideas material form.[74] Thus we arrive at a profound ambiguity characterizing the Romantic notion of freedom.

The agency animating the process of human emancipation was a collective entity known as "race". The Romantics contributed much to the notion that all races possessed ingrained characteristics and limitations but also potential. This idea owed much to Augustine Thierry. He maintained that a "people" was created through the fusion of various races, a mix usually accomplished through wars of conquest. Once a people came into being it retained its character, which was understood as a synthesis of the virtues and failings of the component races. The notion of enduring racial traits was also accepted by Balcescu because it reassured him that the Romanians would always retain their identity despite their subjection to foreign invasion and lack of political independence. But this still did not answer the question and to how a people acquired the status of nationality which, in his view, was the highest form of racial life.[75] Clearly there was need for an evolutionary schema that, without challenging race as a determinant of national character, rejected the notion that history can be thoroughly explained in terms of perennial racial traits. For in the first half of the nineteenth century the concept of race did not entail the ominous, deterministic connotation it would later acquire. Race was not yet conceived as destiny. Rather, it was perceived as the raw building material out of which national

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[74]Jules Michelet, Ouvres Complètes, ed. Paul Viallanaix (Paris: Flammarion,1972), II:23.

[75]Vasile Maciu, "Activitatea Istoriografica a lui Nicolae Balcescu," in Gheorghe Cazacu ed., Studii Despre Nicolae Balcescu (Bucuresti: Societatea de Stiinte Filologice, 1969), 29.

character was fashioned. How was this to be accomplished?

In the first volume of his History of France, published in 1833, Michelet elaborated a thesis already set forth in his earlier Introduction to Universal History. In his view, the maturity of a people or the degree to which it has fulfilled it destiny could be measured by several factors. First, the extent to which it succeeded in overcoming internal racial divisions. Second, the extent to which it had emancipated itself from inherited racial characteristics and the success it had in taming nature and shaping the surrounding environment to suit its purposes.[76] Inspired by the great Neapolitan Giambattista Vico, whose Scienza Nuova he had translated in 1828, Michelet advanced the argument that progress in human development can be charted by changes in collective mentalities. Henceforth he would maintain that people emancipated themselves from inherent racial and environmental limitations by developing national cultures.

Michelet entertained a totalizing concept of culture. Culture integrated all human phenomena through time.[77] Hence it included social classes, institutions, wars and technology, as well as literature, religion, folklore and even witchcraft. These latter categories were particularly important because they constituted symbolic discourse of identity and purpose. Indeed, Michelet believed that each people possessed a unique personality and individual genius. From this it followed that genius was the motive force of historical development: L' histoire est celle de l'aime et de la pense originale, de

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[76]Crossley, French Historians and Romanticism, 201.

[77]Marin Bucur, Jules Michelet si Revolutionarii Romani (Cluj-Napoca:Editura Dacia, 1982), 10.

l'initiative feconde, de l'heroisme, heroisme d'action, heroisme de création."[78] In this
fashion, Michelet argued, "history fulfills the designs of Providence and by studying the
manner whereby centuries succeed each other we can observe the stages God has foretold
in the education of mankind."[79]

"Providence" was a pivotal concept for Michelet and many other Romantics. It
allowed him to reconcile free will and the right of moral self-determination with the
concept of collective destiny. Balcescu too adopted a similar teleology though with a less
sophisticated approach towards the relationship between changes in collective mentalities
and the stages of historical evolution. Instead he valorized the moral dimension of
historical practice.

> Under the eye of Providence humanity advances its historical evolution.and ever
> since in the Gospel the Savior has shown the absolute moral law, the law of
> *justice,* he has propelled humanity on the unending vista of a progressive
> development which conquered nature, oppression and the external world by virtue
> of the absolute preponderance of the mind....He [The Savior], through his death
> and sacrifice, has shown us the law of love, of *brotherhood,* the way we can
> overcome evil and fulfill the moral destiny of humanity...."[80]

This was powerful medicine to be administered to the Romanian people whom Balcescu
perceived as having been victimized by history. Yet this passage also reflects Balcescu's
cherished conviction, which he absorbed from Michelet, that his own century would
witness an improvement in the human condition by virtue of the redemption of peoples'

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[78]Jules Michelet, Histoire de France au XVI-eme Siècle, (Paris: Chamerot, 1846), 9.

[79]Michelet, Ouvres Complètes, II:240.

[80]Balcescu, Opere, III:11-12.

historical condition through the attainment of national independence. National independence for all peoples was but a step and precondition to the advent of universal brotherhood. Genuine harmony, both thinkers believed, could only be achieved among peoples who had attained the individuality and strength necessary to leave their mark on history.[81]

As Michelet explained in Le People and the History of the French Revolution, France had found a vocation as the fatherland of man and a source of universal love because the Revolution had enthroned the Republic as a form of salvation and reconciliation between nations. It did so by inaugurating a new type of political unity based on a spiritual brotherhood that reconciled freedom and organization, unity and diversity in a spontaneous awareness of the common good.[82] Thus we once more encounter the concept of historical mission.

This notion also played a central role in Balcescu's thought. In the introduction to his 1851 Romanii subt Mihai Voda Viteazul (The Romanians under Michael the Brave), Balcescu propounded the notion that the Romanians had a historical vocation as defenders of Western civilization. He proceeded by arguing that Emperor Aurelian's withdrawal of the Roman legions from Dacia in the third century, left the romanized population of the former colony cognizant of its duty to educate the newly arrived

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[81]Ibid., 13.

[82]Jules Michelet, History of the French Revolution, trans Charles Cox (Chicago: and London: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 455-458.

barbarians into the "useful arts and skills necessary for civilized life."[83] In binding the barbarian through commerce, the Romanians eventually forced them to "settle and become civilized." This civilizing mission was resumed in the ninth century when the Romanians converted the Bulgarians to Christianity. Together they founded a strong state whose kings were Romanians. Unfortunately, the argument went, the Romanian-Bulgarian state fell prey to internal strife and by the eleventh century succumbed to the domination of Byzantium. The period of Byzantine rule, the argument continued, forced the Romanians to organize into small states. These polities coalesced in a unification movement which by the fourteenth century engendered two independent states: Wallachia and Moldavia. Because they were incessantly menaced by the poles and the Hungarians, these states preserved their existence only by dint of heroic efforts. Yet these struggles only prepared the Romanians for a greater challenge. In 1360 the Ottoman Turks invaded Europe and inaugurated "four centuries in which the Romanians shed blood in defense of civilization against barbarism."[84]

This rendition of Romanian history was surely mythical and for that matter not very original since the Poles and Hungarians developed similar pretensions to a status as defenders of Western civilization against the Ottoman onslaught. Typically such claims were based on the memory of famous battles such as that of Lepanto. Yet the relative merits of various national myths or the extent to which they may or may not reflect

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[83]Balcescu, Opere, III:14.

[84]Ibid.

historical truth need concern us here, especially since such an exercise runs the risk of conflating the analysis into the very discourses which it claims to question. A more fruitful approach would be to examine the manifold applications to which these historical myths lent themselves. In Balcescu's case, the notion of a defensive and/or civilizing mission enabled him to endow the Romanian people with an honorable past that made the worthy of joining Europe's community of nation. It also substantiated the Romanian claim to a Western identity and implied a corresponding obligation on the part of Western European countries to repay the historic sacrifices of the Romanians by upholding their claim to nationhood. Most importantly, the idea of a historical mission became a kind of meta-historical trope that anchored Romanian identity on the concept of defensive heroism. It now became possible to write the history of the Romanians as a unified whole and portray their slow maturation towards nationhood.

Balcescu's scenario of the Romanian course towards nationhood is tinged by nostalgia and influenced by another important Romantic trope, that is the myth of a lost golden age. According to Balcescu, from their earliest beginnings the Romanians strove hard to organize their internal unity on the principle of equality. His vision of fourteenth-century Wallachia was that of a highly centralized "martial republic."[85] The majority of peasants were free and owned land. Thus they were always ready to defend their independence with arms in hand. They were ruled by a prince elected by an assembly or "*Sobor of the entire country*" who in conjunction with the ruler passed new laws, raised

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[85]Ibid., 16.

taxes and decided upon war and peace. Even the boyars were not a hereditary noble class. They were bound by the same laws as the peasants and held rank only by virtue of service to the state. Nor could they bequeath titles or offices to their children. Moreover, no Romanian was barred from owning land and all could potentially attain high rank by serving the state.[86] The only problem was that in this constitution there existed "vices stemming from the feudal idea of the time and that caused the destruction of this state of affairs."[87] Though weak in the beginning, there existed monarchic and aristocratic attitudes and tendencies, as well as a small number of serfs. Though Balcescu did not make clear how serfdom came into being, he then went on to explain that, since public power was not periodically vested in elected representatives but concentrated in the hands of military leaders it was only natural that the latter would come to acquire supremacy over the common classes. Then too the lack of sustained urban commerce prevented the development of a middle class and placed the people in an even weaker position *vis a vis* the boyars.[88]

Balcescu and the Theory of Discontinuous Progress

Consequently, for Balcescu progress towards nationhood involved, in a sense, a return of the original principle of equality by which Romanians first constituted

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[86]Ibid.

[87]Ibid., 15-16.

[88]Ibid., 16-17.

themselves into a polity. This led Balcescu to evolve a theory of discontinuous, even regressive progress. The theory took form by means of a familiar literary device. In Balcescu vision, the Romanian quest toward nationhood was a story of decline and redemption detailing the political trajectory of the Romanians.

Balcescu maintained that each type of political organization brought its own form of social oppression to be superseded as the nation matured. Consequently, he divided Romanian history into four periods that purported to show that the laws of progress dictated the evolution of the state into a republic characterized as the rise of "plebeianism to power" or the "confirmation of the Romanian in his rights as human being, citizen and nation". [89] Such a periodization was sketched out in <u>Romanii subt Mihai Voda Viteazul</u> yet developed more fully in his 1849 <u>Mersul Revolutiei in Istoria Romanilor</u> (The Course of the Revolution in the History of the Romanians). Like Thierry, Balcescu projected his nationalism on the Middle Ages. From this perspective, the history of the Romanians had always been a national history because all important developments were of a national character. This may strike the disinterested observer as a tautology but occasional lapses in reasoning seldom disturb the true believer. Thus Balcescu portrayed the frequent feudal wars between Moldavia and Wallachia as part of a long struggle for national unity. Indeed, for Balcescu the national problem revolved around two issues: unity and independence. It was these themes which informed his periodization of Romanian history. Accordingly, his analysis commenced with the fourteenth century when, he argued, the

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[89]Balcescu, <u>Opere,</u> II:110.

rulers began to reach for absolute power and enthroned monarchy as a principle of political organization. This monarchical state Balcescu credited with vanquishing anarchy and preserving Romanian independence but only at the cost of smothering internal liberty. However, this state of affairs quickly came under attack because the boyars allegedly rose in the name of liberty and commenced a long struggle against the princes. Eventually the boyars succeeded in wresting power and established an aristocratic state. The boyars proceeded to use their power to monopolize all the land and reduce the peasants to serfdom. Despite placing the peasants in bondage, Balcescu gave qualified approval to the boyar state because "the substitution of leadership by an entire class was a progress just as serfdom was an improvement when compared to slavery during the Roman Empire."[90]

His conditional defense of the boyar state reveals much about Balcescu's philosophy of history. From contemporary French historiography he had adopted the idea that each epoch engenders a better one. Yet he did not think that the history of the Romanians warranted an unconditional acceptance of this theory. And here is where the notion of discontinuous progress comes into full play. Reasoning in Hegelian fashion, Balcescu elaborated a secular theodicity explaining the existence of evil in history by its capacity to engender good.[91] There exist, he insisted, periods of stagnation and decay that are, in a sense, times of atonement. During these periods the nation pays for its transgressions and quietly gathers the forces for another period of growth. In this light,

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[90]Ibid., 106.

[91]Ibid., 108

the period of decline that followed boyar rule was inevitable. Their ruthless exploitation of the populace rendered it apathetic and weakened the country. Aware of the situation the Turks moved in imposed Phanariot rule. This inaugurated a century of "oppression theft, corruption and degradation."[92] But at the same time the Phanariots fulfilled a "providential mission" by reforming the state and smashing the power of the old aristocracy. Hence they inaugurated a new period in Romanian history "corresponding exactly with the rise of the bourgeoisie in Western Europe."[93]

This was an extraordinary assertion indicative of the extent to which Balcescu desired to endow Romanians with a Western identity. He continued to build his case for a Romanian pattern of development similar to that of Western European countries by maintaining that this rapacious foreign bourgeoisie [the Phanariots] unwittingly aided the maturation of the "people" by turning the "peasant from serf into proletarian, theoretically free but not in fact since his liberty is not guaranteed by property."[94]

The Question of Class Struggle

From Balcescu's analysis of Phanariot rule we can deduce another principle underlying his conception of Romanian history. This was the idea of class struggle as a precondition of progress. That antagonisms area historical necessity was a fashionable

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[92]Ibid.

[93]Ibid.

[94]Ibid.

idea at the time which came from Hegel. It was also shared by most French historians. No doubt inspired by Thierry, whom Marx praised as the father of class struggle, Balcescu identified class antagonism as a long-term phenomena instrumental in sgaping social reality. He spoke in strong terms about the centuries-long "oppression of the lower classes by the upper classes" and about "nations where a small number of citizens establish their happiness by the enslavement of the masses."[93]

Balcescu's preoccupation with class struggle was partly motivated by the realization of having discovered a potent tool of historical analysis. Two of his most important works, Despre Starea Muncitorilor Plugari (The Social Condition of Agrarian Workers), published in 1846, and Question economique des principautes Danubiennes, which appeared in 1851, abound with class analysis and are noted for their penetrating insights into the social and economic conditions prevailing in the Principalities. Marx himself made use of the information provided in the latter work in preparation for drafting Das Kapital.[94] Unlike Marx, however, Balcescu did not associate class with any particular mode of production. His terminology derived primarily from the French socialist tradition which, by and large, propounded social criticism and prescriptive remedies rather than engage in detailed analyses of economic structures. Consequently, though he frequently heaped scorn upon all kinds of exploiters such as boyars and bureaucrats, Balcescu's definition of class was rather loose. It simply distinguished

[93]Balcescu, Opere, I: 161.

[94]V. Ionescu, Contributii la Studiul Gindirii Economice a lui Nicolae Balcescu (Bucuresti, Editura Stiintifica, 1956), 133.

between exploiters and exploited. To be sure, he believed that the economic and political relationship between oppressors and oppressed must be analyzed in terms of specific and geographic contexts. We have also seen that he was not averse to the suggestion that social groups could play world historical roles. In the final analysis, however, Balcescu's goal was not the proletarian millennium but the attainment of nationhood. Very much in the tradition of Michelet, who wrote Le People in a desire to prevent the fracture of the social body into alienated groups, Balcescu's aim was to prevent class antagonisms from undermining the moral unity the Romanians had to achieve in order to become a nation.

Fully aware of class antagonisms in the past as well as in his own time, Balcescu was nonetheless convinced that they would cease in the future. The "triumph of Romanianism," he believed, would vanquish the hatred between peasants and boyars thereby insuring fraternity among all classes. Yet this was not to be achieved until the completion of a historical process that changed and would continue to change the Romanian people from serfs into proletarians and finally into proprietors.[96]

This reliance on stages of social development indicates yet again the importance Balcescu ascribed to the social underpinnings of the nation. He believed that the Romanians would find national salvation in a republic of free citizens. In theory, this republic would be defended by a citizen army and insure liberty and equality under the law through universal suffrage, education, and an independent judiciary system that

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[96]Balcescu, Opere, II: 112.

guaranteed trial by jury. This is why he emphatically argued that such a republic could not survive if the peasants, the most numerous social group, were not given the means o develop into self-reliant citizens fully capable of exercising popular sovereignty. Hence his proposals for redistribution of land to the peasants. These proposals were developed most fully in Despre Improprietarirea Taranilor (Concerning Peasants' Endowment with Property), published in 1848.

This work makes clear that Balcescu's ideal polity was a nation of small producers. Ownership would, by a now classic liberal logic, aid the transformation of peasants into citizens by endowing them with that sense of responsibility necessary to participate in the political process. More important, however, was his emphasis on the equalization of land ownership. Restricted ownership would, in his view, insure a rough parity of social status most akin to the republican ideal of equality. In short, Balcescu placed his faith in a form of peasant democracy as the best hope of national salvation. Still, he did not think this type of polity would materialize until the historic transition from feudalism to capitalism had been completed.

Revolution as a Force of Historical Progress

In this transition social antagonisms would still play an important role as force of progress. According to Balcescu, the highest expression of social conflict was revolution. Like Michelet, Balcescu was aware that revolutions carried an enormous destructive potential. Yet his messianic Romanticism compelled him to regard revolution as an essentially creative act. In his view, the main virtue of revolutions was that they

were acts of popular will and as such brought profound changes in the social order. Because he was influenced by the example of the French Revolution, Balcescu believed that a genuine revolution could only take two forms: popular insurrection and/or revolutionary war. Popular insurrection was a people's sovereign right to solve its problems by establishing a new order. Revolutionary wars were also a legitimate right for they enabled oppressed peoples to achieve liberation or preserve their independence from foreign domination.[97] Such a genuine revolution, Balcescu believed, occurred in 1821 when Tudor Vladimirescu came to "personify the people's awakening."[98] The portrayal of Vladimirescu as a catalyst of national emancipation reveals the connection between Balcescu's cult of revolution and his admiration for the great personalities of Romanian history. How did he resolve the apparent contradiction between his conception of history as a discipline whose proper subject was "the people" and the cult of great men? Here again Michelet's Le People provided a source of inspiration. Balcescu believed that a nation's individuality could well find incarnation in a man of genius who, when the situation demanded, was fully capable of restructuring society in a new spirit. By this definition, a truly great man was not a ruler but a leader. His moral virtue resided in a complete disregard for his own fate and the extraordinary degree to which he embodied the image of the people. It was heroes such as Vladimirescu and Michael the Brave - who in 1600 briefly unified Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania - who awakened the

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[97]Zane, Nicolae Balcescu: Omul, Opera, Epoca, 35-37.

[98]Balcescu, Opere, II: 109.

conscience of the Romanians and strengthened their will by virtue of their sacrifice in service of the national ideal.

Emboldened by this heroic conception of the Romanian past, Balcescu proceeded to heap scorn on the Organic Regulations. He criticized the Regulations for stifling the revolutionary spirit awakened in 1821 and of hindering the advancement of the national cause by substituting the limited rights which the Turks held in the Principalities *via* the Phanariots for an even more pervasive Russian encroachment on Romanian national rights. Even worse, the Regulations "disinherited an entire people" by enthroning an oligarchy of boyars and bureaucrats whose property rights were bolstered at the expense of the peasants.[99] He was, however, willing to credit the period of the Regulations with certain positive developments such as the introduction of parliamentary rule, the recognition of the principle of free trade and above all the survival of the national cause through the establishment of the National Party.

He bemoaned the fate of the 1840 revolutionaries who, few in number yet fortified by the conviction that they represented justice and truth, did not realize that their time had not yet arrived. This is precisely what persuaded him to embark on a most spirited defense of the 1848 revolutions. For Balcescu, the revolution of 1848 had been no mere "ephemeral" phenomenon expressing the will of a minority. The European revolution was the "occasion but not the cause of the Romanian revolution."[100] Its origins

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[99]Ibid.

[100]Ibid., 107.

were rooted in the perennial quest of the Romanians for social, political and national emancipation. Still, Balcescu believed that the 1848 revolution had stopped way short of its true goal. In his view, the uprising had been primarily a social revolution aiming the secure Romanians their rights as "men and citizens" by endowing them with "property, without liberty is a lie."[101] In reality this was not exactly the case. Balcescu and Ion Ionescu de la Brad were the only members of the provisional revolutionary government who consistently advocated agrarian reform. His analysis was closer to the mark when he argued that the Revolution did not go far enough in securing Romanian national rights. It only demanded that Turkey and Russia respect the traditional Romanian right to self-government. Balcescu perceived this limited demand for autonomy as a dilution of national principles. Still, he was unwilling to press the point that the revolution should have assumed a more pronounced character. He was only too aware that the *Pasoptisti* had limited space in which to maneuver, caught as they were between the Scylla of Russia and the Charybdis of Turkey, neither power willing to abdicate control over the Principalities.

He therefore concluded with a scathing attack on Russia as a bastion of absolutism and oppressor of nationalities everywhere. His reflections on the failure of the 1848 revolutions also predicted the rise of Pan-Slavism and Pan-Germanism and identified them as threats to Romanian national rights. Against these forces, Balcescu deployed the ideology of "Pan-Romanianism," that is the right of the Romanians to

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[101]Ibid., 110-12.

evolve into a strong, united, and independent nation.[102] This would be accomplished by means of a future, purely national revolution, that would witness the mobilization of the Romanians in a *levee en masse* - yet again an echo of Michelet's panegyrics to the armies of the Revolution - rising to defend their national rights with arms in hand.

Conclusion

It would be interesting to follow Balcescu's intellectual and political evolution had he lived longer. He died in 1852 in exile at Palermo, a victim of the tuberculosis he acquired in prison and had neglected to treat in the subsequent years of feverish revolutionary and scholarly activity. Even during his exile, perhaps because he knew that his days were numbered. Balcescu managed to accomplish a great deal. He founded a publication suggestively entitled *Romania Viitoare* (Future Romania) and made great efforts to unify the Romanian *emigres* who were rent by sectarian squabbles and struggles for power. Remarkably, he even found time to complete his monograph on the rule of Michael the Brave, a work he undertook with the express purpose of fostering national unity.[103] In short, to a striking extent Balcescu's life resembled his Romantic ideal of the hero, the man of genius and tireless fighter willing to make the ultimate sacrifice in defense of a just cause. If Balcescu aspired to become a Romantic hero then

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[102]Ibid., 112.

[103]Balcescu, Opere, IV: 201.

he certainly came close to achieving his goal.

Having given him due credit, it is time to embark on a critique of his legacy. In the first place, few of his expectations came to pass. The unification of Moldavia and Wallachia into what cam to be known as the Old Kingdom did not come after victory in a revolutionary war, but as a result of cunning diplomatic maneuvers at the end of the Crimean War. This unification could not have been accomplished without enlisting the political support of France. At this time, many of Balcescu's former comrades in the national movement all to eagerly jettisoned their radicalism in order to curry favor with Louis-Napoleon. The conversion of many *Pasoptisti* from radicals into clients of an authoritarian ruler had evident domestic consequences. They now constituted themselves into an ineffectual ruling oligarchy that could agree on little save a policy of opportunistic irredentism aiming to integrate Bessarabia, which was annexed by Russia in 1812, and eventually Bukovina and Transylvania into the Romanian Kingdom. Moreover, the former revolutionaries compounded the social problems of the country by undertaking a land reform that, however well-intentioned, proved ineffective in the long run. In these aspects the Old Kingdom prefigured many twentieth century nation-states just emerging from a colonial or quasi-colonial condition. Would Balcescu too have foreshadowed the occupational disease of twentieth century anti-colonial leaders? Fully conversant with Western theories of rights, once in power many such leaders proceeded to rule despotically.

Balcescu himself confessed in a letter to his friend Ion Ghica that his "only

political god was power, specifically military power.[104] In the context of the letter, this statement communicated Balcescu's desire to insure the viability of a Romanian state *vis a vis* its neighbors. But at the same time this confession cannot but call into question the extent of Balcescu's commitment to a democratic order. The astuteness with which he appropriated and deployed the Romanian past in order to advance his objectives, to say nothing of the way in which he refashioned Romanian identity on Occidental premises, may have very well stemmed from honest conviction but also suggests that he was no stranger to Machiavellianism.

These doubts are certainly legitimate. Yet Balcescu continues to be regarded as an outstanding example of moral probity and consistency of principle. Indeed, he has become the subject of a hagiographic tradition elaborated by subsequent nationalists. This process of mystification was aided by his untimely demise. Clearly he had no opportunity to sully his reputation. Thus he acquired an aura of martyrdom that helped him attain a prominent place in the pantheon of Romanian national icons.

He thereby acquired a potent image and became an important element in the general stock of Romanian cultural symbols. These symbols could be borrowed, used distorted or reinvented to fit many different purposes. Arguably, this process was aided by the ambiguities and tensions inherent in his intellectual legacy. Despite his efforts to endow the Romanians with a Western identity and his attachment to the notion of a

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[104]Ibid., 160.

common European civilization, Balcescu's nationalist doctrine contained undeniable nativist elements. These elements were expressed in the privileged role he accorded to popular traditions and language as those manifestations of Romanian identity that rooted the nation on its ancestral soil. True, it is well-nigh impossible to construct a national identity without these elements. Consequently, a tension between nativism and universalism is symptomatic of many other national ideologies. Yet Balcescu's doctrine rests on a particularly brittle synthesis, for his valorization of European civilization comes perilously close to undercutting Romanian specificity.

This ambiguity was made abundantly clear on a political level. In the early stages of the 1848 revolution, Balcescu proposed a Southeastern European federation of "oppressed peoples" as an alternative an counterweight to the absolutist tendencies of the Russian, Turkish and Habsburg empires. The revolution had made stagger and totter the bastions of the old order and consequently this was a fairly realistic proposal. It was also a farsighted call anticipating contemporary efforts towards European integration. Yet his failure to reach an agreement with Kossuth concerning the national rights of Transylvanian Romanians made him bitter and engendered virulent diatribes against Magyar nationalism. Even so, he continued to render homage to the ideal of harmony and cooperation between peoples but this did not stop him from propounding the henceforth famous slogan "through ourselves alone."[105] "In vain will you kneel and beg at the courts

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[105]Balcescu, Opere, II: 112.

of [foreign] rulers and their ministers," Balcescu told his compatriots.[106] "They will not give you anything, for they cannot and will not."[107]

In light of these statements, one might legitimately question whether Balcescu would have opposed the recruitment of a foreign ruler in the cause of Romanian unification, to say nothing of the 1877 achievement of formal independence under the leadership of a Hohenzollern monarch. An equally valid case can be made that the enlistment of Louis-Napoleon's help was but a logical culmination of his policy of cultural and political synchronicity with France.

Such questions did indeed come to divide subsequent generations of Romanian nationalists who often invoked his authority to bolster their position, a practice that became even more common during the twentieth century. For example, during the 1920s the National-Liberal Party invoked the slogan "through ourselves alone" to advocate a policy of relative economic autarchy. By this logic, the National-Liberals protected the sovereignty of the newly constituted "Greater Romanian" state by minimizing the influence of foreign capital.

This issue is further complicated by the Communists. They too appropriated his legacy in order to legitimize their rule. In the 1950s Romanian Communism was closely aligned with the Moscow line and consequently Balcescu was portrayed as the Romanian

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[106]Ibid.

[107]Ibid.

response to Russian "revolutionary-democrats" such as Herzen and Chernyshevski. Moreover, at this time Romanian Communism was in an anti-national phase and Balcescu provided the added advantage of having attempted to achieve a *rapprochement* with the Hungarian revolution.[108]

Following the reassertion of national values during the 1960s, it made sense for the Communists to seek honorable antecedents in the national past. Their need was indeed acute because during the interwar period the Romanian Communist Party had been notoriously weak.[109] In itself this was enough of a problem. But the dilemma reveals its full dimensions only if one considers what happened to Lucretiu Patrascanu, the only solid Marxist theoretician of the interwar years. Patrascanu had been purged in the 1950s for his heterodox views. He was accused of nationalist heresies, a grave matter in those years in which Stalin's shadow loomed large. The reassertion of national values during the 1960s removed much of the stigma attached to Patrascanu's name. Yet to rehabilitate him right away would have raised too many awkward questions about the recent past. Far better to seek antecedents in the more distant periods of Romanian history. In this context, Balcescu once more provided a suitable symbol. It was relatively easy to cleanse

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[108]Lucian Boia, Istorie si Mit in Constiinta Romaneasca (Humanitas: Bucuresti, 1997), 261-65 passim.

[109]Moreover, Romanian intellectual life had traditionally lacked a vigorous Marxist tradition. A notable exception to this rule was Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea, a sociologists active at the turn of the century, but he was theoretically too unorthodox.

him of sins by minimizing or explaining away the idealist dimension of his philosophy as a reflection of the time in which he lived. His thought contained enough materialist elements, such as his emphasis on class struggle, to insure him a respectable status as a "progressive". Moreover, as Lucian Boia astutely observed, Balcescu projected an image of revolutionary intransigence which rendered him eminently suitable to a totalitarian regime that asserted that there was "only one just way."[110]

These operations complete, the Communists proceeded to put his picture on the currency. This sent a powerful message. It showed that the type of historicist nationalism developed by Balcescu remained suitable as an integrative ideology capable of structuring the language of Romanian politics and cultural canons well into the twentieth century and possibly beyond. This is particularly true if one considers that since 1989 the discourse on the nation has been "liberated" from the programmatic restraints which the Communists had imposed on it.

Clearly the time has come to defuse the teleological charge so deeply embedded in Romanian nationalist discourse by Balcescu and others. Combined with enduring stereotypical views of the Romanians as defenders of Western civilization or a "Latin island in a Slavic sea", teleological thought perpetuates a widespread siege mentality no longer congruent with concrete geopolitical circumstances. The Romanian nation-state is a reality that is here to stay and this siege mentality remains but a convenient mode for

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[110]Ibid., 261.

Power to cloak itself as guardian of Romanian destiny.

Still, it would be unfair to blame Balcescu for the uses and abuses of his doctrine especially since, from today's perspective, his legacy retains undeniably valuable elements. Thus it is worth remember that, at least in the realm of ideas, Balcescu endeavored to ground Romanian nationalism on democratic principles. He thereby inaugurated an intellectual tradition conducive to a reconstruction of Romanian political culture on liberal-democratic premises. No less important was his "westernized" rendition of Romanian identity which in theory asserted equal rights for all nationalities. In the process he elaborated a usable vision the Romanian past that can now be deployed in support of Romania's efforts to achieve integration in the newly emerging pan-European political and economic structures. As such, Balcescu retains his relevance to Romanian political culture.

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