Avram Iancu in the Spring of 1848
Considerations on the Mentality of a Revolutionary

PARADIGMS

There are numerous accounts about the life of Avram Iancu (1824–1872), coming from his contemporaries, from memorialists, and then from historians and great writers. There has been a steady flow of studies, articles and monographs, folklore and document collections. The historiography devoted to him has reflected the changes experienced by Romanian society throughout the various eras. No regime, be it authoritarian or liberal, ever sought to cast into oblivion his otherwise meteoric activity, for the simple reason that he was part of the national pantheon. The echoes, or indeed the lingering presence of the year 1848 in the collective conscience, undoubtedly helped to keep alive the extremely compelling ‘myth’ surrounding him. Alongside other Central and Eastern European peoples, it was at that time that the Romanians experienced the first major episode of their affirmation: “The Springtime of Peoples.” This was the chance to join...
other Europeans in an attempt to assert an identity and to further the hopes and expectation of an outstanding generation. The development of the national identity was the centerpiece of this troubled middle of the 19th century, and it remained a crucial element until comparatively recently. The combination between the needed social and national reforms led to differences of opinion and violent clashes, prolonging the event and all of its dramatic consequences. Present in those “stormy” years (to quote one of his contemporaries, Nicolae Popea1), familiar with the European ideas of that time, Iancu turned into a constantly evoked symbol, especially in the most trying moments in our history.

Iancu’s situation is different from that of many of his contemporaries, who became the subjects of comprehensive monographs, with analyses seeking to piece together their revolutionary mentality, ideas, and intellectual background. The biography of Iancu is still defined by significant gaps, speculations and assumptions caused by the lack of documents penned by the man himself. Dominant are the behavioral elements, his empathy and his penchant for justice. These have all been taken up in the collective mentality, in the Romanian folklore that celebrates Iancu. The accounts about him come chiefly from memoirists and from the villagers of the Apuseni Mountains, who passed on his myth from one generation to the next. Many of these accounts show him as a representative of “Young Europe.”

Defining for the emergence of his revolutionary mentality are the testimonies of two Hungarian contemporaries. In 1848, the Unitarian priest Mózes Székely travelled to the Apuseni Mountains, where he spent a few days in the company of young Avram Iancu’s family. In his diary, the author expressed his surprise at the fortunate results of education even among the lower classes, as proved by the virtuous conduct, unanimously recognized as such by the estate officials, displayed by the two serfs from Vidra de Sus [Alsóvidra], the brothers Avram and Alisandru2 Iancu. That said, it is my sincere wish that even a small part of the population of our country would come close to their culture, wellbeing, and behavior. This would make for a much happier Hungary.3

Later on, in 1872, an economist and former commerce minister also wrote about Iancu. Béla Lukács had learned about him during his internship in Târgu Mureș (Neumarkt am Mieresch, Marosvásárhely) where, in the youth circles largely consisting of the future leaders of the Revolution, the young law clerk was known as “Abi.” Born in the Apuseni Mountains, this romantic region had left a significant imprint upon the mind of the child. He was blessed with a focused and piercing intellect. Soon his parents sent him to school. The
little Abi studied diligently and quite soon began to think for himself. The events and phenomena occurring around him drew his attention.

And Lukács continued: “Graduating with the highest marks possible, he went to Cluj [Klausenburg, Kolozsvár], where the seat of the Gubernium was.”

These two accounts only come to confirm what is already known about the schools attended by Iancu and their outstanding albeit non-Romanian teachers. This is where he began to learn Hungarian, German, and Latin. Romanian, not so much. To satisfy his interest in Romanian history, he read the works of Gheroghe Șincai and Petru Maior, also attending the meetings hosted by the Piarist College of Cluj which, since 1845, had been hosting an Academic Society whose honorary chairman was the young lawyer Alexandru Bohățiel, while Alexandru Papiu Ilarian and Nicolae Popea were the editors of the weekly publication called *Diorile pentru minte și inimă* (The dawn of minds and hearts). Worth mentioning in this context is also his family’s subscription to *Gazeta de Transilvania* (The Transylvanian gazette).

In 1847, while in Cluj, he attended the debates of the Transylvanian Diet on the urbarium. It was at this time that he formulated the famous position, defining for his mentality: “Tyrants are not swayed by philosophical and humanitarian arguments, but by pikes, as shown by Horea.” Such statements on the crucial social questions of the day were to be reiterated at the time of the Revolution, in 1850–1852.

The schools attended by Avram Iancu and by most members of his generation, and the socialization they made possible, led to the creation of a Transylvanian elite much more attuned to the ideas of that time—to what we usually call “Young Europe”—than we tend to accept. In Zlatna (Klein-Schlatten, Zalatna) and Cluj he studied the “higher humanities” (1841) and then, for two years, he attended courses in philosophy, finally deciding to study law (1844–1846). His classical background was utterly remarkable. He demonstrated this during the Revolution, when he served as prefect and commander of the Auraria Gemina Legion, organized and run in keeping with the model of ancient Rome. Recently published documents come to confirm his modern adaptation of the Roman formula, passed on by his “teacher” Simion Bărnuțiu, by Timotei Cipariu, and by George Barițiu. For the generation of 1848, public natural rights and the rights of peoples, taken from Bărnuțiu’s philosophy, as well the articles published in the two newspapers edited in Blaj (Blasendorf, Balázsfalva) by Cipariu—*Organul luminării* (The Organ of enlightenment) and *Învățătorul poporului* (The teacher of the people)—and in the periodicals of Brașov (Kronstadt, Brassó) were “an attempt to reconcile nationalism and historicism within a new synthesis, which rejects historical rights” in favor of the rights of man and
of nations.\textsuperscript{7} Besides, the young Transylvanians were familiar with the ideas of Lamennais, Lamartine, Michelet, Guizot, and Thiers.

Thus, in Iancu’s speeches we find constant references to human rights, to the famous slogan “liberty, equality, fraternity.” The short-lived “Romanian Land” of Transylvania (from the fall of 1848 to the summer of 1849) was grounded in the democratic ideas of the time, and the aforementioned slogans were commonplace. Iancu stimulated and encouraged the cohabitation with the denizens of the mountain regions that were of a different nationality, punished those responsible for looting and abuse, insistently demanded that all procurement by the new authorities be accompanied by proper paperwork, etc. He was determined to fight corruption and nepotism, and issued decisions in the new spirit of the time. Quite impressive is his order against any torturing of prisoners. It is easy to understand why he chose to become a lawyer. His intention was to restore the rights and the properties taken from his fellow villagers throughout the centuries using legal, rather than violent means. The years of the Revolution made him change his approach, in keeping with the priorities of his nation. The traumatic year 1848, followed by months of confrontations, shows him as an advocate of change, of that “justice” permanently invoked alongside the other principles of the European generation of 1848. Quite early on, the assemblies and the preservation—in keeping with the new principles—of the liberty and autonomy of Transylvania became the fundamental components of his revolutionary mentality.

The news of the events occurred in both Vienna and Pest created a stir in Târgu Mureș, where Iancu was practicing law. Later on, Barițiu would describe the agitation in the city:

\begin{quote}
Regardless of their number, practically all the Romanians who were educated or at least blessed with a sound mind began to wonder about the future of our nation, in light of those events. From one region to the next, they exchanged letters and made inquiries, seeking to find out what others felt or thought about this. From the very outset, the more intelligent ones became suspicious of this new Hungarian freedom, expressed in the 12 points of Pest and largely enacted on 11 April 1848.\textsuperscript{8}
\end{quote}

After lengthy polemical exchanges in the press and among the memoirists of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century concerning the causes behind the Transylvanian Revolution, the same scholar and outstanding historian highlighted the issue of identity, defining for the mentality of Avram Iancu, alongside the social desiderata:

\begin{quote}
The most burning and painful wound, festering for centuries without any prospect of cleansing, healing, or recovery, was that \textit{spiritual serfdom}, the despicable laws
that had forcefully declared the majority population to be alien and completely subjected to the whims of the other inhabitants, the minority population.\textsuperscript{9}

In their turn, Alexandru Papiu Ilarian and the young Romanian intelligentsia of Sibiu (Hermannstadt, Nagyszeben), Cluj, Blaj, or Brașov—people like Simion Bărnuțiu, Aron Pumnul, etc.—drew on the concepts of their time in order to express their fervent support for the ideas of the European revolution. August Treboniu Laurian, Axente Sever, Constantin Romaniu Vivu, Ioan Maiorescu, etc., who resided in Wallachia, stayed in contact with their Transylvanian counterparts and offered their opinions on the future programmatic priorities and in regard to the complex Central and Eastern European context. Quite prevalent is the call to immediate action, to the adoption of the program by the Romanian groups in the towns and cities of the Principality, as well as to a total commitment in support of the socio-political desiderata. Most of the Romanian youths in Târgu Mureș were fluent in Hungarian and did not shy away from attending the meetings and even contributing to the manifestos of their Hungarian colleagues. This is the environment in which the young Avram Iancu began his ascent. He was far from a passive witness to the events unfolding around him. Naturally, his revolutionary mindset drove him closer to those who saw things the same way he did.

The March manifestos, especially Bărnuțiu’s\textit{ Provocațiune} (Challenge), had a decisive contribution to the establishment of his future priorities. A few years later, one of his contemporaries, the historian László Kőváry, would quote a public statement made by Iancu in Târgu Mureș: “Eternal redemption for no reward, or death,” which was essentially his response to the March program of the Hungarian revolution.\textsuperscript{10} Iancu’s endorsement of Bărnuțiu’s manifesto entailed the priority objective of securing the recognition of the Romanians as a “political nation,” together with the abolition of serfdom. The merger between the two objectives, one national and the other social, was confirmed by the witnesses interviewed by the Kozma Inquiry Commission. On the emperor’s birthday, in the town of Câmpeni (Topesdorf, Topănfalva), “The crowd sang\textit{ Gott erhalte}, and the young Iancu shouted ‘Long live Bărnuțiu, the liberator of the Romanians!’ when they sang\textit{ Unser Kaiser}.” And the witness continued: “The crowd responded to the ovations.” Bărnuțiu, the author of the\textit{ Provocațiune}, was indeed Iancu’s mentor.\textsuperscript{11}

The gatherings held in the Apuseni Mountains, as well as throughout the rest of Transylvania, highlighted the desire of the Transylvanian Romanians to take concrete action as well as the need for them to get organized, with all the consequences thereof: the definition and justification of the revolutionary path, the endorsement of the leadership and of the priorities of the early days of the
Revolution, as well as the adoption of a discourse which now brought together the social and the political-national issues.

The local inhabitants got organized more quickly on account of the very specificity of their mountain region, of their occupations and status. The Sundays and the religious holidays, the weekly or monthly fairs had traditionally been a time of socialization and dialogue. The documents of that time show the early signs of unrest, the fears about their shared future, the anxiety caused by the rapidly circulating rumors. In this context, the young students, as well as the young intern Avram Iancu, went back to their villages. This is where they began to discuss the latest accounts and especially the events likely to take place in the empire, without forgetting the early iterations of the program of the radical Hungarians.

The documentary sources, essentially memoirs, describe the contacts that Iancu and his fellow militants had with the local villagers during the gatherings. Iancu was one of the most active militants, alongside Ioan Buteanu, Petru Dobra, Nicolae Corcheș, Ion Ciurileanu, and others. Simion Balint wrote about the visits he and Iancu made to the villages located in the vicinity of the town of Câmpeni, the meetings they had with the local inhabitants, the Motzen, who were first quite reserved, but then became enthusiastic:

"Come now, Father, do you perchance seek to deceive us? Were you sent here by the deputy guv'nor or by his superintendent? I replied: no. Despite that, they remained deeply suspicious. However, Iancu managed to become increasingly popular, bringing compelling arguments in any debate. The natural caution manifest during the month of March apparently had to do with his family."

Another one of his contemporaries, an active participant in the gatherings held in the impoverished area of the Apuseni Mountains, wrote about the speech Iancu delivered before the townsmen of Câmpeni, a testimony to his revolutionary mentality: "The whole of Europe is taking up arms in pursuit of freedom. The Romanians are following suit, for the time has come for them to be free as well." The reaction of the audience is quite noteworthy: "Vivat Iancu! Vivat the Romanian nation! To arms!" It was at this time that he began to draw the attention of the authorities, increasingly alarmed by his rising popularity and by the ideas instilled in those who attended the gatherings. Barițiu would also make reference to the plain language he used when he wanted to convey a message to the common people. George Barițiu managed to wonderfully describe Iancu’s charisma:

"only extraordinary times can produce extraordinary people . . . In normal times or when everyone is submissive and oblivious, men of action serve no purpose; they
are born, live and die just like a million others, with history paying no attention to
them whatsoever.14

The days and weeks of late March and early April, the time of the gatherings,
increasingly brought Iancu into contact with the crowds. György Lázár, in his
deposition to the Kozma Commission, provided one of the most eloquent de-
scriptions of the gatherings of March–June 1848:

_They were convened by the young Avram Iancu of Vidra de Sus, and they were held_ 
_not only in the town square and in the streets, but also in the Brotherhood Chamber_ 
_and on the royal estates, at nighttime. Since the state of emergency was declared,_ 
_the young Avram Iancu has played the most important role on the [royal] estate of_ 
_Câmpeni, convening large gatherings and inciting the masses, telling them: “Fear_ 
_not, for the martial law was only meant to scare you, it’s just an attempt to deceive_ 
you.”_15

In the local gatherings held after 3/15 May, his radicalized message included a
call to arms, a plea to fight fire with fire.

Relentless, he visited more and more towns and villages in the Apuseni
Mountains, and the official reports of the authorities frequently mention him as
the “organizer.” On 6 April, in Bistra (Bistrau, Bisztra),

_the aforementioned gathering was also attended by the young chancellery clerk,_ 
_Avram Iancu of Vidra de Sus. In the evening of 5 April, he showed up in Câmpeni,_ 
_coming from parts unknown. I was not informed of any suspicious speeches or_ 
_actions on his part._16

Chief magistrate József Bisztray concluded his report to the supreme count of
Lower Alba with a proposal to have Iancu recalled to Târgu Mureș. He feared
the popularity gained by him and the other youths who had returned to the
mountains: “I dare not touch any of these leaders for fear of causing a revolt and
putting myself in danger.”17 A few days after the mountain gatherings, Miklós
Bánffy, the supreme count of Lower Alba, wrote to Governor József Teleki:

_You were kind enough to inform me that you took measures to ban Father Simion_ 
_Balint of Roșia Montană, lawyer Ioan Buteanu of Abrud, and law clerk Avram_ 
_Iancu of the Royal Table [Tabula Regia, the appeal court in Transylvania]_ 
_from attending popular gatherings and from stirring up the people._18

The measures had come too late.
The Local Council of Abrud (Großschlatten, Abrudbánya) also paid attention to the events unfolding in Câmpeni. They identified the same Iancu as the man behind the gatherings:

*Presented herein is the seditious message of the young Avram Iancu, voiced at Câmpeni and in the surrounding areas; therefore [the report of the Abrud Council] shall be sent forth to allow for an expansion of the inquiry, proposing a solution similar to what has been done before: “measures of utmost urgency for the arrest of said instigator.”* 

Between the June gathering at Câmpeni, probably second in importance only to the one held in Blaj, and until September, Iancu came to change his position on the relations with the authorities, deciding to resort to armed struggle and proceeding to organize the groups of mountain people. The reason behind this change was the incident occurred at Mihalț (Michelsdorf, Mihálcfalva), during the summer. In a letter to Simion Bărnuțiu, in which he described to his “brother” the decision to organize and conditionally arm the people, Iancu stated:

*Let us arm ourselves with the weapons of the mind, to prove our rights, but not with cudgels, lest they bring soldiers to their defense, as we could easily cause them a lot of trouble.*

We can see that Iancu was not envisaging an armed offensive. What he wanted was to ensure the safety of the mountain villages. During an ad-hoc gathering at the fair in Câmpeni, he called the people to arms:

*Know this, my good men: given all the terrible news, you can only take up arms, by which I mean make pikes and straighten your scythes.*

He never gave up on the idea of public consultation. We have a wealth of information about the gatherings. The witnesses interviewed by the Kozma Commission unanimously pointed out Iancu as the organizer, and their accounts show what kind of influence he exerted over the masses. Shortly after his return to the mountains, following his visit to Blaj, he participated in the collective taking of the Oath originally formulated on Liberty Field. Even if witness testimonies tend to be rather succinct, we can piece together his speech, in light of the objectives set in the early days of the Revolution: recognition of the Romanian nation, rejection of the “union,” and the return of the ancestral assets abusively seized by the powers that be. “This
young man, Avram Iancu, stirs and instigates the people. His influence is such that, were God to descend from the Heavens, the people would listen and obey Him less than Iancu,” confessed János Barányi.22

The impact of the Câmpeni gathering came as a shock for the authorities. The unrest spread to the surrounding villages, as indicated by the statements of the witnesses. “If necessary, we shall rise up and teach the Hungarians a lesson,” stated Sándor Botár of Roșia Montană (Goldbach, Verespatak).23 Another witness, Nicolae Morar, declared: “This young man, Avram Iancu, who chaired the meeting, urged the people to take up arms. . . . He is the root of all evil. The people should not have listened to him.”24 The influence of Bărnuțiu can be seen in his attempts to explain the situation in a plain language that the common people could understand:

The young Avram Iancu pointed out to the people that such a thing would deprive the Romanian nation of its own language, alongside the land they were willing to give up,

as stated by a forester from Zlatna.25 Iancu considered the preservation of the Romanian language of paramount importance, and his speech of 2 May had a significant impact. He ended that speech by saying: “May God watch over Bărnuțiu and smite those who want to turn the Romanians into Hungarians.”26

Gradually, his discourse came to highlight the pressing issue of Romanian-Hungarian relations. The “union” programmatical formulation and passionately endorsed by the radical young Hungarian revolutionaries rapidly caused the Romanian law clerks in Târgu Mureș to change their approach, even if some were reluctant to reject it outright, in the absence of a collective decision. The discussions within Iancu’s “cartel,” as reported by some participants to these small meetings, indicate the existence of an initiative in this regard, confirmed and later supported by Bărnuțiu’s well-known Challenge. The contacts with the other groups located in Blaj, Cluj, and Sibiu, stimulated by Bărnuțiu’s manifesto and by the public position taken by Papiu Ilarian and by the Romanian group at the Royal Table, led to its rapid acceptance.

Upon his return home to the Apuseni Mountains, together with Simion Balint and Ioan Buteanu, Iancu proceeded to organize the gatherings:

Presently, the Romanians had before them several political points, formulated in the spirit of the nation’s treaty of 1791. However, this was no humble supplication, but rather a firm request coming from people who believed in the justness of their cause.27
In late March, Iancu appears to be highly aware of the importance of the gatherings, of a public consultation, as the indecision and the confusion surrounding the planned “union” had to be replaced by a firm and persuasive response along the lines suggested by Bărunțiu.

Iancu devoted considerable energy to the organization of the first “National Congress,” scheduled to take place in Blaj on the Sunday of St. Thomas. In this regard, the appeal formulated by Aron Pumnul gave new impetus to the summons addressed to the revolutionary groups present throughout Transylvania. Contemporary accounts speak about Iancu in the days preceding his return to the mountains:

*Having reached the sanctuary of civilization, this young man had come to understand the harsh reality of the disregard shown to his nation and, filled with the spirit of the century, he had assimilated the leading ideas of the time feeling, from the bottom of his heart, deep concern for the fate of the Romanian people.*

During one of the frequent meetings held at that time, he told his Hungarian colleagues:

*Your actions are just, but your judgment is biased. You know only too well that time has long broken those iron chains that you want to preserve, with all their weight, to the detriment of our own country.*

He then openly and candidly stated his endorsement of the modern concept of human rights: “It is my opinion that historical rights cannot take precedence over human rights.”

Having become the topical issue of the day, the various proposals aimed at the actual achievement of the planned “union” stirred notable reactions. I believe that there is another reason why the shock created by this proposal led to its rejection. The concerns of Aulic Chancellor Sámuel Jósika were confirmed by the press campaign, by the public gatherings and by some decisions made by the authorities, which remained unchanged during the early days of the Hungarian Revolution: “I can barely wait to hear the news from Transylvania. I am most worried by the effects that the spurious claims of the newspapers may have there.” The exaggerations of the press of that time, the radical perception of the practical implementation of the “union,” caused fear and anxiety among Romanians and Hungarians alike. The worrisome rumors affected all the inhabitants of Transylvania, who feared

*the disappearance of Transylvania as a country and its incorporation into a powerful Greater Hungary, the obliteration of the nationalities and their transforma-
tion into Hungarians and, finally, the full independence of the Hungarian state following the break with the Monarchy.\textsuperscript{32}

A rather surprising “anti-Transylvanianism” spread like wildfire immediately after 15 March, engulfing the cities, especially Cluj and Târgu Mureș. These concerns, also fueled by the so-called “conservative party” of Transylvania, or indeed the “fossilized party,”\textsuperscript{33} reminded Iancu of those who had fairly recently endorsed the urbarium (1847). Important counties like Cluj (Kolozs) and Lower Alba responded by declaring their “secession” from Transylvania until the summoning of a unionist Diet, and the newspapers supported the campaign:

\begin{quote}
We shall erase the name of this country, we shall burn the map the shows the dividing line. I have expunged the name of this unfortunate country from my mind, and its days are numbered . . . Call it whatever you want, I do not care, call it political Sodom, just do not call it Transylvania.
\end{quote}

The opponents of the “union” were exposed and deemed traitors to their country: “Let us enact the crime of treason for those who write down the name Transylvania.”\textsuperscript{34} Such statements were made on an almost daily basis, causing justifiable concern and making necessary a clear-cut reaction. The central authorities, as well as the local ones, waited to see how the Romanians would respond. They would not have to wait for long, as demonstrated by the local gatherings and then by those held in Blaj.

The anti-Transylvanianism fervently promoted in March–June 1848 affected the whole revolutionary process. The indecision manifest among the Hungarians, Romanians, and Transylvanian Saxons led to divided communities, to changing priorities and designs. The deeply significant social component could not be separated from the issue of identity. The pressure was mounting. Aulic Chancellor Jósika resigned starting with 8 April, given the Imperial Court’s decision to summon a Transylvanian Diet with an ethnic composition little affected by the revolutionary changes. The main objective of the institution that embodied the autonomy of the Principality was the vote on the “union” with Hungary:

\begin{quote}
The union has been set as their main task, but how is it to be done? With the disappearance of Transylvania, as advocated in today’s issue of \textit{Híradó [News]}? Can a reasonable person believe that such a thing would not trigger a significant reaction? Going along this path would mean the destruction of the country.\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

As his position stood in contrast to both the conservatives and the supporters of the “union,” Professor Farkas Bolyai disappointed the Hungarian law clerks from Târgu Mureș who had come to his house:
Do you realize what you have done? By the light of torches, you have buried the freedom of the Hungarian nation, and only God knows when it will be resurrected.  

The preservation of a system centered around the nobility remained, after 15 March, a constant concern of the Hungarian aristocracy, also shared by the Saxons and even by the Szeklers. The reluctance towards article 12, which concerned the “union,” largely had to do with the fears of a possible Romanian reaction. Bertalan Szemere expressed the hesitation showed by some members of the government newly installed in Pest at the thought of a Romanian response. A major fracture appeared even in the early days of the Revolution, and the solidarity between the ethnic groups became an illusion.

In the days following the announcement of the Pest plan, the counties of Crasna (Kraszna), Middle Szolnok (Közep-Szolnok), and Zarand, as well as the district of Chioar (Kővár), decided to unite with Hungary without taking into account the position of the Romanians. A similar event took place in Timisoara (Temeswar, Temesvár) (18 March). A rally ended in a Proclamation whereby the participants endorsed the twelve points. Among its signatories there were also some Romanians. In other towns, including those in Banat, many people decided not to oppose the “union” for fear of upsetting the “order”: “Today, state compensation is thrown like a bone to a dog,” wrote Count Apor’s nephew, “if the assets are not secure, there is no hope for a peaceful transformation.” He brought forth an additional argument: “Therefore, I would like them to reject the ‘union,’ lest they be caught in a maelstrom with no escape other than a republic.”

The annexation of the region known as Partium increased the fears of the Romanians. At that time, Imre Teleki wrote to the governor:

The reckless petition of [Miklós] Wesselényi, who wants to separate Partium from Transylvania against the wishes of the country, gave renewed impetus to the Romanian reformers. Every day they hold gatherings or visit each other.

The Romanian reaction was quite prompt. The confusion among the Romanians lasted less than one would have expected. The conditioning of the “union,” the vacillations in the Romanian discourse witnessed in Brașov, Sibiu, Blaj, or Cluj had to do with the enticing elements of the Hungarian revolutionary program, related to the social component but also to the political, democratic one. Initially, Avram Iancu went along the same lines, even if he insistently sought to form his own opinion, in keeping with the general sentiment. It was easy to clamor for a rejection of the “union.” It was more difficult to suggest a way ahead, to bring about the long-awaited change in the status of the Romanians, which clearly depended on the fate of the whole of Transylvania.
The manifestos of March and April, the gatherings, Bărnuțiu’s Challenge and his speech in the Blaj Cathedral, the popular support that exceeded all expectations, all combined to facilitate the firm rejection of the “union.” “The party of Mr. Bărnuț” was gaining more and more ground. This is indicated by Iancu’s concern for the organization of the First Blaj Gathering. Petre Dunca explained the reasons behind his involvement alongside the students:

*We do not want to hear about any union until the three other nations recognize us as the fourth; only when this is done shall we decide whether we want it or not.*

The Gathering on the Sunday of St. Thomas, the preparations for the one planned for 3/15 May in Blaj, the adoption of the Romanian response to the program of 15 March, the weakening of the early leadership structures of the Revolution, all came to place Iancu definitively alongside the elite group determined to pursue the Romanian design of a different Transylvania, grounded in the concepts circulating at European level. The Romanians understood that they would have to defend and reorganize the principality. A new “Romanian Land” was beginning to emerge, despite all difficulties and the confrontations stirred by the Diet of Cluj, a confirmation of the Romanian fears voiced in the early days of the Revolution.

Shortly afterwards, this Romanian “counterproposal” to the “union” was presented by Iancu in the discussions with the representatives of the Pest youth who were present in Transylvania. The Kozma Commission interviewed a young man, 23 years of age (witness 162), honorary assessor at Câmpeni, who offered the most valuable information on Avram Iancu. József Lázár declared:

*The following week I heard about the return of Balint, Buteanu, and the young Avram Iancu, who convened a great gathering at the Orthodox church; after that, the previously peaceful population began to show signs of unrest.*

He explained why he believed that Iancu was one of the main “instigators of the people,” blaming him for the violent reaction of the Romanians: “I had several conversations with the young Avram Iancu and all I heard from him was that the Hungarians have been oppressing the Romanian nation.” He personally witnessed one of the gatherings held in the town square, asking Iancu to “no longer malign the Hungarians, refrain from stirring the people against them,” and stop criticizing Greek Catholic Bishop Ioan Lemeni, known for his opinions rejected by the youth of Blaj and of the Apuseni Mountains. There is another piece of valuable information in his statement, namely, that Iancu urged the Romanians to take up arms.
The same witness reported on the position expressed by Iancu during a meeting with “some youths from Pest,” held in his parents’ house. One of them, Cseresnyés, asked Iancu, in his own home, why he was stirring the people against a “union” that his majesty King Ferdinand V of Hungary had already confirmed. Iancu’s reply is a testimony to his character and to the strength of his beliefs. Iancu “stated that it had never been his intention to stir up anyone and that he is in the habit of supporting justice.” His rejection of the “union” reflected the position of “the Romanian nation in Transylvania, actually expressed [by the Romanian nation] at the National Gathering of Blaj.” The same argument was brought forth in the spring of that year, in all the manifestos issued during that period:

This “union” will never be accepted until the Romanians are recognized as the fourth nation and, by way of their delegates, are represented in parliament, being thus able to have a say and make decisions.

In regards to a possible legislative enactment of the “union,” he believed that the only acceptable solution was federalization: “Transylvania must have its own king and its own government.” According to Iancu, this was the only way to ensure the preservation of the Romanian language, by making it an official language in the administration of Transylvania: “No argument could divert him [Avram Iancu] from his principles, as he had taken them up from the Romanian-Saxon Committee of Sibiu.”

For Avram Iancu, the period between March and July of 1848 brought renewed hope for the whole of Transylvania. He focused his message on the need for unity within the national community, encouraging the resistance to the abuse of the authorities by any means possible. Last but not least, he pleaded for a rejection of the “union” with Hungary, which essentially entailed the loss of Transylvania’s individuality, including the other groups alongside the Romanians. He and his supporters, who overwhelmingly came from the rural environment, deserve recognition for having turned a spontaneous reaction into a clear approach, accepted by the people attending the peaceful gatherings. He did not advocate violence, but he asked the inhabitants of the mountains to rally in support of the Romanian revolutionary agenda. The gatherings brought together intellectuals and peasants in support of the national program, helping to clarify the options and thus set the priorities. In clear succession, the gatherings gave the people a sense of security and facilitated the emergence of the future leaders. Also, we must not forget that the far-reaching European Revolution insistently promoted the defining concepts of a world in the making. “Liberty,
equality, and fraternity” were the concepts underpinning the revolutionaries’ hope and their attempt to shape the future. In those days, the imaginary was but a combination of fear and hope.\footnote{1}

The gatherings and the discourse cultivated by Avram Iancu in the spring of that year, after the Gathering of 3/15 May, bear the imprint of his revolutionary mentality. The accounts of that time allow us to piece together the reaction of the authorities, who rapidly labelled him a “dangerous” individual. This is an indication of his desire to consult with those he constantly referred to as “the people” or “the nation,” to reinforce his belief in the righteousness of the path he had chosen and never abandoned. Because of Iancu and of his supporters, the solidarity experienced by the rural population at times of external threat became a challenge against the established order, against the powers that be. It was socialization that fueled his revolutionary mentality, his decisions, his attachment to the ideas of the European Revolution. He rejected the “union” but, whenever he was given the opportunity, he did not refuse a dialogue with the representatives of the Hungarian government. His hopes, his dedication and his empathy, as well as his faith in the future were the defining coordinates of his revolutionary mentality. The last part of his life, however, was marked by the crushing disappointment experienced in the wake of the Revolution.

\section*{Notes}

1. Nicolau Popea, \textit{Archiepiscopul și metropolitul Andreiu baron de Șaguna} (Sibiu: Tipariul Tipografiei Archidiecesane, 1879), 42, 224, 256.
2. Error in the document: Alisandru Iancu (1787–1855) was the father of Avram Iancu, and his brother was Ioan Iancu (1822–1871).


27. Barițiu, 2: 84.


29. Ranca, 62.

30. Ranca, 63.

33. Papiu Ilarian, 2: 245.
34. Papiu Ilarian, 2: 52, 257, 262, 268.
36. Barițiu, 2: 42.
42. Discussing “crowd mentality” in the context of the Revolution, the slow adoption of the new dimension brought in by the Revolution, of nationalism and then of association, Jacques Le Goff, Pierre Nora, Jacques Revel and others manage to do genuine pioneering work in the historiography of the major events in European history.

**Abstract**

**Avram Iancu in the Spring of 1848:**

**Considerations on the Mentality of a Revolutionary**

There are many outstanding biographies of Avram Iancu (1824–1872), as the revolutionary fighter holds an important place in the Romanian ‘Pantheon,’ the latest being Silviu Dragomir’s book of 1965. However, the attempts to approach his personality from the perspective of the history of mentalities have been conspicuously missing. This is precisely the approach chosen for the present study, which is based on the document collections published in the last half century (especially *Documente privind Revoluția de la 1848 în Țările Române. C. Transilvania*, including the fabulous volume 10, dedicated to *Ancheta Kozma în Munții Aşseni*, 2012). The testimonies of Iancu’s contemporaries, as well as the rich folklore, reveal an unknown facet of the hero, not only providing additional information on the events of the 1848–1849 Revolution, but also highlighting the revolutionary’s ideology, inner motivations and intimate drives.

**Keywords**

Avram Iancu, Transylvanian Revolution of 1848–1849, Apuseni Mountains, gatherings, revolutionary mentality