

Theodor Aman in the Sion Donation

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Abstract

The paper presents the engravings made by Theodor Aman, a 19th century Romanian artist, preserved in the Special Collections Department of the Lucian Blaga Central University Library, donated by Gheorghe Sion to the institution in 1923. Theodor Aman, who learned the various techniques of engraving in Paris, was mainly interested in Romanian history and traditions, representing in his works prominent historical figures, scenes from national history, characteristic Romanian customs and figures. A pioneer of Romanian graphic art he elevated the art of engraving to the rank of art in Romania.

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The Lucian Blaga Central University Library holds in the Special Collections Department a great number of engravings¹ either received as donations or purchased by the Library. There are 8897 such documents in our institution. This valuable collection was based on the donation made by Gheorghe Sion in 1923. Besides the considerable number of books, manuscripts, maps, and coins he donated to the Library approximately 2500 engravings. The brothers Iuliu and Liviu Martian also contributed to the enrichment of this collection.

Gheorghe Sion was preoccupied especially with collecting all types of documents connected to the Romanian countries, as well as to the Romanian territories under a foreign rule. Thus, during his travels abroad, he gathered a large number of documents referring to the Romanian provinces.² In this way an impressive collection of engravings

¹ General denomination of works imprinted by different processes.

² V. Beneș, *Bouquet, Raffet și Lacelot cu 56 de reproduceri. Desene privitoare la Principatele Române din Colecția Sion* (Bouquet, Raffet and Lacelot with 56

was gathered, which he later donated to the Library, and which at present is one of the most important collections of engravings referring to the Romanian territories in our country.

These works are especially important for us from historical, ethnographical, and artistic points of view. Regarding history, we have a great number of portraits representing the Princes of the Romanian countries and their wives, as well as other important personalities of national history.

From the point of view of ethnography, the engravings of the Sion collection represent an important documentary source. Romanian and foreign artists travelling in Romanian territories alike were impressed by our national costumes and traditions. Thus they made a series of works representing Romanian dresses and customs.

The artistic importance of this collection is conferred by the artists who realized these works. The most important foreign artists whose works are to be found in the Sion collection are Auguste Raffet, Lancelot, Doré, W. Hogarth, etc. Among the Romanian artists Theodor Aman must be mentioned.

Theodor Aman (1831–1891) was born in Câmpulung Muscel as the son of the merchant Dimitrie, called Aman and his wife, Despina. When he was three years old, in 1834, his father died, and the education of the five children, Theodor being the youngest, became the mother's responsibility.¹ He studied at the Central School of Craiova where he had Professor Constantin Lecca for a teacher, then at Saint Sava College in Bucharest, being taught by Carol Wahlsteiner. In 1850 he left for Paris where he studied in Michel Martin Drolling's and François Eduart Picot's art studios. Here, in the capital of art, he became acquainted with great artists' works, his attention being focused especially on Rubens, Velasquez, Watteau, Gericault, Courbet.² Here he also became familiar with the techniques of engraving which he would use mainly in the period 1871–1881.

The artist's life was marked by the turbulent age he lived in. Not yet 18, he witnessed the Revolution of 1848 in the Romanian Principalities being a member of the Revolutionary Club of Craiova.

Replicas. Drawings Referring to the Romanian Principalities in the Sion Collection), offprint from *Gazeta Ilustrată* (Illustrated Magazine), 1934, p. 6.

¹ *** *Theodor Aman*, p. 7.

² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Later on, he was present in the Crimean War as a direct observer and saw the union of the Romanian Principalities and the War of Independence.

Theodor Aman's oeuvre is represented in the Sion collection by 15 engravings. His portraits are considered to be the best.¹ This genre is represented in the Sion collection by three works: the portraits of Ion Heliade Rădulescu,² a witch³ and a woman from Bucharest.⁴ Ion Heliade Rădulescu's portrait was painted in 1876 in the manner of 17th century portraits. The background has a similar tone to the clothing, this highlighting the physiognomy of the model to which the artist accorded special importance. In contrast to the other portraits where the background is covered with hachure, in this Aman exploited the whiteness of the paper.

The portrait entitled *Une femme de Bucharest* is an engraving made by etching on ochre paper, drawn and engraved by the artist, made in 544 copies. This represents an oriental woman's portrait with a specific costume. The head is turned left and slightly bowed. The background and the clothes painted with dark colours are in contrast with the white veil covering her entire face except the eyes.

The third work is the portrait of a gypsy woman in semi-profile with characteristic shawl and hair style. The dark background is in powerful contrast with the whiteness of the blouse.

Historical paintings are illustrated by two works – *Bataille d'Oltenitza*⁵ and *The Last Night of Michael the Brave, Prince of Romania (in 1601)*.⁶

The two pictures were made during the artist's stay in Paris. In 1852 he painted the picture *The Last Night of Michael the Brave*, after which Adolph Mouilleron⁷ made a series of lithographs. The second work *The Battle of Oltenița* was exhibited in Paris together with a self-portrait being received favourably by critics and the public.⁸ During his

¹ George Oprescu, *Grafica românească în secolul al XIX-lea* (Romanian Graphic Art in the 19th Century), vol. II, Bucharest, Fundația „Regele Mihai I”, 1945 p. 21.

² Catalogue no. 14.

³ Catalogue no. 11.

⁴ Catalogue no. 12.

⁵ Catalogue no. 1.

⁶ Catalogue no. 2.

⁷ George Oprescu, *Pictura românească în secolul al XIX-lea* (The Romanian Painting in the 19th Century), Bucharest, Meridiane, 1984, p. 172.

⁸ Călin Dan, *Theodor Aman*, Bucharest, Meridiane, 1984, p. 6.

journey to Constantinople, Aman presented it to the sultan who bought it. At present the picture is in the Dolmabahce Sarayi Museum.¹ This work was copied by lithography in Paris by A. Bayard.

Genre scenes, representing everyday life, are illustrated by four works: *Mendiants de Roumanie*,² *La ceinture (Dans de Roumanie)*,³ *Épisode des inondations à Bucharest. Le prince Alexandre visitant le quartier des tabaches*⁴ and *The Saint and Great Day of Good Friday*.⁵ *Mendiants de Roumanie* has a copy made on ochre coloured paper. This work represents two gipsy boys each holding a violin. One of them is standing and playing, while the other seated by a wall is listening.

La ceinture (Dans de Roumanie) also has a duplicate. The engraving illustrates a characteristic Southern Romanian dance.⁶ The composition is dynamical having at its centrepiece a group of dancers wearing traditional costumes. On the left there are the musicians, and on the right, beside a thatched house, another group of peasants are sitting and watching the dancing. There is also a woman with a child in her arms.

Épisode des inondations à Bucharest. Le prince Alexandre visitant le quartier des tabaches presents an episode of Alexandru Ioan Cuza's reign. The work is propagandistic, it was reproduced in the magazine *L'Illustration*. Its aim was to promote Alexandru Ioan Cuza's image in France, a country which supported his election as the ruler of the two Principalities. The Prince is represented on horseback visiting the districts of Bucharest affected by the inundations, with houses destroyed and men who took refuge on the roofs. The work is preserved in images cut out from the magazine.

The Saint and Great Day of Good Friday, imprinted by the Minerva Graphic Art Institute, reproduces a work in which the artist immortalized the procession with the Saint Epitaph around the Stavropoleos Church⁷ in Bucharest during the Good Friday service.

¹ *** *Theodor Aman*, p. 7.

² Catalogue no. 9.

³ Catalogue no. 6.

⁴ Catalogue no. 3.

⁵ Catalogue no. 10.

⁶ Mariana Vida, *Theodor Aman, gravor* (Theodor Aman, the Engraver), Bucharest, 1993, p. 66.

⁷ Orthodox church built in Brâncovenesc style in 1724.

Also in Paris, in the magazine *L'Illustration*, issue 596 from 1854, pages 77, 85 and 100, three illustrations appeared by Theodor Aman for Vasile Alecsandri's short story, *Balta Albă* (The White Lake), engraved in wood by Williams Watts.¹ Sion cut out all three works – *La caroutza de poste valaque*, *Le lac de Balta Alba* and *Le vilage de Balta Alba* – from the magazine.

The techniques used to make these engravings are etching, sometimes drypoint technique (*pointe sèche*), lithography, chromolithography and typographical reproductions of engravings. The paper is usually of good quality, the artist using the plastic effects offered by dripped paper. Some of Aman's works were reproduced in Paris by Adolph Mouilleron, Lemercier, Bayot and Cadart.

Theodor Aman was a pioneer of Romanian graphic art and artistic education. The Fine Arts School in Bucharest was founded at his initiative in 1864. He became the first headmaster of this institution. He was also the first Romanian *peintre-graveur*.² Thanks to him the art of engraving ceased to be a trade and was elevated to the rank of art in Romania.

Aware of the artist's great responsibility in society, he tried to educate the public through art. His works transmit a powerful patriotic message trying thus to revive the moral values of the past.³

The catalogue of engravings

1.	<p>Engravings IX/9-a, Engravings IX/9-b</p> <p><i>Bataille d'Oltenitza. Gagnée par le Turcs, le 4 Novembre 1853. Peint par Aman de Valachie. Litographie par A. Bayot.</i> London, Gambart et Co; Goupil et C-ie, Paris, Berlin et New York; Imp. Lemercier, Paris, [s.a.]. Lithography, 325x500 mm.</p> <p>Item with the shelfmark <i>Stampe IX/9-a</i>. Inv.1810/1959.</p>
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¹ Vida, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³ *** *Theodor Aman*, p. 10.

	<p>Item with the shelfmark Stampe IX/9-b. Inv. 1811/1959.</p> <p>Notes: Work published in the collection “Guerre d’Orient”. Ex-libris: “G. Sion”.</p>
2.	<p>Engravings IX/8</p> <p><i>The Last Night of Michael the Brave, Prince of Romania (in 1601). Dernier banquet de Michel le Grand, prince de Valachie (en 1601). (Poesie de B. Bolintineano). Th. Aman pinx., Mouilleron lith. Paris, Imp. Lemercier, [s.a.]. Lithography, 310x411 mm. Inv. 922/1923</i></p>
3.	<p>Engravings II/33</p> <p><i>Épisode des inondations à Bucharest. Le prince Alexandre visitant le quartier des tabaches. D’après un croquis de M. Aman, [Paris, s.n., s.a.]. Reproduction after a wood engraving, 140x220 mm. Inv. 2093/1959.</i></p> <p>Notes Cut out from the magazine <i>L’Illustration</i>. Signed inside the frame in the left bottom corner “Edison Emeeton” and in the right bottom corner “Janet Lange”.</p>
4.	<p>Engravings IX/12</p> <p><i>Ion Heliade Rădulescu. [s.l., s.n., s.a.]. Etching and drypoint, 195x128 mm. Inv. 707/1959</i></p> <p>Bibliography: Vida, <i>op.cit.</i>, p. 59.</p>
5.	<p>Engravings IX/7</p> <p><i>La caroutza de poste valaque. D’après M. Aman, de Valachie. [Paris, Williams Watts, 1854]. Reproduction after a wood engraving, 121x242 mm. Inv. 1078/1959.</i></p>

	<p>Notes: Cut out from the magazine <i>L'Illustration</i>, 1854, no. 596, p. 77. Ex-libris: "G. Sion".</p> <p>Note on the item: "Illustration 1854 pg. 77". With black pencil.</p>
6.	<p>Engravings IX/1, Engravings IX/2</p> <p><i>La ceinture (Dans de Roumanie)</i>. Th. Aman del. et sc. V-ve A. Cadart, Edit. Imp., Paris. Librairie Bachelin Deflorenne, [s.a.]. Etching, 275x190 mm.</p> <p>Item with the shelfmark Stampe IX/1. Inv. 1374/1959.</p> <p>Item with the shelfmark Stampe IX/2. Inv. 1373/1959.</p> <p>Notes: Work published in the collection <i>Le musée des deux mondes</i>. Ex-libris: "G. Sion".</p> <p>Bibliography: Vida, <i>op. cit.</i>, pp. 65–66.</p>
7.	<p>Engarvings IX/10</p> <p><i>Le lac de Balta-Alba</i>. D'apres M. Aman, de Valachie. [Paris, Williams Watts, 1854]. Reproduction after a wood engraving, 123x223 mm. Inv. 1321/1959.</p> <p>Notes: Cut out from the magazine <i>L'Illustration</i>, 1854, no. 596, p.100.</p> <p>Note on the item: "1854", "3 article de B. Alecsandri" (3 articles by B. Alecsandri). With black pencil.</p>
8.	<p>Engravings IX/11</p>

	<p><i>Le village de Balta-Alba</i>. D'après M. Aman, de Valachie. [Paris, Williams Watts, 1854]. Reproduction after a wood engraving, 112x170 mm. Inv. 1322/1959.</p> <p>Note: Cut out from the magazine <i>L'Illustration</i>, 1854, no. 596, p. 85. Ex-libris: "G. Sion".</p> <p>Note on the item: "1854 pg. 85". With black pencil.</p>
9.	<p>Engravings IX/5 ; Engarvings IX/6</p> <p><i>Mendiants de Roumanie</i>. Th. Aman pinx. et sc. V-ve a Cadart, Edit. Imp. Paris, [s.a.]. Etching and drypoint.</p> <p>Item with the shelfmark Stampe IX/5. 150x110 mm. Inv. 1369/1959. Ex-libris: "G. Sion".</p> <p>Item with the shelfmark Stampe IX/6. 155x113 mm. Inv. 1370/1959.</p> <p>Notes: Signed inside the frame in the left bottom corner "Aman 1879".</p> <p>Note on the item: "Mediants Roumain. E. forte de Th. Aman". With black pencil.</p> <p>Bibliography: Vida, <i>op. cit.</i>, pp. 89–90.</p>
10.	<p>Engravings XV/7</p> <p><i>The Saint and Great Day of Good Friday (Procession with the Saint Epitaph. – Stavropoleos Church in Bucharest)</i>. After a</p>

	<p>picture by Th. Aman. Bucharest, Minerva Graphic Art Institute, [s.a.]. Chromolithography, 430x585 mm. Inv. 941/1959.</p> <p>Notes: Ex-libris: “G. Sion”.</p>
11.	<p>Engravings IX/4</p> <p>[<i>Sorcière bohémienne de Roumanie</i>]. [sl., s.n., s.a.]. Etching, 177x135 mm. Inv. 1371/1959.</p> <p>Notes: Signed inside the frame in the left bottom corner “Th. Aman fecit 1874”.</p> <p>Note on the item: “Femme de Bucharest. Eau forte Th. Aman”. With black pencil.</p> <p>Bibliography: Vida, <i>op. cit.</i>, pp. 80–81.</p>
12.	<p>Engravings IX/3</p> <p><i>Une femme de Bucharest</i>. Vve A. Cadart, Edit. Imp. Paris, [s.a.]. Etching, 138x105 mm. Inv. 1372/1959.</p> <p>Notes: Signed outside the frame in the left bottom corner “Th. Aman del. et sc.”. 544 copies. Ex-libris: “G. Sion”.</p> <p>Bibliography: Vida, <i>op. cit.</i>, pp. 62–63.</p>

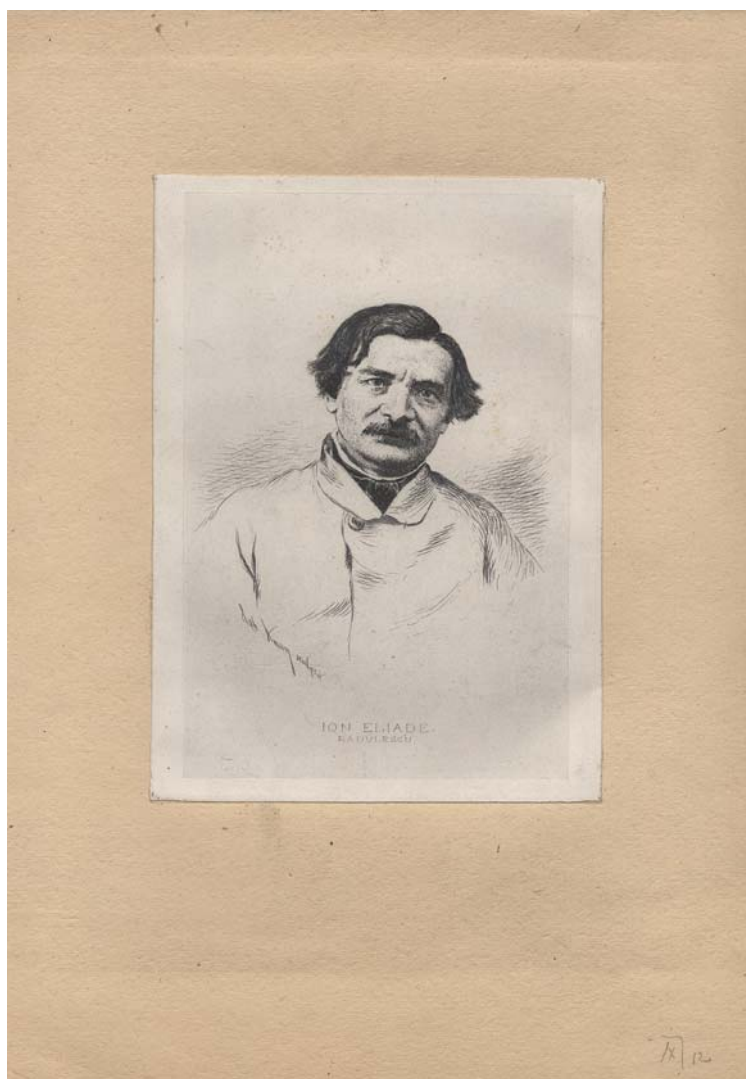
Illustrations



La ceinture (Dans de Roumanie), Catalogue no. 6.



Mendiants de Roumanie, Catalogue no. 9.



Ion Heliade Rădulescu, Catalogue no. 4.



*The Last Night of Michael the Brave, Prince of Romania (in 1601),
Catalogue no. 2.*

Translated by Ágnes Korondi