

## LOCAL MUSEUMS IN THE EPISTEMIC CONTEXT OF THE BELLE ÉPOQUE. THE FOUNDING FATHERS' DILEMMA

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**Abstract** The present article is based on the disputes caused by the means of organising the central and local museums from La Belle Époque, in order to identify certain concepts regarding heritage, as well as certain arguments that supported such concepts. Considering the clashes or convergences between different epistemes of that time, the present paper exploits the academic polemics in order to emphasise the ways in which the development of sciences was – more or less directly – reflected by the evolution of the representations of the past. Thus, these confrontations are illustrated by appealing to the dominant figures of the Romanian cultural life from the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.

**Keywords** museum, localism, centralism, episteme, scientific imagination

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the epistemes cohabited, but they did not collaborate, since a possible ramification did not yet seem useful. The term science encompassed and safeguarded all, regardless of their different areas of activity. Hence, the “methodological collusion” between biology and history resulted from the observation that the human physiological functions are not independent from the changes that occur in our daily lives, throughout the years.<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Neo-Lamarckists argued that the needs and balances of the organism did not exist per se, as anatomical essences of human nature; they varied from one epoch to another, influenced by the evolution of the internal biological functions, as well as by social and cultural factors (labour standards, heating systems, food hygiene).<sup>2</sup> According to Lamarck and to those who

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Paul Aron, „Biologie, histoire et histoire de la biologie”, *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 17, nr. 6 (1962): 1136.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1136.

further developed his precepts in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the living environments of beings exert a determinist diversification, as well as a selective intervention among them.<sup>3</sup> However, Antipa's students, by introducing the Romanian space to the fieldtrip trend, also instilled the passion for establishing provincial museums<sup>4</sup> in many people. One such figure, Constantin Kirițescu, states it loud and clear: "The new generation of professors of natural sciences who entered the field of education after Hater's reform, familiarised themselves with the method of researching beings within their own environments, thus distancing themselves from the traditional, purely theoretical method of instruction that was limited to drawing on the blackboard, using mural

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 1134. In *Cronica literară și științifică*, the journal *Convorbiri Literare* from January 1907, in the History section, published a series of debates that would today qualify as interdisciplinary: "According to recent research conducted on Egyptian mummies, it has been proven that sheep, oxen, cats, dogs, crocodiles and other animals embalmed 6000-7000 years ago are exactly as the ones that live today in the Nile Valley. Only the ibis (as popular in Egypt as is the swallow or stork in Romania) lost some of the length of its legs. It is obvious that it fishes in more and more shallow waters. Such a discovery would have had a great impact about a hundred years ago. Lamarck, Darwin's predecessor, asserted that the animals today were born from the slow modification of older species. The catastrophists said that the types of animals today have nothing to do with the types of animals that lived in the past, whose remains we find petrified in the earth's crust. According to them, from time to time, a flood comes and kills all living being and the power of creation makes new ones (as if you were to erase a blackboard and write something else instead). For if a species of animals were to be born from another, we would also be able to see this change happen – they added. At that time, Napoleon had entered Egypt and the French scholars studied the Egyptian documents. These scholars' conclusion was that the plants and animals there had not changed for 3000 years. The partisans of the flood then jubilantly used these researches in order to combat and bury Lamarck. He very calmly responded: what are 2-3000 years to the history of the globe! If he had lived long enough to see the results of today's research, there would have been no joy for those who upheld the theory of the flood and other cataclysms. The ibis sided with Lamark and Darwin, testifying for them." See *Convorbiri Literare* XLI, no. 1 (January 1907): 114. In order to support his transformist theories, Jean Baptiste Lamarck used the antithesis between the opposite poles of an evolutionary series, trying to emphasise the intermediary stages through which the organisms under scrutiny passed. See Lyndia Roveda, "Lamarck et l'art des distinctions", *Revue d'histoire des sciences* 58, 1 (2005): 145-168.

<sup>4</sup> Constantin Kirițescu wrote: "The museum, housed in the left wing of the University building, in condominium with other sections – archaeology, an art gallery, etc. – of the conglomerate that was pompously named 'National Museum', was an outdated institution." See Constantin Kirițescu, *O viață, o lume, o epocă. Memorii* (Bucharest: Sport-Turism, 1979), 121. He attributed the revival of the Natural History Museum to Grigore Antipa and to the support of Carol I. The new image of the establishment was given by "the instructive and suggestive use of dioramas, in accordance with the natural environments and communities and with the demands of modern museology" (Ibid., 122). Kirițescu recalled with great fondness the Society of Naturalists co-founded with a group of young people such as himself, on 13 March 1899. Emil Racoviță also appreciated their society, which "first and foremost required fieldwork, in order to gather material (...). Thus we could identify one of the lacunae of our higher education system, since each faculty had a more office-based scientific activity, both during courses and during the practical seminars" (Ibid., 126).

posters or pointing, from a distance, to an animal behind a glass, a dried plant mounted in a herbarium, or to a rock on a wooden shelf. The momentum that the school fieldtrips later had, the students' animal and plant collections and the establishment of *small, regional museums* were, for the most part, the results of the new philosophy promoted by the Society of Naturalists and its members that also work as teachers throughout the Romanian space" (emphasis added A. M).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the naturalists also inspired archaeologists. Both for biologists and for historians, a thesis that could affect museums became more and more attractive: the *context* that surrounds the subject of their research implies the contribution of the physical and cultural environment to the development of a person or to the endurance of an older object. Following the model given by natural sciences, whose purpose was more and more represented by the direct study of the object of research, studied in the environment of its subsistence, historians and archaeologists appropriated a similar idea of authenticity; they were increasingly more hostile towards the idea of collecting and centralising antiquities completely isolated from the geographical and geological environment in which they had been buried.

In the scientific imagination of the late 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the great touchstones were chemistry, physics and the natural sciences; they became the models of probity that history tried to imitate. The greatest asset of chemistry and physics was the experiment or, in other words, the possibility of proving, *here and now*, the proposed thesis, not to mention the spectacle of concreteness offered by medicine.<sup>6</sup> The natural sciences also strived for this ideal by relying on observing the object of study; fieldwork created the appearance that they had a connection with their better rated "sister" sciences. The natural sciences also became a model worth following in the field of humanities, which were increasingly more fascinated by any dose of empiricism that made them more credible, more integrated in the culture of exactitude that the public deemed as truth. In Romania at least, the large sums allocated to the Museum of Natural Sciences were the envy of other, similar institutions, but from different fields; there were voices that associated the popularity of Antipa's establishment with Crown Prince Ferdinand's passion for botany and (scholarly, hunting or just automotive) tourism. At that time, an academic fieldtrip was well publicised and Antipa's rivals, such as Alexandru

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 126-127.

<sup>6</sup> As early as 1876, the western sciences already indicated the new paths on which they set out. When the young Ioan Artemie Anderco studied in France, he expressed his admiration in his journal: "I visited the Anatomy Museum founded by Orfila, the Museum founded by Dupuytren, of anatomical pathology. *They are unique places of study, where one can find out all of what human observation ever produced. Understandably, having everything in sight and within reach, understanding and learning is that much more accessible. Oh, the trouble we went through in Turin, for example, for medical material! We had no "champion", no concoction that we could see with our very eyes, that we could hold in our hands or that we could make ourselves! What patience we had to learn from memory, through imagination, so that we would not immediately forget everything after the exam! The means of learning make Paris truly Paris (emphasis added, A.M.)*" See Ioan Artemie Anderco, *Jurnal (1876)*, ed. Liviu Papuc (Iași: Alfa, 2001), 216.

Tzigara-Samurçaş, invented societies for leisure through which they hoped to attract similar royal support<sup>7</sup>. In Samurçaş's opinion, the historians' search for the truth could only be supported by archaeologists at that time. Only they could closely follow the biologists who had forgotten about the stuffed animals in order to study the beings in their natural environments. From the viewpoint of scientific logic, the tourism claimed by the new natural sciences shed new light on the ways in which the scientists took into account (or did not take into account) the intellectual frame in which their field of study developed; they studied it either as *a witness* to an epistemic evolution, or as its *co-author*. If the stuffing of a poor pheasant immediately blocked it in the past, observing the animal "live", days in a row, offered the passionate hikers the satisfaction of an unmediated access to their object of study, thus continuously receiving new data. However, observing a historical fact in the space of its occurrence would have also given the historians the impression that they could cultivate an idea of probity, similar to that of the hard sciences. Furthermore, the affinity for research conducted in the natural habitat led to a new idea of museum authenticity, which, according to Constantin Kirişescu, in turn led to the creation of regional institutions. It was a difficult transition from storing the artefacts in The National Museum of Antiquities to preserving them *in situ*, or, in other words, in plain sight, so that a visitor could relate to the object of his curiosity unmediated. The model of science showed off at the Parisian Exhibition in 1900 was so categorically embedded in the memory and sensibility of the continent, that the past studied by historians also had to be visible and visualised through photographs, dioramas and cinematic journals. During his journey through Germany, Samurçaş observed and promoted this change, this break away from the old, office based philological investigations: "As opposed to words, objects have the great advantage of offering the incontestable proof of their age, since an object had been crafted long before it was named. Therefore, since an object found in its place of origin speaks unmediated, unveiling the context of its crafting, exposing the personality and the skill of its maker, the name of the object does not contribute to our knowing of its past. Throughout the years, words suffered sometimes radical transformations that did not affect the remains preserved in the earth's crust."<sup>8</sup> Why were these museum concepts so strongly associated with the German academic fields? In the memories from his student days, Tzigara-Samurçaş recalls "that glib-tongued W. H. Riehl's lectures,"<sup>9</sup> whom he more clearly mentions in a different work in 1936, in which he offers information about the University of Munich which he attended in 1893, upon the advice of Alexandru Odobescu: "(...) the interesting lectures of Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl who, at the University and through applied research in the old Bavarian museum, sought to shed new light on the importance of national art; his theories, after they

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<sup>7</sup> Alexandru Tzigara-Samurçaş, *Memorii*, I, 1872-1910 (Bucharest: Grai și Suflet – Cultura Națională, 1991), 150-151. "The Romanian Tourist Society" was established in February 1903 and its president was, who else, Prince Ferdinand.

<sup>8</sup> Tzigara-Samurçaş, *Scieri despre arta românească*, ed. C. D. Zeletin (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1987), 377.

<sup>9</sup> Tzigara-Samurçaş, *Memorii*, 106.

had been overlooked for some time, are today once again valued.”<sup>10</sup> If we are to understand the intellectual climate that favoured museum localism, both from an ideological and epistemic viewpoint, we must mention the fact that Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl (1823-1897) was the promoter of interdisciplinary folklore research, supporting the natural sciences as models for ethnography.<sup>11</sup> As an anti-modernism and neo-medievalism scholar, Riehl wanted a new form of anthropology that would fuel social politics with the purpose of solving the negative effects of modernisation: homogenisation, alienation, moral degradation, community restructuring.<sup>12</sup> His idea of *Volk* paid more attention to mental mutations, regional particularities and social differentiations and he was critical towards the excessively metaphysical and idealised views of his compatriots.<sup>13</sup> And, since folklore and customs were immemorial, anonymous and impossible to date, they held an aura of objectivity, by virtue of which the people could be studied with objectivity during the fieldtrips, in the same manner employed by the naturalists while studying beings in their natural habitats. Riehl’s main goal was to classify and to give meaning to the differences between areas, not to the trans-regional similarities, thus trying to combat the tendencies towards politically funded uniformity. Every now and then, Riehl was a convenient precedent to the countless pro-con arguments practiced by Tzigara-Samurçaş.<sup>14</sup> Based on these mutations in the scientific field, local history was provided with a small epistemic *alibi*: it was a time when positivism could no longer settle for the emphasis put on documentary information, devaluing the study of already transcribed inscriptions; the emphasis was put on the competencies that arose from working directly with the fragments of encrusted stone, or on the discoveries of unknown charters that had been found and deciphered by historians on their own. Regardless of whether they had been

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<sup>10</sup> Tzigara-Samurçaş, *Muzeografie românească* (Bucharest, 1936), XV.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Carignan, “Analogical Reasoning in Victorian Historical Epistemology”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 64, no. 3 (July, 2003), 450-451.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl partially had a French correspondent in the person of Frédéric Le Play (1806-1882). The Frenchman was the follower of a social museum model based on presenteeism, in which “the larger public must be informed on the social context in which it lives and works and in which it must be encouraged to ensure a progressive development of our common livelihood. Frédéric Le Play and his school also mentioned a “social museum” and they believed that in certain “universal exhibitions”, not only industrial accomplishment, but also social accomplishments were worthy to be displayed. As the general commissioner of the Universal Exhibition in 1867, F. Le Play added a stand in which he displayed a series of objects that could have aided in ‘improving the physical and moral conditions of the population’. According to his theory, ‘the social sciences’ were meant to set the grounds for a ‘social reform’ (...). The items from the exhibition from 1867 were once again displayed in 1887 and, in 1897, Count Chambrun founded a proper “Social Museum”, based on the same idea of aiding the actions of social reform. (...) For Le Play, a reform was first and foremost a spiritual one, handled in a religious, ‘Catholic’ manner, not in a ‘cultural’ or sociological manner.” See Henri H. Stahl, *Amintiri și gânduri din vechea școală a „mono-grafiilor sociologice”* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1981), 317.

written, grooved or sculpted, the historical sources gathered by each historian had more gravitas if they were included, temporarily, at least, in the semiotic sphere of the *monument*, rather than that of the *document*. In this sense, Duiliu Zamfirescu wrote to Maiorescu, on 8 April 1889, in an attempt to show him the advantages of studying certain inscriptions “in person”: “(...) for a long time I have been thinking about something about which I have not yet had the courage to tell you. I do not know whether there is any special scholarship for history at our Faculty of Letters. In any case, *I do not know of any laureate of ours in Rome, one who would have come to study 2<sup>nd</sup> century epigraphics*, a field so rich and so important to us. Perhaps I ask too much, but I can ask for less: *for students to study the time of Dacian colonisation on the spot*, or even less: *for students to study Roman history on the scene*. There is an immense difference between the paper document and the stone document. Trajan’s Column, the Arch of Septimius Severus, Hadrian’s Villa from Tivoli, the statues of our great emperor, the busts, the stones from the Capitol with the multitude of inscriptions etc., etc., *there are so many things that, if they do not bring special viewpoints into scientific discussions, at least they place the historian’s imagination in the aura of that time, they teach him to not judge the worlds past through the false criteria of modern man* (emphasis added A. M.).<sup>15</sup>” No matter how much we taunt them, we must admit that the history aficionados tried their best to retaliate to the naturalists, with whom they always compared themselves; the concept of probity in the case of historians must somehow keep up with the nonchalance of the visual demonstrations from Antipa’s museum. Therefore, Zamfirescu’s suggestions resulted from a reality that was as simple as it was almost unbeatable: most of the samples on which the naturalists based their arguments were extracted from a still present reality (minerals, animals) that was always available to those who could find it on their own in nature; however, the stray objects collected by the National Museum of Antiquities were no more than traces, echoes of historical phenomena long concluded.

The National Museum of Antiquities from Bucharest was established on 25 November 1864, when the Union from 1859 seemed to merely be a fleeting annexation. Therefore, from an ideological viewpoint, the institution constructed the myth of a timeless Moldavian-Wallachian synthesis. Predictably, the concept of an accord between convergent diversities, that was more valid in the much more heterogeneous Germany, was always avoided. However, “The Museum of Archaeology, kept in the worst conditions, as it was during the time of Tocilescu, unloading objects from around the world,<sup>16</sup>” continued to irritate Nicolae Iorga: many years after the death of his famous adversary, he continued to invoke him, as a basis of comparison. Any antithesis could be made at the expense of Grigore Tocilescu. Posthumously taunting him, the memoirist left nothing out – an anatomical detail seemed to reflect a behavioural detail: “(...) Grigore Tocilescu’s face was that of a tortured Dacian, with his warrior eyes sunken underneath his bushy eyebrows”;<sup>17</sup> thus, the “image” was completed by the

<sup>15</sup> Duiliu Zamfirescu, *Cele mai frumoase scrisori*, ed. Al. Săndulescu (Bucharest: Minerva, 1974), 90.

<sup>16</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Orizonturile mele. O viață de om așa cum a fost* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1984), 508.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

opinion that “Tocilescu’s lively energy and warm passion knew no reserve when it came to charging the enemy who, to him, was anyone who entered his vast domains that spread from the barbarians from underneath the Adamklisi mound, where he had conducted digs, to the rule of King Carol I, whom he had revered so much.”<sup>18</sup> Since this was the relationship between the two, for Iorga, the promotion of local museums was a means to subvert the centralism of the National Museum of Antiquities led by Grigore Tocilescu between 1881 and 1909. Beyond the fact that Iorga’s localism was clearly a means to strike at his rival, if we were to limit the discussion to the feud between the two historians, we would descend into ridicule. We must accept the fact that Iorga based his pleads on his substantial German experience, which, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was combined with observations made during his journeys throughout Romania.

How was he influenced by his residencies in Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden, Nuremberg or Innsbruck? In essence, we would rely on the antithesis between the cosmopolitan capital of the Reich and the ambiance of the other cities, that was more to his liking: “In Lipsca/Leipzig I experienced true German life, the German life of the South, that was gentler, more cheerful, friendlier, ‘begotten, not made,’ one that had none of the constraints present in every detail of life in Berlin. (...) The past itself also had more rights here – according to Iorga regarding Leipzig –, since it was not shaped by a strong modern life that was American in nature, as was the case there. (...) Obviously, the international society was completely absent.<sup>19</sup>” In similar fashion, he also noted certain differences in the plans of museum concepts: “In Berlin I studied museums so vastly designed, with gables of such strong classicism, so skilfully placed and presented – the elegance of the Museum from Dresden, that contained some of the most precious Italian canvases, was, however, unparalleled.<sup>20</sup>” *Small is beautiful* was clearly the creed that was enforced in Nuremberg and then in Austria, in Innsbruck, leaving its mark on the way in which the conservation of heritage by means of restoration, preservation and archiving was seen. *The – very few – means through which we preserved our past mattered less than the representations of time that resulted from the chosen means.* Iorga continuously raised the same question: *what can we know about ourselves and what do we forget when we opt for a certain means of preservation?* A German example that would be revealing for his future pleads for local museums would be his memories of two other cities: first, he eulogised “old Nuremberg, where no stone budged in any house and which now lives between the medieval fortifications (...); it attracted me rather from a romantic sentiment (...);” regarding Innsbruck, he stated that “(...) the environment in which I worked helped me understand this past life. Not everyone has the pleasure of studying the dead in the place where they had lived.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, the traces of the past had to be left where they had been created; moreover, when writing the history of a certain time, we must, as far as possible, also study and preserve the space which

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 147-148.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 153.

hosted its primary events. What did he truly mean by this? According to him, the landscapes that would delight him at home did not appear randomly, but rather from the transformations caused by the human time upon the geographic space. They were all witness-landscapes and Iorga intensely personified nature, since nature gets involved and preserves the echo of collective drama for connoisseurs such as himself. Thus, the new localist philosophy was outlined, one which gave the regional museums the purpose of saving some of the “breath” of the histories that took place in the respective area. Taken away too far, the traces of our past are forever silenced since, in most cases, the context in which a phenomenon took place offers even more information than the phenomenon itself.

These were the beliefs based on which Iorga began roaming the country on foot, from Botoșani to Severin, tirelessly searching for “the absolute incarnation of the page in history”: “A summer flu that gave no sign of leaving me made me try, in 1904, a change of scenery (...). In the beginning I set off across Romania, towards Severin. I was faced with things that were completely unknown to me. *The historical memories became a reality that was more alive than ever on the soil on which the past had taken place – the traces, no matter how neglected and disregarded, truly spoke to the historian.* An unintelligent, rash and vein modernity, through its “palaces” built for the Prefecture, for the Commune, for the Courthouse, for schools, for the enriched of the political scene, highlighted what was authentic and harmonious even more, what carried the seal of time and what was *supported by the needs of the respective location* (emphasis added A. M.).”<sup>22</sup> However, the antithesis was the most frequently used artifice in his descriptions, exploiting every opportunity to regret the fact that the modern architecture of the present had no priors in the past, since its traces had been swiftly erased. This restless opposition is constantly present in the historian’s writings – the opposition between a current architecture that could be found anywhere and the old remnants that could only be found in that particular place. The subject of this book, however, is not Iorga’s opinions regarding buildings and their restoration, but the way in which, by noting this aspect, we could identify an idea on the preservation of history’s remnants, no matter how big or small. Where could they have been kept? a) where they had been found; b) in a museum that would reflect the cultural sphere of that area; c) in an establishment that would dignify their local specificity, or, on the contrary, a historical trans-regional and convergent evolution. Iorga thus developed a short anthropology of space, suggesting that there is “complicity” between the historical fact and the space in which it occurred. This “collaboration” between the event and its geographic background was, according to Iorga, proven only by the passage of time: by resisting all weathering, the traces of the events from long ago could be identified only by those who believed in the genius of the respective location. Their preservation in that particular regional perimeter was thus justified, since they had witnessed and they had been the co-authors of its long story.

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<sup>22</sup> Iorga, *Drumuri și orașe din România*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Bucharest: Librăria Pavel Suru, 1916), 233.



Some of the discourses of that time rely heavily on our integration in a multi-secular historical trend which we manage to handle due to our own qualities, while others argue the idea of a history that we had forged by ourselves, speaking of events that seem to have naturally occurred to us. Hence, there is a distance between the emphasis put on *attributes* and the emphasis put on *actions*, both of which are blameworthy, since neither are *reconstructions*, but *restorations*. They both individualised us at the risk of dehistoricising us. This is why we cannot ignore the polemics generated by the renovated monasteries, since they are part of the historical culture of that time. Such mistakes are now useful, since any form of revival, though exaggeration or even kitsch, reveals the sense of temporal separation from a world which we already felt outdated, but which we somehow wanted back, in order for it to represent our present, not the time of its construction. These are the circumstances in which the differences between the ways in which the information about the past was gathered at some point and the representations of the past desired by the information became more visible. The idea that *restoration* and *preservation in a museum* are two sides of the same process of monument *conservation* is also present in the fragment in which Iorga criticises the works of Lecomte Du Nouy from Curtea de Argeş. Namely, the creation in the immediate vicinity of the church of a museum associated with the convent was, for Iorga, not a secondary-benevolent aspect, but a testament to the fact that in Curtea de Argeş the past had been saved and not embellished: "In the 'old church', during the so radically destructive restoration, faces of saints were discovered, for which the craftsmen of the past had used their true, boundless piety; chalices and vestments ornate with the stones that, in the smallest spaces, gather the most light and all the riches were discovered; holy cloths that wrapped bones that turned to dust were also discovered. Some of the works of art were brought to Bucharest to be included in the collections of a newly established and newly open Museum. The rest are recorded in the ledger now, since the new House of the Church must keep track of what it owns; they would then be forgotten in the back of cabinets or at the bottom of different chests. The mind then wanders to those *fabriche* from around the great, beautiful churches in Italy; workshops and museums which preserve what time had peeled off of the wonderful buildings, where the craftsmen work, insofar as it is necessary, to maintaining the monument in good condition."<sup>23</sup> The "newly established museum," in 1906, was owned by his best man, Al. Tzigara Samurçaş, with whom he shared an acceptable, but not cordial relationship. His mentioning was neutral, as proven by the fact that Iorga did not attack, nor did he eulogise the transportation of the objects to the capital. Samurçaş, when he directly or indirectly criticised the situation of the Museum of National Antiquities led by Grigore Tocilescu, also invoked the museums of the "small German homelands" that had clearly stated anti-Berliner purposes. They also had a "supplement" of John Ruskin or William Morris-type English utopian socialism: Iorga and Samurçaş did not want an idealised and definitively closed Middle Ages, but one that was

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 53-54.

useful and active in the present.<sup>24</sup> *The perfect preservation of a cultural archetype was not an objective in itself, since, according to Iorga, the value of an inaugural monument resided in the continuations and adaptations it received in time. "Everywhere, in every town I visited, I tried to identify the primordial, exact act from which everything else began – the old birthing cell and, once it was found, everything else became intelligible and interesting."<sup>25</sup>* He was a preserver who believed that tradition must remain current, but not as a purpose in itself, but as a means of negotiating between the old and the new. In other words, the past was a basis for comparison, not an absolute model. In fact, Iorga represented a general tendency, since the smaller Balkan states chose certain stable identity benchmarks by which they could unmistakably be identified. Iorga asserted himself in the age when states defined themselves in relation to their neighbours and to the most powerful countries at that time; the sometimes excessive emphasis that each small state from South-Eastern Europe put on their own originality seemed to be the only way in which westerners could finally tell the difference between Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia. However, this idea of authenticity only belonged to the majorities of those nations; they wished to be its sole owners, the newcomers in their stories disconcerting them. This is why Iorga's travel stories contained so many obsessive anti-Semitic references. He believed that the poor development of the Romanian people's patrimony conscience was caused by the fact that, in this space, modernisation was the result of a cultural-ethnic capitulation to the primary promoters of capitalism, the Jews. Since they were no longer the protagonists of their own history, the Romanian people commercialised and passivated their ways by ignoring the past that no longer contributed to the present. In 1914, Iorga wrote "Botoşani is more and more beautiful (...). One element that would make these changes be in good taste, however, is absent – a form of respect for things past, a sense of continuation, elements that give a town its true character, even a modern town (...). Otherwise, the repairs made to religious monuments would not have the character they had been given. Churches like Păpăuții, or Sf. Gheorghe would not decrease in value, by removing so many elements, additions – if you will – that also have their own historical character and perhaps even artistic value (...). Otherwise, such an important town would not be lacking a Museum – for all the rare objects that could easily be found – and a public library."<sup>26</sup> Not for nothing did he establish a relation between the restoration of the churches of Botoşani and the

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<sup>24</sup> On antimachinism, anti-modernism, neo-medievalism, ideas from the writings of John Ruskin and William Morris, see Michel Ragon, *Histoire de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme modernes, I, Idéologies et pionniers, 1800-1910* (Paris: Casterman, 1986), 169-170. John Ruskin warned his contemporaries that architecture is not merely an art of proportions; according to him, a religious establishment is not built only to shelter a community, but it must also excite certain feelings. Morris did not wish to simply imitate the medieval spirit, but to resuscitate it in creative way, to encourage its followers to return to manufactured goods. Unfortunately, such good were very expensive and were not accessible to the larger public, but they still excited the elite's taste for handcrafted items.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 154-155.

preservation of the small artefacts that were their contemporaries, the latter being able to provide more explanations for the genesis and evolution of those religious edifices. Obviously, a monument could not be fully preserved if the jewellery that assisted its existence were not also preserved. For the same reason, he insisted on promoting the confusion between *continuity* and *historicity*, although the former implied a certain constancy and lack of change, while the latter is synonymous with evolution, adaptation etc. Iorga understood tradition as an art of taming change. Its purpose was to gradually adopt imports that were perhaps too circumstantial and to change them into inevitable steps in an extremely long, preliminary evolution.

For Nicolae Iorga, the time of humanity “ascended” towards the Middle Ages, in which he created a cultural model of reference; then, the years sped up and “descended” towards a modernity that dislocated Europe from that certain pool of value that had been validated for centuries. The change suffered by the old continental skylines did not feel like a tragedy, but it felt like haste, like a risky acceleration of history’s pulse. For him, the physical geography and the human creation assembled an idyllic landscape which the Romanian people had to perpetuate in order to keep their sense of direction through history. His idea of age was not a totemic one, from beyond history. In his organic concept, this age was the effect of certain build-ups that reached their peak during the Middle Ages or shortly after. However, it was clear that for the sceptical Iorga the modernisations did not simply happen; they did not conjoin the old, but they expelled it. He travelled in order to find forgotten places that were thus “pure” – corners of the countryside to which the Romanian people could return in order to resume their history, starting from the true values. This is why any initiative that did not take into account the age of the available models was, to him, a tawdry addition, an infringement. According to Iorga, a project of modernisation was not worthy of esteem if it were not legitimised by our enshrined origins, if it had no sprouts in the earliest of times. Our future had to come from the past, it had to grow from it. *“The Romanian province – here, we use the term for its French meaning and it arouses more or less hilarious assessments that do not always reflect the truth –, our provincial towns do not really play a role in our cultural life (...). Sometimes, the conferences held at provincial Athenaeums are successful and the lecturer marries well or, in less fortunate cases, he wins trials, patients or voters (emphasis added A. M.),”* as Nicolae Iorga wittily noted on 25 January 1904.<sup>27</sup> However, Iorga found something worthy of attention and continued: *“(...) some deeds that are true and good were made at times and they show that one can work with a conscience and usefully in many towns from different counties that are clean and diligent. One of these deeds is the exhibition of ‘antiquities’ – a word that had been as poorly chosen as ‘retrospective’, used for a section of Mr. Istrati’s exhibition in Bucharest –, the historical exhibition in Craiova. (...) The exhibition occupies a large room of the beautiful Minerva Hotel. It contained many items and they were organised well enough. These very diverse items were connected by the memory of the same*

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<sup>27</sup> Nicolae Iorga, “Reviste, atenee și muzee de provincie”, in *O luptă literară*, Vol. 1 (Bucharest: Minerva, 1979), 48-49.

*past from which they all originated* (...). These features were present in both the fine cloth and the painstakingly crafted silverware, as well as in the delicately decorated weapons, the paintings made by focusing on truth and the skilfully painted royal edicts (emphasis added A. M).<sup>28</sup> By using comparisons as pretexts, Iorga made his classic pokes at Grigore Tocilescu and C. I. Istrati. However, besides these attacks that had become reflex, the historian also outlined a short sociology of the antiquarianism of Olt County and emphasised its philanthropic substrate and the possibility that the exhibition could become permanent – that it could become a museum: “Many would think that this rare phenomenon that occurs in provincial life, a historical exhibition will have been greeted with smiles of indifference and contempt. No. Although there was a 1 Leu fee for school canteens – another good deed –, although it was the time of the Saint John’s Eve, the door kept being pushed open. During the hour I spent there officers appeared who, due to their focus, left the greatest impression, schoolboys who, I assure you, entered in the same manner as they would enter a church, old women who looked at the items as if looking in a mirror in which they would see the rejuvenated reflection of themselves – even an old man who carried a large family portrait which he brought as an offering to this unveiling of Craiova’s past. Perhaps this exhibition could turn into a small museum, just like in Târgul Jiului. Perhaps this example given by the towns of Olt will spread. The parade athenaeums, the imitation journals, the blackmail newspapers will gradually disappear and they will be replaced, in those certain life centres that make up the province, by truly useful establishments.”<sup>29</sup> Iorga’s assessments from the beginning of 1904 were foreshadowing, since the way in which things progressed confirmed his intuitions. The context which connected the theoretical assessments, on the one hand, and the concretisations that arduously occurred within the institutional policies on the other hand is that in which Iorga assigned the symbolic heir of his precepts: “(...) *Drumuri și orașe din România* (Roads and towns of Romania) was published by ‘Minerva’ that same year. It was popular enough to determine the editor to continue the series and, from the youth of that time, one of my best students, Vasile Pârvan, who had been destined to such a great and rapidly evolving career, did not fail to present to a fairly wide circle of readers from the schools, an honest and understanding public, the book that was meant to spark the interest of the Romanian people within their own country<sup>30</sup>.”

On 8 March 1906, the apprentice sent his magister a letter from Berlin in which he described the politicisation of national identity in the Romanian public sphere. Among the guilty parties, he identified the older historians, about whom he wrote bluntly: “We are ashamed to say what we want out loud and we are disgusted by politics because the issue of national identity was compromised by the likes of Rosetti, Urechia, Tocilescu and others and by The Cultural League (!) and today’s politics is identical to the most despicable upstartism.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Iorga, *Orizonturile mele*, 236.

<sup>31</sup> Vasile Pârvan, *Correspondență și acte*, ed. Alexandru Zub (Bucharest: Minerva, 1973), 26.

From Pârvan's viewpoint, his disapproval of Tocilescu did not include his activity from the Museum of National Antiquities. For a while, the young star of Romanian archaeology gave the impression that he shared the same centralist view and that he parted with his predecessor at the exact time when he should have criticised the eternal limitation of museum conservation to a simple storage of artefacts. He broke away from the old Bucharest-type interventionism but, gradually and silently, the proofs of this change were revealed by the archives. There were two major arguments: the crisis of space in Bucharest and the acceptance of the idea that a local museum more quickly took over the archaeological discoveries to which the capital reacted tardily. During World War I, the memory of these disputes had already been stabilised, in the sense that the public opinion disapproved the dislocations caused by Tocilescu in Dobrogea and it perceived his heir and critic, Pârvan, as the promoter of local museums. This idea is sustained by the war notes of Yvonne Blondel, the daughter of the former French ambassador Camille Blondel. The pages written between 1916-1917 contain references to Tocilescu's vandalisms, but also praises for the local museum from Hârşova, promoted by Vasile Pârvan: "Near the fortress, the Trophaeum Traiani monument from Adamclisi triumphantly towers (...). It is a circular structure that was once forty metres high and it was decorated all around with friezes that depicted scenes from the Dacian war. Statues, bas-reliefs and inscriptions decorate the monument. One can assume that an earthquake caused all of these decorations to break off and they were found at the foot of the stairs, buried beneath heavy layers of soil. Unfortunately, all of these beautiful items were transported to Bucharest and they were taken over by the National Museum of Antiquities. Today, this poor ruin, its majesty smothered, only resembles a gigantic shell, set on about ten bleachers in a circle that forms its pedestal."<sup>32</sup>

By contrast with the disapproval for Tocilescu's works, on 16/29 October 1916, a few lines were published, demonstrating the fact that the caution with which Pârvan acted in the issue of preserving the ancient patrimony and they thus ensured his positive character image: "Wherever he went, studied and conducted digs, professor Pârvan was able to also discover hearts in which he could plant the seeds of his passion and knowledge. And so it came that everywhere disciples and imitators became invested in the same work with the same passion, patiently trying to uncover the vestiges of past civilisations, buried beneath the shroud of the earth that protected them from the winds which, be it winter or summer, scrape the clay of this Danube province. (...) When we returned to the town centre, he made me admire the church which, from above, from its plateau, seemed to watch over the small town like a hen watches over her chicks. The teacher was not spared by my compliments to the beauty and the imposing nature of the school, of which he seemed to be very proud. On a side of the building he began to put together a regional museum in which he had already gathered much material that he had carefully categorised and catalogued. Ceramic wares, Chinese or Japanese

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<sup>32</sup> Yvonne Blondel, *Jurnal de război, 1916-1917. Frontul de sud al României*, transl. by Rodica Zagăr (Bucharest: Institutul Cultural Român, 2005), 170-171. The thoughts are laid out on the page for Wednesday, 7/20 September 1906.

porcelain wares, beautiful Amphorae with rose bodies and exquisite profiles were aligned on wide shelves. Fragments of marble sculptures, stones covered in inscriptions and drawings were lined up along the walls. Mister Dănescu had begun to assemble the rarer items. This scholar, who was as passionate as I was, could not fathom the barbarians freely touching these sacred vestiges, but he was desperate because he had no means of transporting the heavy crates across the river. I promised him that I would intervene in his and the museum's favour, since I sensed that this entire establishment represented, for him, years of hard work. In a way, it was as if he had to abandon his own child.<sup>33</sup> At that time, any form of storing objects – with

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 281-282. Eugen Lovinescu outlined the best portrait of Pârvan's personality. By vexing the encomiasts who had an interest in claiming a flawless academic celebrity, the great literary critic captured the archaeologist's personality perfectly: "short, skinny, with a rural appearance and rural origins, who, besides his fierce diligence, stood out from the very beginning through an ambition made obvious by its force and will for power; the man whose charm he had learnt and used, by means of strive and obedience to a vanity that was easy to win over, was N. Iorga, and through his destiny as the new Gulliver, after so many disciples who never measured up to him, it was then Pârvan's turn to carry his briefcase full of books, barely keeping up with him and facing the ironic smiles of passers-by on Victory Avenue; his later rival never suspected that the small student who even then shook in convulsions would be the only man to stand against him in the scholarly world and to oppose the university and academic arrangements (...); he was intelligent, studious, but, above all, ambitious and proud to the point of dehumanisation, hypnotised by the exclusive will to prove himself (...). After a few years of studying in Berlin, he returned home and the first homage made by Romanian science to the new go-getter who was on the verge of writing the story of his own academic career was the opportune and deferential death of Teohare Antonescu, the professor of ancient history from Iași – this opened the path towards the cathedra for which he had prepared. When I met him, I 'congratulated' him for the fortunate conjunction of his debut. I was, however, faced with a man disgusted by fate... in Iași? ... if he had been directly nominated, he would have accepted... but like this? ... he was expected to apply and be examined ... by who? By A. D. Xenopol!... by Petru Râșcanu! And by who else? Perhaps even by Gr. Tocilescu! Absolutely not! Never! He could not humiliate himself like that. I stared at him with eyes wide with admiration: he was still short and simian, hunchbacked, with high cheekbones – however, his expression was still that of a victor with an ambition and faith in his own merit and destiny; as the author of a thesis of a few dozen pages on Romanian merchants, he considered it a humiliation to apply for a position and be examined ... by who? By A.D. Xenopol or by Gr. Tocilescu! Even the contempt with which he said these important names of that time suggested the direction of a predestined career. He deserved the positions he had held and that he had surpassed, but even if he had not deserved them, he would still have obtained them because he wanted them and because an act of massive, exclusive will, together with complete spiritual resources, are enough to obtain anything (...)." See Eugen Lovinescu, *Memorii, 1900-1916* (Bucharest: Cugetarea, 1930), 76-79. Lovinescu was not neutral either, since Pârvan's friendship with Iorga could not inspire a more gentle approach. Sober and distant, Vasile Pârvan built his image as an unapproachable scholar, even exiting a certain fascination among his contemporaries. For that matter, he even appeared as a character, the Professor, in the novel written by a female author with a male pseudonym, Ticu Archip, entitled *Soarele negru. Viața* (The Black Sun. Life), edited by Constantin Mohanu (București: Minerva, 1983), 141-142. There is a striking similarity with Lovinescu's words: "He had a strange, but original appearance: slightly hunchbacked, with broad, thin shoulders, wearing black clothes that had the collar

the pretext of preservation or creation of a better form of exhibition – was rejected even by the public opinion; localism and centralism could not be justified by the old reflex of merging artefacts.

It would be unjust to identify museum centralism only with the person of Grigore Tocilescu and to attribute the promotion of local establishments only to Nicolae Iorga. For a long time, centralisation represented a general tendency and a test of patriotism. It was reflected, for instance, in the ideas of architect Nicolae Gabrielescu in 1889. On the one hand, he defended the local characteristics of Moldavian churches – more precisely, he was opposed to the typification that would result from restoration for the sake of creating a pure, generic and magnificent Byzantine style.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, Gabrielescu argued that “the museums from Iași and Craiova must be put under the direction of the museum from Bucharest, in order to form a more unified and complete form of organisation. They must only be a form of local archives for the popularisation of artistic taste and, if an object of extraordinary importance for history and art were to be found, it must be included in the central collections of the capital, the only place where it could truly be useful, since it was the centre for science; as for the region in which the object had been found, a plaster model could be made to be kept in the museum of that respective town.”<sup>35</sup> Some solutions come from less explored fields. If we were to read the catalogue of the museum organised in Suceava at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we would notice that many of the catalogue items were architectural fragments.<sup>36</sup> More precisely, Emil Ioan Emandi and, more recently, Bogdan Petru Nicolici offered extremely

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and necktie of a Protestant pastor. (...) When he was thirty years old, he was offered a position at the University and he was grateful to the people who helped him study abroad and who facilitated the illustrious career he now had. (...) He was fair, but ambitious beyond measure. He was a man who would have been the prototype of an upstart, if his sharp intelligence had not governed his appearances.” Ticu Archip started writing the novel in 1935, when Pârvan was no longer alive, but the plot in this third novel takes place, according to the writer, between 1914-1939. However, posterity was more than laudatory towards Pârvan. His dedication to his profession consequently attracted much praise: Alexandru Păunescu, “Strădaniile lui Vasile Pârvan pentru salvarea și recuperarea obiectelor prețioase din Muzeul Național de Antichități precum și a pieselor arheologice din Dobrogea” (Vasile Pârvan’s struggles to salvage and recover the precious items from the National Museum of Antiquities, as well as the archaeological items from Dobrogea), *Carpica* XXIII/1, tribute volume to Vasile Pârvan (Iași: Fundația Chemarea, 1992), 15-39. For a general idea on the colleagues Pârvan despised, see Mihai Vasilescu, “Primii profesori de istorie antică ai Universității din Iași: Petru Rășcanu și Teohari Antonescu”, in *Universitatea din Iași, 1860-1985. Pagini din istoria învățământului românesc, Supliment la Analele Științifice ale Universității „Al. I. Cuza” din Iași – Istorie* XXXII (1987), 115-132.

<sup>34</sup> Carmen Popescu, *Le style national roumain. Construire une nation à travers l’architecture 1881-1945* (Presses Universitaires de Rennes/Simetria, 2004), 106-107.

<sup>35</sup> Nicolae Gabrielescu, *Privire generală asupra monumentelor naționale și mijlocul de a împiedeca distrugerea lor* (Iași: Tipografia Națională, 1889), 28.

<sup>36</sup> *Catalogul obiectelor colecționate de Muzeul local din Suceava de la 1895 până la 1912* (Suceava: Tipografia „Societății Școala Română”, f.a.), 11 p. These extremely heterogeneous records contained 359 items.

helpful clues regarding the evolution of local museology in a region that raised much sensitivity, Bukovina. Due to these two historians, we are inclined to believe the following: oscillating between the French and the German museum localism, the Romanian people from the kingdom were more inspired by the Austro-Hungarian model, since it was more accessible, more applicable and more familiar. In fact, Nicolae Beldiceanu had asserted himself in Iași, but he was born in Fălticeni. The former resident of Bukovina was well received, since the envoy of the Central Committee for Art and Monuments from Vienna, Karl Adolf Romstorfer (1854-1916), was awarded by Carol I with three Romanian commendations. He was thus given credit for being the saviour of the historical vestiges from the Habsburg Moldavia; for that matter, Bogdan Petru Nicolici mentioned what those commendations were: The Order of the Star of Romania, Commodore rank, The Order of the Crown of Romania and the Bene Merenti Medal, 1<sup>st</sup> Class, Gold Grade. The politics from Vienna was also important, since it was reluctant towards the museums that promoted an Austro-Hungarian identity of synthesis. It preferred rather a concert of the comfortable characteristics that were, from a semiotic viewpoint, subordinate to an imperial centre that prudently governed the somewhat passive cultural differences. However, from the words of Emandi and Nicolici we can deduce that the identity dimension of the collections of the school from Bukovina was present in a rather ethnographic form and the historical dimension was set to begin after the celebration from Putna (1871). Emandi and Nicolici draw attention to the fact that, from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Bukovina had the model of a secondary school museum, which already existed in Cernăuți beginning with 1817: in this area, there was already an established practice to surrender to the director of a school any antiquities found randomly. The same thing happened in 1860 in the case of the objects from the Princely Fortress of Suceava. In Bukovina, the first legislation in this field was established between 1828–1829, due to the requests made to catalogue the precious church objects. The idea of a national museum was promoted only three decades later, by Aron Pumnul (1858), Eudoxiu Hurmuzaki (1864) and George Costin (1865). Consequently, the government decreed, on 16 September 1867, the establishment of such a place which was, however, opened later, inside a wing of the archbishopric residence from Cernăuți, on 14 May 1893, with the help of the curator from Vienna, Karl Adolf Romstorfer. According to Emil Ioan Emandi, during that same year, in Cernăuți, together with the National Museum of Bukovina, a Museum of Industrial Arts of Bukovina, dedicated to crafts and material culture was established. This separation did not suit the people of Bukovina, since they wanted a national museum or even a village museum in Câmpulung; either way, there was a desire for a museum that would not administratively depend on Vienna and that would reunite the two fields, history and ethnography, thus giving the entire construct a more explicit ethno-cultural connotation. The establishment of the Society Museum of Suceava, on 4 January 1900, as a result of the archaeological research conducted in the Princely Fortress,



fulfilled this localist desire. The project was supported especially by Iosif Fleischer, who opposed the transportation of the discoveries to the National Museum of Cernăuți.<sup>37</sup>

The centralist arguments regarding what we would call today “research management” considered that the accumulation of as many artefacts as possible under the same roof eradicated history’s blank spots – they would construct some representations of the past which would at least be coherent, if not necessarily truthful. The centralists did not overlook the local disputes that had been caused by the fact that the provincial establishments were supported by townhouses or by any other potentates that, once the changes caused by the elections occurred, could withdraw their support for the museums, endangering their existence. The centralist ideology was Salvationist, living off of local negligence. By combating the squander of information sources and the indifference of the locals for the vestiges, the museum centralisation would have made available to those interested, no matter where they came from, a database that would have been impossible to construct in the province, where there were no such material resources. According to the centralist ideology, the capital was dis-located and therefore, by placing certain essential institutions in Bucharest, they would become deterritorialized and would belong to everyone, as trans-regional and national symbols.

The localist arguments were reparative, rather than academic – the establishment of certain provincial museums seemed to be the retaliation to the pillages made by the centre in the name of an identity that was too generic, too insensitive to particularities. The localist ideology claims that the particularities do not divide, but they show that the things that bring us together are more important than the ones that set us apart. A solid national identity, from the localist viewpoint, is built on the certainty that whichever part of the country you visit, you would find different, but convergent histories with which you could easily identify due to the diversity they bear. Localism was a reaction to the establishment of certain “places where nothing ever happened”; the repopulation of the provincial past with first-hand historical events does not lead to separatism, but to the feeling of belonging to the history of the other. By virtue of this feeling, the people of Muntenia were to admire the Moldavian museums and vice-versa and the concreteness of the artefacts would thus help them visualise each other’s biographies. Even the feeling of envy for the other’s glory appears out of the desire to be part of the other’s story. Thus, the symbolical exchanges of past also occurred and they were supported by the subconscious desire to recognise oneself in the other and to take part together in a common consciousness of becoming.

The justifications of one side could, depending on the context, serve the interests of the other. The occasional acts of vandalism made by the peasants or by the “treasure hunters” were used as arguments both by those who thus justified the transfer of the items to Bucharest, claiming that the province was incapable of protecting them, and by those who

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<sup>37</sup> The entire chronology of the museography in Bukovina was taken from Emil Ioan Emandi, *Muzeul de Istorie Suceava* (București: Sport-Turism, 1985), 22-32, and from Bogdan Petru Nicolici, “Arheologie și arheologi în Bucovina secolului al XIX-lea”, *Analele Bucovinei XX*, 2/41 (2013), 520-527.

wanted the exact opposite, claiming that a local museum would in no time ensure the safety of the items. The impulses of museum localism in modern Romania required certain resemblance to the similar phenomenon from the West, but the differences are much more relevant. Paradoxically, the idea of a local museum was indirectly simulated by the centre, either because of the lack of funding or lack of space, or to attack a rival tenured in the position of director, or from theoretical impulses, inspired by the polemics caused by the restorations of that time. As opposed to France, the “lower” localist phenomenon was frail in Romania, and it sought if not the support, at least the consent of the centre. In the absence of certain strong local initiatives, financial and judiciary autonomy from Bucharest was fairly unattractive objectives. Either way, localism would have been a just option if it were supported by the locals and if it served their interests; in other words, if localism were not instrumented, for various purposes, by people foreign to a region which they pitied from afar.

What does local history essentially seek? An inexorable specificity of the region, certain cultural details that would outline a completely unique identity? Or certain highly relevant aspects that would draw the region out of obscurity and would place it on the same symbolic level as the areas in which certain battles had been fought? Local museums were established and each history, no matter how small, generally returned to the geographic areas that had generated them. The fight between local and central was, however, null. The idea of displaying a vestige in the museum that was closest to the place of its discovery did not contribute to the story of the respective item, since it could have been there by chance and thus it could not effectively characterise the past of the area. The most relevant symptom is the case of the inscriptions from Iași dismantled by V. Hălăceanu and put back into place after Th. Burada’s complaints. Beyond the petty intellectual envies, the polemics paved the way for a subtext with a great future. The true counterbalance to the central museum was not the local museum, but the efforts to preserve the remains in the same place they withstood throughout centuries – the architectural, urban or natural environment gave them a greater meaning than the one they would bear if they were taken separately, as stand-alone exhibits. The best form of preservation is the one that keeps the artefact and the ruin together, in the context of their survival, which forces them to tell a more detailed story than they could as stand-alone items, from behind the glass of display cases.

Translated from the Romanian by Anca Chiorean