

RADU MÂRZA, *Călători și pacienți români la Karlsbad. O istorie culturală a mersului la băi pe la 1900* [Romanian travellers and patients in Karlsbad. A cultural history of spa visits around 1900] (Iași: Polirom, 2022)

Radu Mârza is a Cluj-based historian who has chosen a rather uncommon career strategy, in the sense that it appears to be somewhat counterproductive, in terms of accumulating symbolic capital, so coveted even by authors of scientific literature. That is to say, almost every one of his books reflects a change in the research field of interest. The vast majority of professional historians remain anchored in the same research field that they had approached in their PhD dissertations. Only much later, after they can emphatically be regarded as senior researchers, they step out of their comfort zones of their own fields. Radu Mârza, however, has chosen a different path. His published PhD dissertation focuses on Romanian Slavic studies: *The History of Romanian Slavic Studies: from the beginnings until the First World War* (Cluj-Napoca: Romanian Academy, Centre for Transylvanian Studies, 2008). This volume was followed by another historiographic project, this time dedicated to the history of railway transportation, finalized through a volume published by the Polirom Publishing House: *Călători români privind pe fereastra trenului: o încercare de istorie culturală (1830-1930)* [Romanian Travelers Looking Out the Train Window: An Attempt at Cultural History (1830-1930)] (Iași: Polirom, 2020). Two years after that, he published the present volume, dedicated to the travels to Karlsbad and the treatments received there by the people in the Principalities and in 19th-century Romania, as well as by the people in the interwar period.

It may be true that Radu Mârza more or less changes his field of interest with every published book, but, as of late, his books are published by the largest commercial publishing house in Romania, which makes him well-known and, thus, allows him to gain the aforementioned symbolic capital. This is indeed an atypical career strategy, but it is by no means a losing one.

There is, however, a constant in the research endeavours of the Cluj-based historian: his interest in Central Europe and, more particularly, in the Czechoslovak space in the 19th and 20th centuries. Radu Mârza is a Transylvanian historian of Central Europe, whose interest for this area is deeply and emotionally rooted in his personal history. The historical subjects do seem to choose us, just as much as we choose them.

A truly overwhelming amount of work must go into an endeavour such as documenting the presence of the Romanian people in the Karlsbad baths. One must research the entire array of memoirs from the 19th century and from the first half of the 20th century, in addition to the correspondence collections, the periodicals etc. A commitment of this magnitude is indeed intimidating, to say the least. However, it is a subject that can be

approached patiently and systematically. Thus, the present volume encapsulates an enormous amount of documentation and passion, as well as a remarkable narrative talent.

The encounter between the author and the topic under scrutiny is recounted in the first pages of the book. Thus, they tell of the moment which one of Radu Mârza's colleagues gifted him a presentation brochure from the Karlsbad resort, published by the local authorities in 1907 in Romanian and distributed for free across the country. This was thus a promotional campaign carried out in Romania, in the Romanian language, for a foreign tourism brand – which implies that there was an important target audience that would justify the investment. What this meant was that many Romanians were indeed in the habit of visiting the Karlsbad resort regularly. Radu Mârza thus sets off to find these tourists and the first one he finds is Baracu, son of Costa from Clisura who visits the spa at the beginning of the 18th century. However, Baracu is not quite Romanian, given the fact that he is Aromanian. The first documented presence of a Romanian from the Principalities in Karlsbad is the charming Wallachian boyar Barbu Știrbei, who, in April 1796, during the reign of Alexandru-Vodă Moruzi, embarks on a grand journey. We know about the adventures of this journey from the letters that our boyar sent to the merchant Hagi Pop from Sibiu, letters published in 1906 by Nicolae Iorga. In June 1796, he is at “Carălsbat,” where he begins his course of treatment: “I drink water from the fountain, where there are five or six hundred other gentlemen and ladies, and the music plays until we finish the water. Then, we take strolls through the gardens, and music is played here as well. (...) Under the Holy Mother's protection, I drink water and enjoy myself very well.”¹ He does indeed enjoy himself very well and, given that the disease is not very serious, Barbu Știrbei – whom a few years earlier a French traveller through the Principalities, Charles Marie de Salaberry, succinctly characterized as “a great reveller” – seems rather more concerned with maintaining an extremely active social life, which he evidently boasts about to the Sibian merchant: “My dear Hagi, I have made friends from all across the world, from Petruburg [Petersburg] to everywhere else – all important people, princes, counts, barons and knights (...). I have tied friendships with all of them (...). And as I've already said, I do enjoy myself well, I am never absent from the comedy shows or from the balls they attend, because they always invite me.”² Obviously, they kept inviting him along because he was a truly exotic

¹ Radu Mârza, *Călători și pacienți români la Karlsbad. O istorie culturală a mersului la băi pe la 1900* [Romanian travellers and patients in Karlsbad. A cultural history of spa visits around 1900] (Iași: Polirom, 2022), 126. Original text: “După ce merg la fântână de beau apă, unde sânt cinci-șasă sute domni și doamne, cântă muzica până isprăvim apa, apoi facem spațiri pă la grădini unde sânt asemenea muzici (...) Beau apă și petrec cu mila Maicăi Precestei foarte bine.” If not marked otherwise, all quotes from the book under scrutiny have been translated by the translator of the present book review – A.C.

² Ibid., 127. Original text: “Am făcut prieteni, Hagiule, din toată lumea, de la Petruburg [Petersburg], din toate laturile, și tot oameni mari, prinți, grofi, baroni și cavaleri (...) Am făcut prieteșug cu toți (...) Și cum zic, petrec foarte bine, nelipsit sunt de la comedii și de la baluri cu dâșii, pentru că mă poftesc.”

character: it would appear that he wore Oriental clothing, he spoke rudimentary forms of French and Italian, but he also had with him a German “interpreter” he had brought along from Sibiu, a certain Ion who seemed cut from a different cloth than the “lads” from Oltenia that made up the rest of his suite. Ion-the-interpreter had a great flaw, namely that “he did not behave as a servant. Instead, taking advantage of the fact that he was an interpreter, when we walked, he walked beside me. I tried to explain things nicely, I tried to teach him how to serve, how the servants of others behaved but, instead of understanding, he always did the opposite.”³ We do not know whether or not the boyar and Ion, the interpreter who did not consider himself a servant, had seen eye to eye by the end, but it is highly likely that they continued to have a cat and mouse relationship until they returned home.

Radu Mârza compiles his volume from this type of texts that recount this type of experiences. Naturally, the material is grouped thematically into chapters that cover the presence of the Romanian physicians in Karlsbad, the international and national politics in Karlsbad, the modernities, the transport systems etc.

There are several relevant examples that uphold the quality of the present volume. It would appear that there was no prominent member of the local elite in the 19th century who did not set foot, at least once in their lifetime, in Karlsbad: boyars and noblewomen, merchants, princesses, all paid their summer tribute to the famous baths. Ștefan Golescu, Gheorghe Asachi, and perhaps even Ion Heliade-Rădulescu, not to mention Alexandru Ioan Cuza and the very well known Maria Obrenović, passed through there. Of course, we are drawn to the medical figures who made a living at Karlsbad, among whom the most famous is Alexandru Vaida-Voevod. Indeed, the Transylvanian politician was also a doctor, practicing medicine in Karlsbad between 1899-1900 and 1911-1914. Moreover, he authored several famous memoirs that allow us to understand his practice. After a brief incursion as a doctor in Karlsbad at the very end of the 19th century, young Vaida-Voevod returned after more than a decade. By then, the most famous Romanian doctor in the resort, I. T. Mera, had passed away two years earlier. Vaida-Voevod took over his residence, office, and clientele, which most likely predominantly Romanian. Despite substantial expenses (rent, office space, elevator, the nurse’s salary), his income more than made up for them, allowing his family to live year-round merely from his seasonal work. Regardless, Vaida-Voevod was deeply committed to the greatness of his mission: “Whenever I put on my white lab coat, I felt a sensation akin to that of a priest beginning a service or a ship captain giving the order to set sail across the vast sea. It was a kind of mystery of sovereign responsibility and, at the same time, of eagerly expecting the new enigma that would require a solution.”⁴ He maintains a very active social life, mingling

³ Ibid., Original text: “*nu să purta ca o slugă, ci fandosindu-să că este tălmăci, când mergea cu mine, mergea alături. I-am zis cu binișorul, I-am învățat cum să cade a sluji, după cum fac alte slugi la alții; în loc de a înțelege, el mergea cu mine contra.*”

⁴ Ibid., 75. Original text: “*Când îmbrăcam halatul alb, mă simțeam cuprins de un sentiment care trebuie să se asemene cu al preotului când începe slujba, ori cu al căpitanului de vas, când dă*

with the political and cultural elite of the Old Kingdom, without neglecting his medical colleagues from other great cities, who were the ones sending him patients once he settled in Karlsbad every May. He thus became the Romanian elite's main physician, who was also mending his own health at the famous baths. His famous patients, mentioned in the memoirs, included the members of the Brătianu family, Tony Bulandra, George Coșbuc, I. L. Caragiale, Barbu Ștefănescu Delavrancea, etc. He seems to be acquainted with the entire high society in Bucharest. His memoirs render the typical portrait of the Old Kingdom patient: "Beside the purely dietary or psychological treatment, quite satisfactory results can be obtained, despite the fact that the Romanian client allows himself the pleasure of variation and often breaks discipline (pastries, fruit, sexual emotions etc.). As a diagnostic fantasy, Romanians prove themselves born poets. It is futile to advise them to keep a family doctor who knows the family thoroughly and to only call in specialists when needed. Men consult their friends over appetizers, while ladies change doctors based on their friends' recommendations, at social gatherings (...). The upper class in Bucharest was almost like an extended family, in which everyone knew all of everyone's intimate details (...). They either had no idea or paid no attention to hygiene and sexual prophylaxis, so I had to explain the respective matters to everyone and I always gave out, for free, a package of six condoms each, to prevent my colleague Gerth's clientele from increasing."⁵

We could pick out many more similar passages from Radu Mârza's book. It is work that has been part of the author's plans for a long time, evidenced by the first sentence from his previous book in 2020 about memories of train travel, which refers to the volume under scrutiny here: "studying the travels of the Romanians to Karlsbad"... While conducting the research for the current volume, Radu Mârza found enough material and time to write not just on one book, but on two. This is what a diligent researcher can achieve with the available documentary material.

In conclusion, we must highlight another remarkable aspect of the work: the illustrative part, which originates from our researcher's personal history. Besides being a scholar and a professor, Radu Mârza is also an avid collector of period images (photographs, postcards, etc.). The rich illustrations in the volume are as picturesque and abundant as the

ordin de plecare, peste marea întinsă. Era un fel de mister al răspunderii suverane și totodată al așteptării enigmei noi ce ți se va prezenta spre soluționare."

⁵ Ibid., 78. Original text: "*Pe lângă un tratament pur dietetic, psihologic, se pot obține de obicei rezultate satisfăcătoare, cu toate că clientul român își permite ca plăcere de variație, încălcarea disciplinei (prăjituri, fructe, emoții sexuale, etc). Ca fantezie diagnostică, românul dovedește că este născut poet. Zadarnic îl sfătuiești să țină medic de casă, care să cunoască temeinic familia și să cheme specialiști după trebuință. Bărbatul consultă prietenii la aperitive, cucoana variază medicii conform recomandărilor prietenelor, la sindrofii (...) Tot stratul superior bucureștean făcea impresia unei extinse familii, în care fiecare cunoștea intimitățile tuturor (...) De igienă și profilaxie sexuală nu aveau idee ori nu țineau seamă, încât tuturor le explicam cele necesare și le cinsteam cu câte un pachet de 6 prezervative, ca să nu sporească clientela colegului Gerth."*

narrative itself. They draw their vitality partly from the author's personal collection and partly from resources available online. Thus, this is a book about an unusual and unique subject and a true pleasure to read.

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