

conqueror, Putin, wants to conquer, reorganize and “civilize” the world! It is amazing how this madness continues to obsess the minds of the Russian rulers and of the population. This shows that the analysis of de Custine was accurate and helps us understand why his book, an international bestseller, has been perpetually banned in Russia, because it puts before the Russians’ eyes a mirror which shows what they do not like to see.

The best epilogue to all this would be Gabriel Liiceanu’s blurb featured on the front cover of the 2022 edition of the Marquis de Custine’s book, *Letters from Russia*: “the best description of a centuries-old historical nightmare, ghastly confirmed by posterity.”



GEORGE CIPĂIANU

IOAN BOLOVAN

**Asociația Națională Arădeană pentru
Cultura Poporului Român: Între local,
regional și național (1863–1918)**

(Arad National Association for the Culture of the Romanian People: Between local, regional, and national, 1863–1918)
3rd edition, revised and enlarged

Introductory word by NICOLAE BOCȘAN

Foreword by LIVIU MAIOR

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THE HISTORY of the modern Romanian nation has generated lively historiographical controversies over the last century. Its reception has benefited from public interest in the past and the resurgence of identity introspection in the past decade. Analyses dedicated to key moments in

the assertion of the national agenda of the Romanians from the Principalities or from territories incorporated by neighboring empires, such as the 1848 Revolution, the unification of the Principalities, and the Great War followed by the series of unions decided in 1918, have generated interpretations inspired by the enthusiasm of the participating historian or the skepticism of those disappointed by later developments in interwar and contemporary Romania. These oxymoronic approaches represent a challenging obstacle for authors concerned with the objective knowledge of the Romanian past from a perspective compatible with the critical demands of contemporary historical writing. In the same vein, the disappearance of interpretative constraints generated by nationalistic militancy and the totalitarian experiments of the last century has been succeeded by the placement of the nation at the periphery of historiographical interest, or by its juxtaposition with the issues proposed by the so-called *longue durée* history. Adapting these research directions to the specifics of Romanian history has also generated a series of opportunities, such as the interest in the history of civil society and the institutions established by it. The social commitment of the elite trained in the educational institutions of the Habsburg Monarchy in service to their community of origin led to the evolution of national affinities from concepts familiar to the educated public to a form of solidarity capable of successfully competing with dynastic loyalty and integrating the entire population, regardless of confessional affiliations.

The reprinting of Professor Ioan Bolovan’s work, resulting from the author’s long-standing interest in the history

of institutional structures of the Romanians in western Transylvania, establishes a *modus vivendi* between the thematic options of traditional Transylvanian historiography with which the author identifies and the methods of social history and historical demography that he has promoted through an invaluable body of work and active involvement in international historiographical forums. The research is placed under the auspices of an ethical commitment explicitly assumed towards the author's community of origin. This latter loyalty signifies an act of courage in relation to the risk of exposing oneself to skepticism from specialists who place local history studies at the edge of historiographical interest. Any potential depreciation of a work with evident scientific significance is counterbalanced by the very nature of the subject. The protagonist of the work is a collective character, the Romanian community in Arad, a region of exceptional contacts, open to Hungarian and Serbian influences, connected with the national life of the Romanians in Transylvania proper, and undertaking initiatives to form a Romanian intellectual and entrepreneurial elite. The chronological interval considered by the author coincides with a turning point in Central-Eastern European history, dominated by the efforts of the Habsburg Monarchy to find functional solutions to preserve its state unity in the face of emerging competing national initiatives. Not least, the work provides an outline of social history through a meticulous analysis of the mechanisms of diffusion of national values from the cultural elite to various social categories. This process generated institutional resources capable of ultimately ensuring the success of the union decreed at Alba Iulia on 1 December 1918.

The legitimacy of this historiographical endeavor is also ensured by its placement in the succession of research by two normative personalities for Romanian historical writing. The introductory word by Professor Nicolae Bocșan highlights the peculiarities of the Arad Association in comparison with other similar initiatives of the Romanian elite in the mid-19th century. The foreword written by Professor Liviu Maior places the institutional developments in Arad in the context of efforts to build a Romanian civil society and the institutional innovations initiated after 1860 by imperial liberalism. The actual introduction provides the author with the opportunity to assume familial and ethical loyalties that illustrate the privileged relationship with the subject addressed and with the Romanian nation's past in general. The first chapter dedicated to the genesis of the Arad Association offers a brief analysis of the state-culture-society relationship in the context of modernization in Europe, followed by a review of developments in the emergence of Romanian cultural-national institutions after the Revolution of 1848-1849, highlighting local peculiarities. The final section addresses the initial phases of the organization of the association itself, in the atmosphere created by the reforms initiated by the imperial administration and the coexistence of liberalism with moderate nationalism. The second chapter is a brief outline of institutional history and analyzes the objectives of the Association specified in the statute approved by the General Assembly in 1863, the governing and operational bodies, and the resources provided by its members. The examination of documentary sources justifies identifying a peak stage of its action in 1871-1880,

followed by stages of decline and revival, dominated by controversies reflecting the Romanian nation's political commitment in the context of dualism. The third chapter offers the opportunity for a cultural sociology excursion, dedicated to the composition of the Association, relevant for the mutations occurred at the level of Romanian society in western Transylvania in the context of modernization. These developments included the rise of intermediate categories such as lawyers and clerks, as well as the involvement of students in the diffusion of national culture into the depths of Romanian society.

The fourth chapter considers the dynamics of the Association's concrete action, as reflected in the annual general assemblies, which became sources of significant cultural initiatives relevant to the evolution of modern Romanian culture, such as the unification of orthography or compatibility with the themes frequented by the proponents of the Junimea (The Youth) literary society (circle). The final section of the chapter constitutes an analysis of the concept of civil society and its meanings over the past decades. The fifth chapter focuses on the interference of the political factor in the Association's cultural action from a dual perspective: the objective partnership between Viennese authorities and the Romanian bureaucratic elite aimed at limiting the process of Magyarization, and the dual involvement of the members of the cultural forum in organizing the political structures of the Transylvanian Romanians. Controversies regarding political tactics impacted cultural action, but significant moments for the identity manifestations of the Romanians in the Monarchy, such as the Memorandum movement and electoral campaigns, dem-

onstrated the results of efforts to integrate the masses into the national movement. The sixth chapter addresses the Association's relationship with other similar structures in the Romanian space and its role in supporting the formation of a Romanian intellectual elite at foreign universities or organizing campaigns to combat illiteracy or alcoholism. The final section emphasizes the significance of the cultural retreat of the Romanian elite, capable of ensuring the resources for militant national action within a specific political framework.

Despite the author's assumed affinities, the work does not constitute an apologetic analysis of a reality constrained by the limits and the enthusiasm of personal life experiences but proposes a snapshot of the community that made an undeniable contribution to realizing the political program preliminarily reflected by the 1848 movement. From the perspective of the ethics governing the historian's profession, returning to the initial research is a plea for persistent work, generating lasting achievements even in the absence of facile glory.



FLORIAN DUMITRU SOPORAN