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¹ See how the historian A. D. Xenopol problematizes it at the beginning of the 20th century, *Domnia lui Cuza Vodă* [Cuza Vodă's Rule], vol. I, Iași, 1903, p. 226-235.

Reflections on the decline of the city of Iași stood out as an obsession of the political and cultural circles of Iași¹ for 80 years (1859-1940). After Iași lost its status of capital of the Principality of Moldavia, held between 1564-1859, the perception of the decline developed by means of a hypertrophied nostalgia of wide public usage, in relation to which political ideas were

Discourses and representations of the decay of Iași (1918-1940)

Tema individuală de cercetare: Iașul mitic: nostalgie, istorie și memorie culturală (1859-1940)

Numele și prenumele cercetătorului postdoctoral: Chipser Mihaela Cezar

Tematica: Discurs literar-artistic și construcție identitară în secolele XVI-XX

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Prof. univ. Gheorghe CLIVETI

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Titlu proiectului: Științele socio-umaniste în contextul evoluției globalizate – dezvoltarea și implementarea

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stated, programmes of relaunch were pictured, economic congresses took place², cultural debates were started, while a specific literature, with considerable impact on the public, grew up. Nostalgia for the status of capital was strong enough for the inhabitants of Iasi, as to make King Carol I (1866-1914) therapeutically use the formula of "the second capital"³, and the cultural circles to insist upon the labels of "cultural capital" or "capital of the Romanian thinking", though these grew increasingly empty of meaning as time went by. In the present case, we focus on the cultural discourse referring to the representations of decline and the utilization of lamentation as forms of memorial practice and emotional expression. The modality used to find the reflections on the topic of decline is literature understood as a cultural-historical phenomenon, involved in the configuration of the mytho-poetical identity of the city. In the meaning Lehan Richard Daniel⁴ puts forward, we can see that the city and its literature share textuality, a standpoint in which the way we read literary texts has much in common with the practices by which the historians of urbanism make a reading of the city. The city takes shape by representations and discourse practices, and the demarcation between the real and the imaginary tends to be difficult to identify. It is continuously modelled by images, myths, aspirations, that can be as real as the city in statistics, in urban or sociological monographs, in demography and architecture⁵. We look for this effect in the texts of an important range of writers, journalists or historians: Radu Rosetti, Gr.T. Popa, Eugen Herovanu, Ionel Teodoreanu, Rudolf Şuţu, Cezar Petrescu, George Călinescu, Al.O. Teodoreanu, Sandu Teleajen, I.Fr. Botez, Ion Dăfin, Iorgu Iordan, A.D. Xenopol, G. Topârceanu, etc. They all participated in the maintenance of the canon of cultural memory, in the development and spreading of nostalgic attitudes, lamenting expressions and projections about the declining present, adopted in the local cultural mainstream.

The paper analyses the cultural discourse referring to the images and representations of the decline as reflected in notes, memories, evocations, memoirs, diaries, media, political discourse, fiction books, etc. Our starting presumption is that, under the pressure of the fervent nationalism and administrative centralism, the valve through which they were directed, the

² C. Botez, I. Saizu, *Pagini uitate de cultură economică. Congresse economice din România (IASI, 1882 și 1884)* [Forgotten Pages of Economic Culture. The Economic Congresses in Romania (Iasi, 1882 and 1884)], București, Editura Litera, 1982.
³ N.A. Bogdan, *Regele Carol I și a doua sa capitală* [King Carol I and His Second Capital], București, Institutul de arte grafice C. Steea, 1916.
⁴ Richard Lehan, *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, p. 3-9.
⁵ We deem useful the standpoints proposed by Gary Bridge, Sophie Watson, "City Imaginaries", *A Companion to the City*, eds. Gary Bridge, Sophie Watson, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2003, p. 7-17; *Urban Mindscapes of Europe*, eds. Godela Weiss-Sussex, Franco Bianchini, Amsterdam, New York, Edition Rodopi B.V., 2006; *Unreal City. Urban Experience in Modern European Literature and Art*, eds. Edward Tims, David Kelley, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1985; Pamela K. Gilbert, *Imagined Londons*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2002; Burton Pike, *Image of the city in modern literature*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1981; L. Rodwin, R.M. Hollister, "Images, Themes, and Urbanography", *Cities of the Mind: Images and Themes of the City in Social Sciences*, eds. L. Rodwin and R.M. Hollister, London, Plenum Press, 1984, p. 3-18.



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reservations and frustrations related to the loss of status of the city of Iasi were put together not in a platform of separatist ideas or in an emphasised regionalism, unacceptable for they would have questioned directly the act of the Union, but in a refined, soft form, accepted by the political community and by the elites. These latter were deploring the decline of the city, a mere shadow of the former capital now, insisting upon the glorious past. Thus, a certain pressure of political nature was constructed as regarded the necessity of compensatory actions from the centre, in a context in which the idealistic and non-negotiated unification of Moldavia and Wallachia forced the different circles of Iasi to start a fight against marginalization in the architecture of the new state, Romania. The unionist message had insistently combined the topic of the unification with that of national progress, working as a salvation myth. The anti-unionist dystopia before 1859 – mainly reduced to a fear of economic marginalization of the former capital and to arbitrary administrative centralism – obtained a fast important success among the former unionists, becoming a dominant metadiscourse full of lamentations against Bucharest. Such a discourse did not have a single-cause genesis, and it could not feed on mere political references. We have a reality defined by intersected histories⁶, interactive ones, at several levels and directions, pivoting around the preoccupation for the endangered destiny of Iasi. First of all, there is the attitude, existing in thousands of press articles, parliamentary speeches, memoirs, according to which the city of Iasi was not offered "what it deserved" as compensation for the sacrifice it made in the process of unification, following the model of the former Italian capital, Turin. Then, there is a conviction that the new capital, Bucharest, used all occasions to attack the interests of Iasi, the cultural institutions, the University, the National Theatre, the education system by either freezing jobs or diminishing funds. On the other hand, the capital was regarded as a monopolizer of resources, imposing centralism as the unique administrative strategy and strangling any possibility of local development; decayed, the former capital lost the economic competition with the cities without an important history behind them⁷. The ruins of Iasi became hallmarks of decay. After a fire, the Administrative Palace was abandoned for decades. The Metropolitan Palace, started in 1838, but fallen, following an error of design, remained in this situation until 1887. The Tower of Golia, the church of Trei Ierari – local historical and cultural symbols, many ruining private buildings, they all defined, from a visual point of view, the urban area; the city suffered from an atrocious pauperization, it faced the insufficiency of communal funds to support elementary social services, running water, the sanitation system, which led to frequent mortal epidemics; the exodus of the inhabitants of Iasi actually started in 1862, when the administration and the big boyar families moved to Bucharest, and it was continued, successively, by the members of the cultural prestigious groups, like those of the cultural societies of *Junimea* and *Viata Romaneasca*, as well

⁶ Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Beyond comparison: Histoire croisée and the challenge of reflexivity", in "History and Theory", vol. 45, No. 1, February 2006, p. 30-50.
⁷ C. Popa, *Starea trecută și actuală a Iașului* [The Past and Current Condition of Iasi], Iasi, Editura H. Goldner, 1932, p. 5-24.



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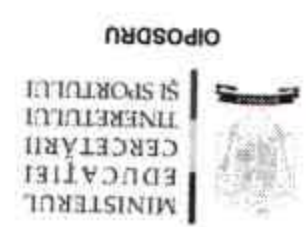


¹³ Rudolf Sutu, *Iași de odinioară* [The Iași of Yore], Iași, Tipografia Lumina Moldova, 1923, p. 42.
¹² *Ibidem*, p. 75-78.
¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 35-38.
¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 29-34.
 Opinia, 1935.

⁹ *Primi Anuar-Ghid al Municipiului Iași, 1935-1936* [The First Annual-Guide of the Municipality of Iași], Iași, Tipografia York, Paigrave Macmillan, 2007.
 See Rebecca Saunders, *Lamentation and Modernity in Literature, Philosophy, and Culture*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
 commemorations. The one performed in the ancient and medieval cultures, with dirges and melodies. It reveals not only the suffering and tragedy of the moral universe, but it develops a complex relationship with the social memory and laments, the one performed in the ancient and medieval cultures, with dirges and melodies. It reveals not only the particularly losses. The "recitation" of losses is a modern ritual and it strikingly resembles, by its functions, the classical and the social groups where they occur. The laments represent the ways by which people face changes, and dramatic expression playing the role of a lens by the agency of which can be examined the emotions, the languages and symbolic role of the city of Iași, after 1859. We use the concept in the meaning proposed by Rebecca Saunders: a and "lamentation" the discourse and emotional attitude expressing the regret for having lost the political, cultural

Lamentation⁸ and historical destiny
*Primi Anuar-ghid al municipiului Iași*⁹ [The First Annual-Guide of the Municipality of Iași], could be labelled as one of the most unusual and curious guides ever written on the authorities' initiative and with the help of the local elites. Instead of reading an inviting book for visitors, we find a visiting card where lamentation is the dominating note. In the article "Problema Iașului"¹⁰ [The Problem of Iași], Mayor Constantin G. Toma claimed that "Iași was destined to sacrifice" and that it had always been forgotten and wronged, left in poverty. Other articles dealt with "Exodus ieșenilor"¹¹ [The Exodus of Iași inhabitants], the continual desertion of the elites because of the provincial conditions. "Resemnarea Iașilor"¹² [The Resignation of the City of Iași] was analyzed, a city that discretely lived its agony, the successive blows received by the University from the Capital were enumerated, while the ministers of Iași promised the "growing" of the city. The guidebook was mainly an excursion in the local nostalgic obsessions and a collection of laments. The characteristics of an epoch, the style of a generation and the defining note of the provincialism of Iași. There was nothing new about it. In the inter-war period, a range of writers, memoirists and academics offered explanations, elaborated theories and analysed the phenomenon from novel standpoints. In 1923, the memoirist Rudolf Sutu noticed the timeless way in which lamentation had occurred in the public sphere: "They deplored the poverty of Iași then, and they have deplored it ever since, as we deplore it now and, of course, we will from now on. Iași then, 26 years ago, decayed from one day to the next. Iași was heading towards ruin, the inhabitants of the city said at the time."¹³ Later, the literary critic George Călinescu, a native of Bucharest settled, for a short while, at the University of Iași, noticed, rather stupefied, two attitudes that were present in any learned Iași native. First of all, they were proud to live in a city with a great cultural tradition,

as by many academics who regarded the city of Iași as a mere intermediary phase in their career before they becoming famous in the capital.



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they were convinced that this was the real spiritual centre of Romania. Second, they felt sadness that the city of Iași was decaying, coupled with defeatism¹⁴. This curious psychology, quite frequent at the local level, was also noticed by the rector of the Medicine University, Gr. T. Popa. The genuine natives of Iași seemed to him "weeping people, ready to complain all the time, to lament everywhere", but particularly proud, at the same time¹⁵. A simple reading of the local publications of that period impresses the reader by the frequency of the preferred themes of lamentation. The "Insemnări ieșene" review recorded the words of the liberal leader Victor Iamandi, minister of Justice, according to whom the natives of Iași can be included in three categories: "those who lament from morning to evening doing nothing; those who, without complaining, do as much as they can. And the third category, of those natives of Iași who move to Bucharest, who gather at Bucharest and weep on the ruins of Iași."¹⁶ In the pages of the same review, the fruit of the local attempts of relaunch, they also talked about the psychology of the victim that the natives of Iași developed. "The native of Iași has created a special mentality, repeating all the time that Iași is the city of culture, that Iași is the sacrificed city, that for the merits of our predecessors, it must be offered things, its needs must be fulfilled. 'Iași is wronged and it must be helped' is the sentence that took root"¹⁷ The same George Călinescu (under the pseudonym of Aristarc) tried an explanation for this stereotype attitude in a Chronicle of the city of Iași, which most of the Iași natives complained of, was fed, in Călinescu's opinion, by the snobbery of the people who had left to live in Bucharest. "Whether a professor, or a student, or a scholar, or a merchant, they all lament that Iași has died, propagating by this lament, its dishonour and even decay". Such an impression determined the publicist I. Fr. Botez to write with irony about Iași with its miseries, with its sometimes tragic citizens, but always grieved in a comic way, reminding us of Charlie Chaplin's so deeply human resignation¹⁹.

For Ionel Teodoreanu, an exponent of the generation of interwar writers, the diagnosis was bad: the citizens of Iași suffered from collective Bovarism²⁰. "Any citizen of Iași believes that he is partly the descendant of Stephen the Great, partly of Eminescu and partly of Junimea. In (the non-Bovarist) reality, any citizen of Iași is like any other provincial – but no citizen of Iași would accept such a reality, which he would deem to be a mere slander ensued from the Bucharest citizens' envy. (...) It is an almost pathological phenomenon of the community of Iași, like a Bovarist intoxication", Ionel Teodoreanu said. This is also the subject of his novel "Bal mascalat"

¹⁴ "Dl. G. Călinescu ne vorbește despre: Restaurarea Iașului în tradiția lui culturală. O nouă Junime. Adevărul și ieșenism" [Mr. G. Călinescu speaks about the restoration of Iași in terms of its cultural tradition. A new 'Junime'. The genuine Iași spirit], in "Iașiul", 10 April, 1938, p. 3.

¹⁵ Gr. T. Popa, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

¹⁶ "Insemnări ieșene" [Notes from Iași], Vol. III, No. 10-12, 1938, p. 148.

¹⁷ "Insemnări ieșene" [Notes from Iași], Vol. II, No. 1, 1937, p. 54.

¹⁸ "Jurnalul literar" [Literary Journal], No. 22, 28 May 1939, p. 4.

¹⁹ I. Fr. Botez, *Iașiul tuturor iluziilor* [Iași of All Illusions], Iași, Editura Autorului, 1930, p. 13.

²⁰ Ionel Teodoreanu, *Masa umbrelor* [The Table of Shadows], Iași, Editura Junimea, 1983, p. 31.





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[Masked Ball]. Local public life was presented as a huge masked ball where, for the losers, the "past had become a profession"²¹, and people lied in complicity, "woven in each other by the hypocrisy of the Iași spirit"²², in a show where everyone wore, in public, the mask of idolizing the city. They knew that the "great Iași spirit – the one that put the voivode crown on Stephen the Great's head and the laurels with stars on Mihai Eminescu's brow – died. But they exhibited it at the window for the rest of the country, saying it is alive – and only them, the people of Iași, behind the window, knew that it was only the past's mummy with glass eyes."²³ This was not an isolated statement. Leaving apart the literary lyricism, the philologist Iorgu Iordan publicly declares his hating the "Iașism", and the *Moldavianism* by extension, the provincial spirit transformed into a supreme quality and ostentatiously exhibited²⁴. A characteristic sign of this provincial spirit were the eulogies the citizens of Iași addressed to themselves on each occasion possible: the city of all great and noble ideas, the existence of authentic intellectual, artistic and literary taste, etc.²⁵

The city had become a caricature and the natives of Iași were fighting the reality of the provincial grotesque with the help of a bitter, self-ironic and equally tragic amusement. Al. O. Teodoreanu does this by means of a devastating pamphlet about the city full of "glorious memories", a city where one should avoid living "twenty-four days between its walls"²⁶. George Topărcceanu too sees a caricature in the city where there is no running water, the schools are falling down, the journalist from the local newspaper, having no piece of news, implores the telegrapher to send him one from Bucharest, and the power plant of the city burns, blocking the tramway circulation.²⁷ The civic initiatives keen on taking the city out of the decomposing and lethargic condition left from an equally tough diagnosis. In the programmatic article of the publication called "Iași. Organ de promovare a intereselor moldovenesti" [Iași. An Organ of Promotion of Moldavian Interests], run by Mircea Bărsan, the citizens of Iași were described as the mean-spirited of the 20th century, consumers of the benefits of the previous century, with no ideals or ideas of sacrifice, bequeathing a "heap of ruins and another one of debts" and a shameful period of fraudulent, moral and material bankruptcy.²⁸

²¹ *Idem, Bal mascat* [Masked Ball], București, Editura Minerva, 1970, p. 98.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 155.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 156.

²⁴ "Iași", 24 April, 1938, p. 2.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ Al. O. Teodoreanu, *A doua capitală* [The Second Capital], in *Tămăie și otravă* [Incense and Poison], vol. I, București, Editura Minerva, 1983, p. 285.

²⁸ G. Topărcceanu, *Civilizație locală* [Local Civilization], in *Scrieri* [Writings], vol. II, București, Editura Minerva, 1983, p. 48-52.

²⁸ "We have inherited, 'monumentum aere perennis' of a reputation of lucid intellectuality, of superior irony, of always awake national conscience, of unbeaten civic courage, crystallized in the lapidary and legendary Moldavian phrase 'that, your Majesty, cannot be'. We will bequeath a sad epoch of dirty sloth, of collective neurasthenia, of civic cowardice, of coward opportunism, of inelegant lascivity amalgamated with the whole range of greedy pushiness", in "Iași", 11 October 1932, yr. 1, no. 1, p. 1.

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Lamentation found an excellent evocative potential by the agency of the image of the moribund city. The crisis brought forth by the centralization of institutions and affairs exasperated the abandoned community. The complaints, the memorials for Prince Al. I. Cuza²⁹, for King Carol I after 1866 followed one another in a desperate rhythm. The perspective of extinction seems natural. The anti-Semite petition published in *Icoana Lunei*, on 31 July 1866³⁰, under the signature of mayor Dimitrie Gusti and of 800 citizens, calls Iași "the Capital that is now a widow, but who is the bride of the greater Romanian State."³¹ A widely circulated saying in the period was that Iași only had two roads left, one towards the railway station, to Bucharest, the other one towards the cemetery³². Fiction drew much of its inspiration from reality. The images projected by Sandu Telesajen, at the end of World War I in the novel *Turnul în apă* [Towers in the Water], evoked a world condemned to extinction. "The city lives a life simulacrum, a halt at the intersection of centuries, with preparations for a funeral. One obsession envelops the whole city, death."³³ The citizens of Iași indulge themselves in a contagious exasperation and thirst for death, in the "expectation and preparation of the way towards their friend: nothingness." After having lost once again the status of capital, the "citizens of Iași were tired. They lived the entrance of the abandon, before the fall of the curtains, at the last act: their city's slow death!"³⁴

Eugen Herovanu's remark was that life was trickling out of it³⁵, while for Ovid Densusșianu- the son the only proper comparison was with the image of the Flemish Capital in *Bruges-la-Morte*, the novel of the symbolist Georges Rodenbach³⁶. The representation of the city in agony was one of the preferred topics of the interwar period. It came as a commonplace of realist literature and it became a heavily used topic of the critical discourse and of the cultural environment of Iași. In the article *S.O.S. Iași*, S.O.S., the writer Al. O. Teodoreanu ostentatiously refused to call it a Capital, as the nostalgic ones used to, or even a patriarchal city, but simply a municipality: "Iași, from absolutely all points of view, decays, gets covered with dust, dies. It died. Like the mummy of the Pharaoh, the dead revenges everyone who touches him. A cultural centre

The moribund city



²⁹ *Prescript Verbal atîngătoru de mijloacele înfloriri Iașilor, făcută de comercianți, meseriași și fabricanți în prefectura de Iași, din ordinul Ministerului de Interne* [Verbal Prescript regarding the means to expand the city of Iași, made by merchants, artisans, and manufacturers in the prefecture of Iași, on the order of the Ministry of the Interior], Iași, Tipografia Buciumului român, 1863.

³⁰ See the memorial *Dorințele din 1866* [Wishes of 1866], in N.A. Bogdan, *op. cit.*, p. 37-42.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 50.

³² Ionel Teodoreanu, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

³³ Sandu Telesajen, *Turnul în apă* [Towers in the Water], București, Editura Cugetarea, 1935, p. 16.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 224.

³⁵ Eugen Herovanu, *Orașul amintirilor* [City of Memories], București, Editura Adevărul, 1936, p. 187.

³⁶ "He who saw the city of Iași these later years knows what a desolate sadness, what a *taedium vitae* and presentiment of agony emanate today from this city that has been, for a century, the capital of the Romanian thought. For having once illuminated this country, the city of Iași is now exhausted. If Bruges is the dead city that the sentimental Rodenbach sang of, Iași seems to be, more distressingly, the city of infinite agony, of hopeless melancholies, of silence with no desires and loneliness with no expectations." Ovid Densusșianu-Fiuil, *Stăpânul* [The Master], București, Editura Cugetarea, 1937, p. 346.

once, a simple patriarchal city more recently, Iași is not today but an insalubrious municipality, and without a shadow of a doubt, the most dangerous centre of contagion of the whole territory of Greater Romania³⁷ In the city of despair, of neurasthenia, covered in suicidal nostalgia, Ionel Teodoreanu thought that all roads went towards the same cemetery, while the poets were bugles of military funerals. In the city nightlife, the citizens of Iași as "ghosts, left their coffins, gathering in pubs to suck the blood of the vine. Above each pub a crow croaked, and in each party of Iași a skull chattered its teeth."³⁸ The only ones that had adapted themselves to the necropolitan atmosphere, as Dimitrie Anghel shows, were the Jewish antiquaries, the collectors of manuscripts and old books, dealers of the artefacts of a whole dying civilization: "The city of Iași has died step by step, street by street, house by house and once the trade has fallen, our necrophores moved here and there."³⁹

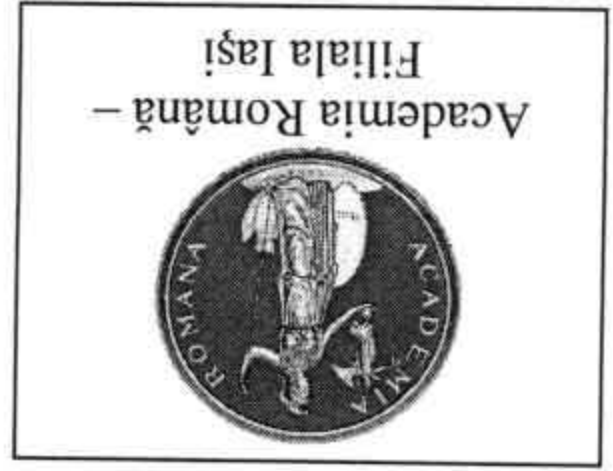
Dying, decaying from the peripheries, the city was actually regressing towards exotic geographical zones and cultural areas. As a mayor, Eugen Herovanu, a guide in a trip made in the vicinities of the city, recalled the exclamation of a French Deputy when she saw a pig wading in the mud of the suburbs: "It's like we were somewhere in Africa! (...) C'est extraordinaire!"⁴⁰ This was not the first time when a French citizen placed the city on that continent. Colonel Le Cler, who had helped the armies of the United Principalties to be reorganized, compared Iași with the Algiers seen from the seaside, an amazing fact if we take into consideration that, for some people, the city was living then its days of political glory. The moribund city, bordering on death, was an extreme figure of speech by which the local establishment tried to define decay in an alarmist way.

The New people of the Romanian "Israel", "vassals" of Bucharest

The survival of the former Capital had become a fight without a cause, the solution of personal salvation being desertion. The ceremonies of the departure were moments of heart-rending lamentation, labelled as "expatriation". When the journalist and lawyer Demostene Botez left, his friends and colleagues from the Bar and his intimates, dedicated him a toast. "Iași lost one more man of strength in the Capital's favour. Of course, one cannot ask a citizen of Iași to refuse to answer the call of his destiny, for the sake of the fusty wall of this city, which has become so vegetative and mean. However we cannot help ourselves from feeling the pain that this long and already settles exodus provokes to us."⁴¹ The condition of the natives of Iași seemed to be that of being spread "all over the country like the people of Israel among the peoples", filling the world



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³⁷ A. O. Teodoreanu, *Tămăie și Otravă* [Incense and Poison], vol. II, București, Editura Cultura națională, 1934-1935, p. 104-107.
³⁸ Ionel Teodoreanu, *Bal mascat* [Masked Ball], p. 155.
³⁹ Dimitrie Anghel, *Necronii* [The Necrophores], in *Opere complete* [Complete Works], București, Editura Cartea Românească, 1924, p. 17.
⁴⁰ Herovanu, *op.cit.*, p. 209.
⁴¹ Lr., *Exodul moldovenesc înspre București* [Moldavian Exodus to Bucharest], in "Opinia", 22 February 1934, p. 1.



with their complaints and claims⁴². Their "exodus" towards Bucharest was equalled with life flowing out. One by one, after 1859, the departure of the boyar families, of the merchants, of the members of the Junimea society, of the socialists, of the actors, of the staff of Viața Românească, of the ones deceived by the economic and social conditions, meant the departure of those who had been, initially, hallmarks of the bright political and cultural beginnings, of the generous initiatives, suddenly stopped and left unfinished. In fiction, the character representing these tortures is Leonil Gînt, the old man imagined by the writer Sandu Teleajen, who theorized a collective "psychical deformation"⁴³. The "Capital spirit" as a species of sudden renunciation to local identity and to the betrayal of future plans taking the shape of a generation of uprooted⁴⁴. The press was permanently monitoring the statistics made by the Bureau of Population. For instance, during the second half of 1938, 180 families left to Bucharest: 1 writer, 3 physicians, 3 chemists, 5 technical specialists, 5 traders, 28 industrialists⁴⁵.

In the panoply of lamentation there is no article about decline that do not mention the endless haemorrhage of the academics. The phrase "the scholars' car" spoke about the academics always between two trains, coming to lecture at the University of Iași and then quickly returning to their home in Bucharest, a phenomenon called *ambulatorism* in everyday life⁴⁶. As for the energetic people, "they are sucked in by the Capital, every year, just like in the past when, vassals of Turkey, we paid tribute in people and in money, today Iași is a benevolent tribute-payer to the Capital, in both money and people."⁴⁷ The phobia of the city's desertion described a collective reality, focused on the escape of the representative personalities. Mihail Sadoveanu, one of the militants of Iași's renaissance and salvation, had to publicly give the lie to the rumours of his moving to Bucharest, where his family had settles down⁴⁸. The desertion of the scholars led

⁴² Herovanu, *op.cit.*, p. 195.

⁴³ "This town will fall in indifference and shame like a slave. Its wall will remain, but it will mean nothing any more. Both Wallachians and Moldavians are to be blamed. (...) There, Cuza's Unification was made. The best of Iași has rushed at Bucharest. A real 'Pahod na Dâmbovița'. And this is our direction ever since. I am not saying that the citizens of Iași are irresponsible or farceurs. They only suffered a psychical deformation: none of them thinks of himself as a citizen of Iași, they are all citizens *in spe* of Bucharest." Sandu Teleajen, *op.cit.*, p. 320-321.

⁴⁴ "We complain that Iași is decaying? How could it not if, since the Unification, all we have done is to bid positions and favours at Bucharest, to sell houses and wealth and live on rent in the hovels on the banks of Dâmbovița?... As soon as we get some advantage, we give Iași's and Moldavia's interests for a dress coat and we make ourselves the Capital's representatives and fight for the descendants of Bucur Ciobanul. We particularly have one reason to be proud of ourselves: the Moldavians' intelligence conquered the top positions of the Capital from the Wallachians. What we gained is misery and desertion for the once richest Romanian province, and for the oldest city, which formerly was a genuinely Romanian one: Moldavia and Iași." see *ibidem*.

⁴⁵ *Zeci de familii de țeșeni se mută la București* [Tens of families from Iași move to Bucharest], in "Iași", 4 December 1938, p. 2.

⁴⁶ G.T. Popa, *op.cit.*, p. 37.

⁴⁷ D.I. Șoarec, "Decadența Iașului" [The Decay of Iași], in "Opinia", 27 March, 1937, 1.

⁴⁸ See H. Brănișteanu, *Mihail Sadoveanu rămâne ieșean. Câteva cuvinte asupra zvonurilor publicate de ziare și asupra activității literare* [Mihail Sadoveanu remains a citizen of Iași. A few words on the rumours published by the newspapers and on his literary activity], in "Opinia", 30 October 1936, p. 1.

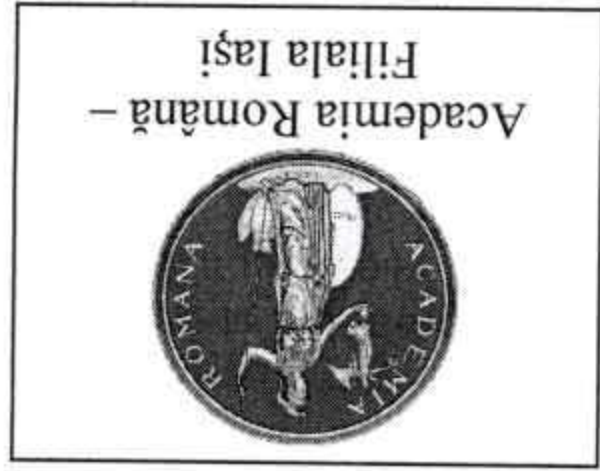
to an awful diminution of the power of creation. The reverse is that only the misfits and people on the fringe could still find their place in the provincial city. Writer Panait Istrati evoked in "Iasiul meu" (I) [My Iasi], the refuge he found there after his return from Russia in 1925, repudiated by the scholarly environments of the Capital (labelled by the historian Nicolae Iorga as "a porter of the Danubian harbour" of Braila, after the novel "Kira Kiralina" was published); he retired to Iasi on writer Mihail Sadoveanu's invitation. "Here is my Iasi, here is what it did for me in a period of big trials, when I did not know any more what to believe about people, about the land of my own country and when my frozen soul needed so much some *Romanian warmth*."⁴⁹ Coming from Bucharest, George Toparceanu too remained at the *Viața Românească* magazine in Iasi, where he found an atmosphere of enthusiasm and "Moldavian sluggishness."⁵⁰

The confusion of the Golden Age

The collection of texts where laments abound, over tens of years, leads to the paradoxical impression that Iasi did nothing else but *evolve by decaying*. Where was that glorious past when decline started? We can find many reference points. The coincidence is that some periods of the 19th century, deemed to be bright by the memoirists of the 20th century, had already been regarded as decayed by the contemporaries. Radu Rosetti, in his *Amintiri* [Memories], thought that the epoch of glory ended at the beginning of 1862, when the ministries, the House, all the central institutions were transferred to Bucharest – a powerful economic blow to Iasi and the start of the exodus⁵¹. This is also the reference point accepted by the current historiography⁵². But decay, as a subjective perception, had its facets, different for each memoirist. If Rudolf Sutu thought that the "elite city, full of life", with an animated fashionable life and a genuine bourgeois spirit was the city around 1880-1890⁵³, an opinion resembling that of poet Ion Dafin⁵⁴, G. Toparceanu on the other hand regarded the decline in relation to the *Viața Românească* magazine, moved to Bucharest in 1936. Once it disappeared, felt Toparceanu, Iasi seemed to have started to sink, gradually, in an unusual condition of apathy, into a somnolence resembling death⁵⁵. Eugen Herovanu spoke about the "Iasi phenomenon", and its great but short brilliance in the 19th century and particularly around the moment of the Unification, followed by a precipitated decline, before "its historical and national mission could have been fulfilled."⁵⁶ But the most

⁴⁹ Panait Istrati, *Trei decenii de publicistică* [Three Decades of Journalism], vol. III, București, Editura Humanitas, 2005, p. 68.
⁵⁰ G. Toparceanu, *Scrisori* [Writings], vol. II, București, Editura Minerva, 1983, p. 281.
⁵¹ Radu Rosetti, *Amintiri din prima tinerețe* [Memories from the First Youth], București, Imprimeria Fundației Culturale "Principele Carol", 1927, p. 9.
⁵² Dumitru Vitcu, *Leagănuși Unirii Principatelor* [The Cradle of the Unification of the Principalities], Gheorghe Iacob, ed., *Memoria unei capitale* [The Memory of a Capital], Iasi: Editura Universității "Al. I. Cuza", 2008, p. 113-127.
⁵³ Rudolf Sutu, *Iasiul de odinioară* [The Iasi of Yore], vol. II (Iasi: *Viața Românească*, 1928), p. 1.
⁵⁴ Ion Dafin, *Iasiul cultural și social. Amintiri și însemnări* [Cultural and Social Iasi. Memories and Notes] (Iasi: *Viața Românească*, 1928), p. 8-9.
⁵⁵ G. Toparceanu, *op. cit.*, p. 281.
⁵⁶ Eugen Herovanu, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

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⁵⁷ N.A. Bogdan, *Orașul Iași. Monografie istorică socială ilustrată* [The City of Iași. An Illustrated Historical Social Monograph], Iași: Tipografia Națională, 1913, p. 298.
⁵⁸ Ionel Teodoreanu, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
⁵⁹ Eugen Herovanu, *op. cit.*, p. 175.
⁶⁰ Désiré Nisard, *Les classes moyennes en Angleterre et la bourgeoisie en France*, in *Études de critique littéraire*, Paris: Editions Michel Lévy frères, 1858, p. 225. Apud Stéphane Gerson, *L'État français et le culte malaisé des souvenirs locaux, 1830-1870*, *Revue d'histoire du XIXe siècle*, 2004, no. 29, p. 2. And Idem, *The Pride of place. Local Memories & Political Culture in Nineteenth-Century France*, Ithaca&London: Cornell University Press, 2003.
⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

Local memory and pride

The cult of local memory, the investigation of the past, guided by what the anti-Romantic and conservative French critic Désiré Nisard called "L'orgueil du lieu"⁶⁰, was another defining aspect of the inter-war specific spirit of the city of Iași. For instance, we can find a public effort meant to resuscitate the local past, infusing affection for the region or the city and even a sense of the place, an emotional and intellectual relation that combined the territorial identification with the capacity of member of a political or social community⁶¹, gathered in the activity of the Circle of Iași

Decline was not a problem only in relation with the former status of the city, but also compared to the destiny of a city that had once been its equal: Bucharest. The opposite trajectories that the two cities followed after the Unification of 1859 obliged the nostalgic voices to invoke the period when Iași had seemed to be superior to Bucharest in terms of civilization. The memoirists of the 20th century valued, above all, the impressions of the English consul Wilkinson to the Principalties (1814-1819), who thought that the Moldavian capital was better settled and constructed than Bucharest, with much more modern and elegant houses. The French consul Adolphe Billecocq, published in *L'illustration* in February 1848 a description where he mentions the "refined, intelligent, intellectual air of the citizens of Iași."⁵⁹ These subjective flashing impressions were enough to feed in an exacerbated way the self-image of the citizens of Iași and the tireless nostalgia for that past when they had been superior to the citizens of Bucharest.

traumatic aspect for the galaxy of scholars who analyzed the problem of the decline was not associated with the historical and political reference points, but with a cultural aspect: the loss of moral authority that it had preserved for decades by the agency of *Junimea* and *Viața Românească*, when Iași took the title of "cultural Capital". From a similar perspective, the historian N.A. Bogdan spoke of decadence referring to the National Theatre, the period of glory being somewhere in the theatrical season of 1870-1879⁵⁷. Starting in 1918, for Ionel Teodoreanu, decline was multidimensional, dividing the ages of Iași according to the period: historical until 1859, cultural due to *Junimea*, *Viața Românească*, and then Bovarist, after 1918, when the editorial staff of *Viața Românească* became an isolated minority, the University turned into a railway station towards Bucharest, the newspapers became province cheap rags and the National Theatre a mausoleum⁵⁸.



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natives in Bucharest, a civic and cultural organization established in 1932. Here, they vindicated a Moldavian specificity, launching or supporting initiatives like: weekly conferences about personalities of Iași or on subjects of local history, commemorations, organization of trips to Iași, pilgrimages to the most important local cemetery, Eternitatea, to the graves of the personalities of the city⁶², a constant effort to look after the public monuments, by collecting the necessary funds to restoration⁶³, the creation of a library dedicated to the specific problems of the former capital, the establishment of awards (in 1933) for monographs on the "Cultural past and great figures of the city of Iași"⁶⁴, or the initiation, by Grigore Trancu-Iași, of the collections of objects, manuscripts, photographs, pictures, portraits of Moldavian personalities⁶⁵, of all the artefacts related to the past of the city⁶⁶, with a view to creating a Pantheon "of our own, 'Kleinaber mein', where we could find a harbour of refuge when sailing in the rough sea of life."⁶⁷ Societies like "Propășirea Iașilor" [Iași's Prosperity]⁶⁸, the Committee for the defence of the institutions of Iași, the Association for the Defence of Iași, the Association of "University's Friends", the Circle of the natives of Iași in Bucharest, though they did not have proper political identities, or they even promised to depoliticize society, went as far as to proposing new opportunities of political expression, because they were placing their activity at the convergence of multiple investments: local identity, civic affirmation, a specific type of political pedagogy and, above all, a certain imaginary of the past and of the place⁶⁹. Such an example was the project of a pantheon. The idea, exposed in the motion voted on the occasion of the Congress of the inhabitants of Iași in 1935, addressed to prime minister Gheorghe Tătărașcu, asked for "the National Pantheon to be made at Iași, where the remains of the Princes and of the great Romanians, who built the Romanian Principality, should be gathered."⁷⁰ The project was reiterated in 1937, in a meeting at

⁶² Hundreds of citizens of Iași come from Bucharest in October 1935 to participate in the festivities of the Month of Iași, in the requiem of M. Kogălniceanu and in the pilgrimage to the graves of Ion Creangă, Vasile Conta, N. Gane, D. Anghel, Th. Burada, Ed. Caudela, Gavril Muzicescu, Gr. Cobălcescu, Barbu Delavrancea, "Iași. Buletinul cercului ieșenilor", May 1936, no. 4, p. 57.

⁶³ "Iași. Buletinul cercului ieșenilor", 1935, no. 2, p. 123.

⁶⁴ "Iași. Buletinul cercului ieșenilor", 1934, no. 1, p. 50.

⁶⁵ The gallery of portraits in the meeting hall included Veniamin Costachi, Gh. Asachi, M. Kogălniceanu, Gavril Muzicescu, Ion Creangă, V. Conta, Spiru Haret, N. Gane, Iacob Negruzzi, D. Brânză, Al. Philippide, Matei Millo, D. Alexandrescu, Mihai Eminescu. See *ibidem*, p. 74.

⁶⁶ Not only the photographs of the great men of Iași. In the house of the Circle there was the piano given by princess Olga Sturdza, the books given by Constantin Naumescu's books, the organ that had belonged to Gheorghe Asachi in 1836. V. Firoiu, *Despre ieșeni și cercul lor. De vorbă cu Gr. Trancu Iași* [About the natives of Iași and their circle. Conversations with Gr. Trancu Iași], in "Buletinul cercului ieșenilor", May 1936, no. 4, p. 76.

⁶⁷ "Iași. Buletinul cercului ieșenilor", 1934, no. 1, p. 68.

⁶⁸ See the Statute of Association in "Orașul nostru. Organ al opinionei publice și al apărării intereselor Iașului" [Our city. Organ of public opinion and for the defence of the interests of Iași], yr. I, no. 1, Iași, 1 February 1928, p. 4. A society called "Propășirea Iașilor" [Prosperity of Iași] had been established in 1912. See the Statutes of the "Propășirea Iașilor" Society, Iași, Tipografia națională I.S. Ionescu & M.M. Bogdan, 1912.

⁶⁹ See the suggestions offered by Stéphane Gerson, *op.cit.*, p. 4-5.


⁷⁰ "Iași. Buletinul cercului ieșenilor", May 1936, no. 4, p. 57.



the Athenaeum in the Capital, convened by the society of the Friends of the University and by the Circle of the natives of Iași in Bucharest. With a view to establishing a Pantheon was started the gothic hall of the Trei Ierarhi monastery, in the basement of which were built crypts where the remains of the great predecessors, of those people who had contributed in the "unification of the nation", were going to be placed. In Iași or in Moldavia there were some graves rather dispersed and difficult to get to, like those of Dimitrie Cantemir, Al. I. Cuza, Grigore Ghica, Mihail Sturza, Alexandru cel Bun, Oitea Doamna, Veniamin Costachi, Iosif Naniescu, Varlaam, Dosoftei, Gh. Asachi, Ion Creangă, Vasile Conta, M. Kogălniceanu, D. Anghel, B. Delavrancea, V. Alecsandri, C. Negruzzi, Al. Vlahuță, C. Negri, Alecu Russo, P. Poni, Al. Philippide. To this series had to be added the bones of Mihai Eminescu, Jacob Negruzzi, A.D. Xenopol, as well as of other princes or chroniclers, whose graves were far off or even abroad⁷¹. As one can easily see, in the "Romanian" pantheon there is no Wallachian or Transylvanian, so often the project was called, especially in the press, the "Moldavian" pantheon. During 1937, an ardent debate arose on the impety of moving the bones, an opinion stated by Professor P. Zosin,⁷² and the pedagogical utility in the education of the young generations.⁷³ The key-motivation of the Moldavian pantheon remained the "power of influence of the glorious ones" on the life of the decaying city, disregarded now and excluded from the map of the national realms of memory⁷⁴. The theatre of memory, expressing the didactic ethos of collective veneration, was not going to be founded any more, but not out of reasons of plausibility. It was obvious that the absence of the concerted interest of the public could be the hint of a pronounced decline in the humanist tradition of promoting the civic example, proving the reduced impact of that culture of deference necessary in maintaining a system of value authority valid in the former times⁷⁵.

⁷¹ P. Gr., *Panteon românesc la Iași* [Romanian Pantheon at Iași], in "Insemnări ieșene", yr. II, vol. III, no. 9, 1 May 1937, p. 774-775.
⁷² See "Opinia", 18 May 1937, p. 1.
⁷³ "In our times of brutal materialism and commercial cleverness some people take the liberty of being ironic about the importance of such an institution for Iași. Some of them even say: 'we want a living Iași, not a Iași of the graves!' As if Paris were a city of graves just because it founded a Pantheon, or London were a ruin for having the famous Westminster Abbey or the graves of the Sultans of Brusa". Gr. T. Popa prizes the "spiritual value of a past speaking through its remains. The power of influence on the generations that the holy relics have seems to be completely despised today. It is against such a spirit of unsteady, travelling people without a country we wish to react today. We want to have a tight relation with our predecessors, by meditating at their graves and recollecting the healthy teachings they left us." Gr. T. Popa, *Panteon românesc la Iași* [Romanian Pantheon at Iași], in "Opinia", 7 May 1937, p. 1.
⁷⁴ "A national Pantheon would require that pupils from all over the country come and see it. Today the city of Iași is not even a tourism centre, at least as much as Turnu-Severin is. It is taken out from the routes of all trips. The pupils are taken to see the Danube Delta, the Valley of Bistrița, Constanța, Balcul, Ploiești, Porțile de Fier, etc, but they are not brought to Iași. (...) By gathering a number of twenty graves, it would become mandatory for all the school children of our country to pass through Iași". Gr. T. Popa, *Asupra unor nedumeriri critice (Panteon la Iași)* [On some critical perplexities (Pantheon at Iași)], in "Opinia", 20 May 1937, p. 1.
⁷⁵ *Pantheons. Transformation of a Monumental Idea*, ed. Richard Wrigley and Mathew Craske, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004, p. 9.

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The obsession of Bucharest

The dynamic, progressive and self-sufficient capital stood out as a permanent obsession of the citizens of Iași. Ionel Teodoreanu noticed that everyone "feels obliged to despise Bucharest: mercantile, superficial, parvenu – they say, implicitly considering that they, the citizens of Iași, are different. Iași does not evolve naturally, living for itself, directly, spontaneously, but in an *adversative* way. It always wants not to be like Bucharest, to be different from the abused Capital. This is an almost pathological phenomenon of the community of Iași, like a Bovarist intoxication."⁷⁶ The negative imaginary, a phenomenon of the inter-war period almost not at all studied, describes the tense, suspicious relationship that particularly developed in the cultural, political and academic circles of Iași. Eugen Herovanu, former Mayor of Iași, said in the conference entitled "The Destiny of Iași", held at the invitation of the Circle of the Natives of Iași in Bucharest, that the Capital absorbed all of the country's life, monstrously developing itself in the detriment of the other cities, a situation that was different from what happened in countries like Germany and France⁷⁷. The excessive centralization of the State apparatus conceded the Capital the possibility to start an unsuspected development at the cost of the other cities of the country. "After the endless municipal works, the Capital competes now with the metropolises of the West, while the Romanian province equals the less developed provinces of the Far East". On the one hand, the intense, tumultuous, opulent and carefree life of the citizens of the Capital; on the other, the extreme poverty with which the province cities struggle, the death-like lull, covering even the most important centres, once shining by their economic and cultural activity. On the one hand, Calea Victoriei, with luxury boulevards, rivaling Avenue de Champs Elysées, with the "a giorno" illumination on boulevard Elisabeta, the prolongation of the famous *Boulevard des Italiens* in Bucharest, with always crowded cafés, pubs and restaurants, with life beating in all the city's arteries; on the other hand, Iași, with its pathetic streets, where the passenger slowly carries his ennu, with inactivity and always empty shops; with the multicolour symphony of "for rent" posters and puddles worthy of Abyssinian realms. "Returning from Bucharest, your heart is fulfilled with sorrow when you see the enormous distance that separates the two capitals of the country. *Iași dies!*... This exclamation is what the ruining walls of the city repeat you every day; the misery of the whole economic activity."⁷⁸

The expenses for the spectacular municipal development of the Capital rose aggressive comments in the press. "There is an abnormal phenomenon happening with Bucharest. The city develops vertiginously, in total contrast with the rhythm of development of the country. This

⁷⁶ Ionel Teodoreanu, *Masa umbrelor* [The Table of Shadows], p. 31.

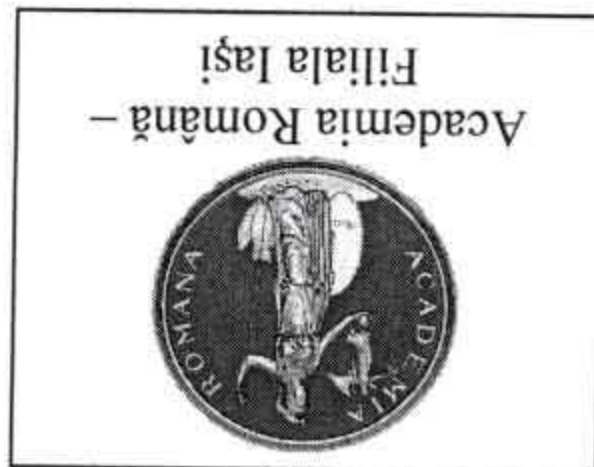
⁷⁷ *Destinul Iașilor. O conferință a d-lui prof. Eugen Herovanu* [Destiny of Iași. A conference by Professor Eugen Herovanu], in "Opinia", 18 December 1936, p. 1.

⁷⁸ Milton Gh. Lehrer, *Imagini contemporane. București-Iași* [Contemporary images. Bucharest-Iași], in "Opinia", 11 January 1936, p. 1.

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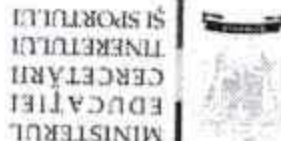
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Bucharestian Americanization is made with the wealth of the whole country, in the detriment of the provinces left to decay. The increasing disproportion between the Capital and the province creates a soul disequilibrium that undermines the harmony that should rule in a country. The bad effects will be seen in the future.⁷⁹ Besides the life-death, Occident-Orient, luxury-misery, Americanization-localism oppositions, we also find the contrast between the morally rotten capital and the still pure provincial, capable to save, by his migration to the centre, the health of the State mores.⁸⁰ The exaggerated centralism reduced the province cities to the status of "unfavourably treated colonies"⁸¹, while in the capital was encouraged a parasitical clientele, based on influence peddling, over-remunerated jobs, which created an atmosphere vitiated by luxury and debauch, with people living in grand style, from easy, undisclosed incomes.⁸² The provincials were left with the unmerciful destiny of working and suffering with the only purpose that the "brothers of Bucharest could gorge themselves, could fully taste from all the joys of life."⁸³ The urges to shake off the "yoke of the greedy Bucharest" and to stop the "tribute"⁸⁴, that 18 million citizens sent in the bottomless pockets of the citizens of Bucharest, pertained to a given aggressive rhetoric, quite frequently encountered in the press. The haughtiness of the citizen of Bucharest in his relationship with the provincials was explained by a "particular psychology in which Iași is regarded as a completely negligible and unimportant quantity. That is why it continues to brutally trample the life and institutions of this city."⁸⁵

The festivals of the decaying city

In the span of 1935-1938, the projects of the local elected officials, the appeals of the civil and cultural organizations referred to an almost out of control situation. The administration of Mayor Osvald Racoviță (1934-1938) initiated a series of projects meant to "save Iași" which included the problem of the water (the fixing of the Timișești pipe), by a State-guaranteed loan⁸⁶

- 79 L.R., *O nouă palmă pentru provincie* [A new slap on the province's face], in "Opinia", 14 March 1937, p. 1.
 80 "Poor provincial! Poor unemployed of the province! His native place was abandoned, neglected by the 'ones' from the Centre. All the payments he made are gone, they concentrated to the big heart of the country: to Bucharest. There, from the money squeezed out from the provincials, industries were established, boulevards, palaces were built... (...) The Bucharest citizens should know that is the Capital is today a wide building site, this is mostly due to the capital leaked there from the other cities of the country. (...) Bucharest's mores need correction. And if the provincials overwhelmed the citizens of Bucharest, maybe they would bring there with them new mores, less disordered ones..."
 81 Jospheus, *Bucureșteni alarmați de năvala provincialilor* [The Bucharest citizens alarmed by the provincials' onrush], in "Opinia", 9 February 1936, p. 1.
 82 Grachus, *Centralism parazită* [Parasite centralism], in "Opinia", 20 December 1934, p. 1.
 83 *Ibidem*.
 84 L. Basarabeanu, *Jugul Bucureștilor* [Bucharest's Yoke], in "Opinia", 21 March 1934, p. 1.
 85 *Ibidem*.
 86 Gr. T. Popa, *Pentru Iași* [For Iași], in "Opinia", 14 December 1934, p. 1.
 87 *Cum a decurs audiența d-lui Primar Racoviță la Ministerul de Finanțe* [How was Mayor Racoviță's audience to the minister of Finances], in "Lumea", 21 January 1931, p. 2.



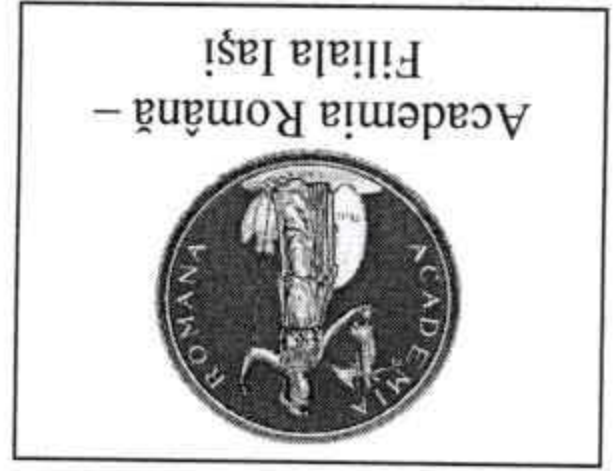
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and the balancing of the local budget, unable to fund the municipal basic services, etc. The deplorable health condition of the suburbs of Iași, the high infantile mortality and tuberculosis were wreaking havoc, while Bucharest was blamed for it, being deemed insensitive and self-sufficient.⁸⁷ Periodically, the academic world accused "blows from the centre", by the attempts to abolish artistic and technical institution in Iași and the intentions to concentrate them all to Bucharest⁸⁸, or by an obvious sub-funding, compared to the chairs of the Universities in the Capital. The attitude of Bucharest was characterized as a "slow assassination"⁸⁹, the abolition of the Faculty of Pharmacy and its moving to Bucharest was a "kidnapping", the tergiversation in the foundation of the Polytechnic School of Iași a "suffocation", while the perspective of abolishing the Medicine School, was interpreted as proof of the "greedy tendency of the Centre."⁹⁰ They organized demonstrations in which thousands of students participated, run by the Rector of the University himself, Traian Bratu, against the policies of marginalization and sub-funding⁹¹. The Iași academics' analyses showed in what way Iași was disadvantaged by Cluj (the new competition field with the Hungarians), an academic centre that received more than double financing, in accordance to the number of students of the university and to the equipment.⁹² In the academia started to be established the "Friends of the University" Association, the most important forum of local initiative and debate, in which Professors, lawyers, artists, engineers businessmen, writers, journalists, politicians, etc. participated. The "Friends of the University" Association was a multi-party organization, organized on sections, which managed to formulate solutions to the economic, health, administrative and academic problems, some of its leaders being famous critics of Bucharest centralism. At the same time, in Bucharest, starting with 1932, works the "Circle of the

⁸⁷ Nicăieri nu se întâlnește o promiscuitate și mizerie ca la Iași - a declarat d.dr. Cădere, medic șef, la constăturăea de Marți seara a "Caravanăi Milosteniei" [There is no such promiscuity and misery anywhere else like in Iași, declared doctor Cădere, physician-in-chief, in the Tuesday night meeting of "Charity caravan"], in "Lumea", 15 February 1935, p. 2.
⁸⁸ Atac pe furiș contra Universității din Iași. Cum a fost votat la Camera, prin surpriză, proiectul de deposedare a Universității ieșene [Stealthy attack against the University of Iași. How was voted in the Chamber, by surprise, the project meant to dispossess the University of Iași], "Lumea", 10 April 1935, p. 2. See also *Protestul vehement al Senatului Universității contra legii de concentrare a învățământului ethnic* [Vehement protest of the Senate of the University against the law of concentration of ethnic education], in "Lumea", 11 April 1935, p. 1.
⁸⁹ "Those who are in charge of the country's affairs adopted the system of weakening the important institutions of Iași, by simply depressing or just completely abolishing them, along with this, the establishments of Bucharest are endowed with all they need and develop in the civilized rhythm of our times". Petre Mircea, *Asasinare lentă a Iașilor! Se răpesc, treptat, cele mai însemnate instituții ale orașului nostru. Constatările d-lui profesor dr. Gr. T. Popa* [Slow assassination of Iași! Gradually, the most important institutions of our city are kidnapped. Professor Gr. T. Popa's findings], in "Opinia", 30 April 1937, p. 1.
⁹⁰ Neculai Dalu, *Facultatea de Medicină. Tendința acaparatoare a centrului* [Faculty of Medicine. The greedy tendency of the Centre], in "Opinia", 1 April 1934, p. 1.
⁹¹ *Marea adunare studențească de ieri de la Universitate* [Yesterday's great student meeting at the University], in "Lumea", 1 March 1935, p. 2.
⁹² Grigore T. Popa, *Starea trecută și actuală a Iașului* [The past and the present condition of Iași], Iași, Editura H. Goldner, 1932, p. 21-23.



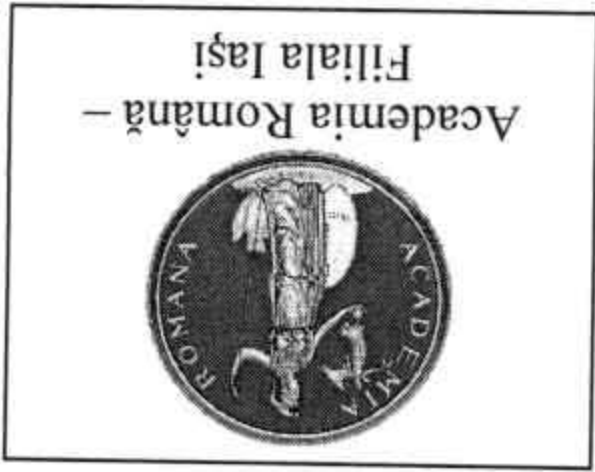
natives of Iași in Bucharest", an association of lobby for Iași's problems of underdevelopment and neglect, regarded as a "Trojan horse" that aimed at demolishing the "egoism and indifference of the Capital"⁹³.

This was the social context of the organization of the "Month of Iași" festival, a project on the model of the "Month of Bucharest". The festivals of Iași were a response of vanity and should be included in a wider series of actions meant to help Iași to be relaunched. The idea to organize a "Month of Bucharest", launched in 1934 by the general Mayor of the Capital of that time, Al.G. Donescu, aimed at creating a community sense among Romania's inhabitants, by the agency of exhibitions, cultural events and technological accomplishments. The first edition in Bucharest, in 1935, proved to be a huge success: the number of visitors exceeded 100,000, and the local authorities in the country immediately understood its economic and cultural potential.

The Month of Bucharest in 1935 coincided with the Congress of the natives of Iași in Bucharest, with a demonstration for Iași, in which tens of citizens of Iași, important persons that had emigrated to the Capital, participated. The opposition between the festival of the capital and the cries for help and laments of the citizens of Iași could not be ignored by anyone. From the tribune of the Congress, which took place at the Romanian Athenaeum, Constantin Meissner, former minister, noticed the "contrast between the progress of Bucharest, between the completion of all cultural establishments that we can find here, and the incompleteness or, sometimes, the abolition of our establishments: between your luxury and our poverty."⁹⁴ In this context, Trancu Iași, former minister and president of the Circle of the natives of Iași, mentioned that he was proposed to organize "a month for the commemoration of Iași"⁹⁵. The idea of a Month of Iași on the model of the capital's one was circulated by the central press⁹⁶ and adopted by Mayor Oswald Racoviță. We cannot, consequently, explain the debates and comments related to the Month of Iași and not take into consideration the negative imaginary of Bucharest, responsible party in the tense, suspicious relation built around the capital, especially in the cultural, political and academic circles of Iași.

The negative perception on the wealth of the Capital, built upon the disadvantages forced upon the province, was accentuated by uninspired actions. A general fury was aroused, for instance, by the address received by the town hall of Iași in the spring of 1935 from the Local Council of Bucharest, reminding that the law of local public finances stipulated that all town halls in the country had to participate with 5% of their income in the adornment of the Capital!⁹⁷ The economic advantages that had obtained the capital by initiating the Month of Bucharest incurred

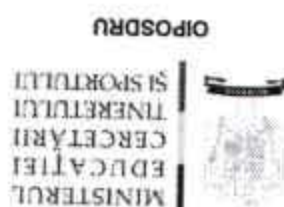
⁹³ Discursul lui Ioan Petrovici [Ioan Petrovici's speech], in "Iași. Buletinul Ieșenilor din București", October 1935, p.27.
⁹⁴ Cuvîntarea d-lui Constantin Meissner, fost ministru, la Congresul Ieșenilor [Mr. Constantin Meissner's speech, former minister, in the Congress of the natives of Iași], in "Iași. Buletinul Cercului Ieșenilor", 1935, no. 2, p. 15-16.
⁹⁵ Ibidem, p. 14.
⁹⁶ Nicolae Roșu, Pe când rîndul Iașului? [When comes the turn of Iași?], in "Iași. Buletinul Cercului Ieșenilor", 1935, no. 2, p. 48.
⁹⁷ Municipiul București cere Primăriei Iași suma de 8 milioane lei pentru... [The municipality of Bucharest asks the city hall of Iași the sum of 8 million lei to ... adorn the capital], in "Lumea", 16 March 1935, p. 2.



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reaction from all over Moldavia.⁹⁸ Furthermore, reasons of constant irritation were the tergiversations of the Romanian Railways Company to concede transportation facilities for visitors, provoking violent reactions in the local media: "A new offence for Iași. The bigwigs from the Centre oppose the organization of a 'Month of Iași'.⁹⁹ The Month of Bucharest-Month of Iași dispute culminated with an urge to boycott: "Do not go to Bucharest". "Dear reader, today, 9 May 1936, starts the Month of Bucharest. The prospects clearly show which is the purpose of that: to attract to the Capital the money from the province. Bucharest uses all means to forcibly cash the money of our provincials, that it seems astonishing that sometimes it tries less imperative procedures. As you can choose, in this case, choose to spend the money on the spot (at a local level – our note).¹⁰⁰ The Month of Bucharest was regarded as a competitive event. The "Opinia" newspaper in Iași, estimated that in the edition of the Month of Iași in 1935, because of the absence of propaganda in Moldavia and Bessarabia, the success was a moral, and not a financial one. In 1936, Bucharest was again "one step further": "The Capital's advertising is everywhere: extraordinary poster campaigns in all the cities, advertisements in the newspapers, radio broadcasts, airplane demonstrations, etc. Iași has no advertisement. Nobody really knows when the Month of Iași should happen and what should it be about. (...) It should have been before that of Bucharest (the proper time would have been 15 April-15 May), we find out that the Capital is again one step further."¹⁰¹

From an organizing point of view, the Month of Iași is often reduced to the exhibition in Copou, a place of attraction for the public and the economic stake of the whole festival. The exhibitions, taking place between 1935 and 1937, could not possibly have the scope of those in Bucharest, where in 1935, the workers spent half a year in the Carol I Park to reconstruct a Bucharest ancient lane, with Turnul Colței, Casa Antim with C.A. Rosetti's printing house, Hanul Manuc or Sf. Gheorghe cel Nou church. To a smaller scale, the exhibitions of Iași tried to reconstruct a certain specificity, to draw a local identity. The exhibitions had a touristic purpose and aimed at valuing the cultural and historical patrimony. The historical monuments and realms of memory were underlined in each edition, a guide of the city of Iași being edited to this end. In 1936, for instance, were built Hanul Ancuței, according to the original referred to by Mihail Sadoveanu, the Arch of the old Academia Mihăileană, and the famous Bolta Rece pub became a real museum, as it had photographs and autographs from all the great poets and writers that had entered it.¹⁰² The exhibitions also insisted on the municipal and engineering accomplishments. In

⁹⁸ The Mayor of Bârlad, D. Buzescu, had a violent outburst about the Month of Bucharest, which "imposed the province". "Provincia moldovenească e păgubită de Luna Bucureștilor" [The Moldavian province is damaged by the Month of Bucharest], in "Opinia", 4 August 1936, p. 3.
⁹⁹ "Lumea", 22 August 1935, p. 2.
¹⁰⁰ "Nu vă duceți la București! [Do not go to Bucharest!], in "Opinia", 10 May 1936, p. 1.
¹⁰¹ L.R., "Ce este cu Luna Iașilor? O ciudată lipsă de publicitate [What is the Month of Iași? A strange lack of advertising]", in "Opinia", 13 May 1936, p. 1.
¹⁰² "Iașul. Buletinul cercului ieșenilor din București", May 1936, no. 4, p. 66.



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the Municipal stand (the work of the architect-in-chief Georges Grumăzescu) was exhibited a small-scale model of Iași, together with a model of the water pipe of Timișești.¹⁰³ Propagandistically, the Month of Iași was a reaffirmation of the status of capital of a historical region, and one objective was the reassertion of a Moldavian identity specificity. We would call the attention on a comment at the inauguration in 1936: "Moldavianism, a right and a duty": "In the exhibition in Copou, the contribution of the Moldavian counties, the participation of Bessarabia and Bukovina, are modest for the time being. We do hope that, with time, much more could be done. It will be necessary to do more, as a sign of solidarity of the three Moldavian regions: the old Moldavia, Bessarabia and Bukovina. This solidarity is absolutely useful, because all of the three regions suffer from the unfortunate outcomes of the total-centralist system, from Wallachia. The Moldavians have a unique spirit, a common tradition, a moral and social specificity. For that, the Moldavians should feel united in their thought and aspirations. Bessarabia and Bukovina should come by the side of old Moldavia, around the city of Iași, so they could restrict, with increased authority, the debauch of Bucharest's centralism. Less demagoggy, more Moldavianism."¹⁰⁴

Obviously, the city of Iași aimed at gaining back its political, economic and social role, in plain loss of image and of status in greater Romania. The former Moldavian capital was now strongly competed not only by cities like Cluj, Timișoara, but also by Chișinău, Cernăuți, Galați, Ploiești. That is why the exhibition wanted to prove that Iași could join a modernizing trajectory, that it could resort to modern means of attraction. It was a leap from the provincial town, to the modern form of the exhibition, location of touristic pilgrimage, of creation and promotion of the image. The exhibitions intended to boost the economic activities, by valuing the local economy, by the agency of the stands of the cloth factory, of the glass factory, of the power station (the textile factories "Țesătura" Socola and "Textila" Copou)¹⁰⁵, the viticulture stand, the stands of the timber factories, of the bakery, of the Victoria factory (E. Cheller), the stand of the communal power society, of the Spiridonia, of the Fire Brigade, etc.

Maybe more important than the exhibitions was their context and the association of some protesting and claim demonstrations. We would mention here the unofficial commemoration, not approved by Bucharest, of the centenary of the Academia Mihăileană in 1936. The commemoration was organized without the leave from the central school authorities, but under the patronage of the "Friends of the University" Association and of the "Circle of the natives of Iași to Bucharest", being projected as a form of resistance protest against the obliteration of the academic and cultural past of Iași. A cortege walked downtown Iași to the National High School (the former Academia Mihăileană) where the commemoration proper took place. Professor Gr. T. Popa said that the meeting was a "subversive" one, reminding of another ignored festival, the

¹⁰³ *Expoziția din dealul Copoului. Construcțiuni și realizări occidentale făcute în decurs de 30 de zile* [The exhibition on the hill of Copou. Western constructions and achievements made in 30 days], in "Lumea", 30 September 1935, p. 4.
¹⁰⁴ L.R., *Moldovenismul, un drept și o datorie* [Moldavianism, a right and a duty], in "Opinia", 22 September 1936, p. 1.
¹⁰⁵ *Expoziția Lunei Iașilor vizitată zilnic de mulțime de provinciali și ieșeni* [The exhibition of the Month of Iași visited by a crowd of provincial and Iași citizens every day], in "Lumea", 9 October 1935, p. 2.



semi-centenary of the Medicine School, annulled because "the Capital did not want it", as well as of the identical situation of the Society of Physicians and Naturalists¹⁰⁶. Bucharest was accused not only of attacking the traditions of local culture, but of kidnapping them as well, concentrating all of them in the Capital.

During the Month of Iași, solidarity actions took place, like the visit paid by hundreds of citizens of Iași (18-20 October 1935) from the "Circle of the natives of Iași in Bucharest", presented as a "return from exile" to the "besieged city"¹⁰⁷. In the period of the Month of Iași of 1935, common meetings took place of the natives of Iași in Bucharest – where the idea of a Congress of the natives of Iași from all over the country was circulated, which was subsequently organized, in 1936¹⁰⁸. The Congress of 1936, deemed to be a real "provincial diet"¹⁰⁹, was marked by the anti-centralization diatribes and, more particularly, by the creation of some projects of administrative organization on regions, meant to reduce bureaucracy¹¹⁰. The meetings were organized on topics with specialized indicators for different problems: town-planning and street remaking; health and hygiene; University and higher education; primary and secondary schools; historical monuments and churches; mass media; economic situation¹¹¹. The moment was reiterated at Bucharest in 1937, when a *Big Iași demonstration*¹¹² took place, which voted, in the end, a motion imperatively requiring for the claims of Iași, debated in the *Congress of May 1936*, to be put into effect.

The invention of the local festivals, the Iași congresses and demonstrations, are the last interesting phase of the civic conscience of the citizens of Iași, circumscribed by the preoccupations that decline generated. They would have probably had results, if the royal dictatorship had not been installed on 11 February 1938, an action that involved censorship or

¹⁰⁶ *Serbara centenarului "Academiei Mihăileană". O solemnitate neoficială – Protest contra atitudinii Centrului [The festival of the centenary of Academia Mihăileană. An unofficial solemnity – A protest against the attitude of the Centre].* In "Opinia", 23 May 1936, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ *Astăzi seara: ne vin ieșenii de la București [Tonight: our Iași citizens come from Bucharest].* In "Lumea", 19 October 1935, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ *Acțiunea pentru ridicarea Iașului. Înălțarea gedință de la Universitate [The actions for the relaunch of Iași. Elevating meeting at the University].* In "Lumea", 21 October 1936, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ P. Gr., *Congresul ieșenilor [The Congress of the natives of Iași].* In "Insemnări ieșene", yr. I, no. 12, 15 June 1936, p. 704.

¹¹⁰ Professor Petre Dragomirescu proposes a grouping of the counties in regions and for the expenses to be covered by a reduction of ministries. See *Congresul general al ieșenilor [General Congress of the natives of Iași]*, in "Opinia", 23 May 1936, p. 4.

¹¹¹ "Insemnări ieșene", 15 January 1936, yr. I, no. 2, p. 63-64. See also I. Armeanu, *Nevoile capitalei Moldovei în discuția congresului ieșenilor [The needs of the capital of Moldavia in the debate of the Congress of the natives of Iași]*, in "Opinia", 24 May 1936, p. 2.

¹¹² See *Marea demonstrație ieșenistă de mâine în inima Bucureștilor. Revendicările minimale ale Iașului [The great Iași demonstration tomorrow in the centre of Bucharest. The minimal claims of the city of Iași]*, in "Opinia", 9 May 1937, p. 2.

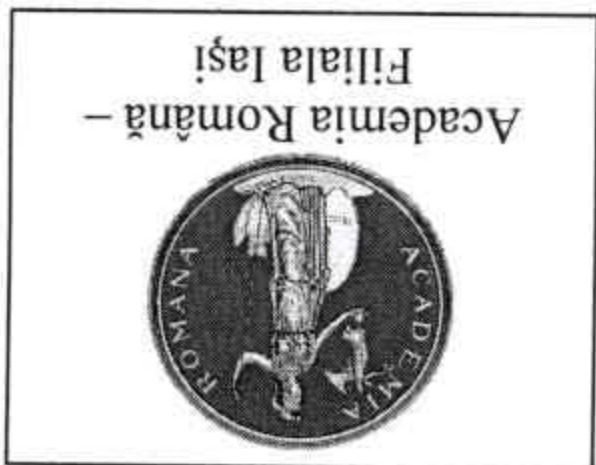
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 Mihai CHIPȘER

Iași
 4.03.2012

The glorifying, idealized attitude from the standpoint of which the nationalist discourse presented the reasons of the Unification of Moldavia and Wallachia in 1859, was accompanied by a reactive and reluctant dimension, which can be rediscovered and analyzed. This was responsible for the circulation of the images and stereotype associated to Iași – a moribund city, a city of desertion, of closed horizons – a process in which participate the inter-war cultural personalities, academics, intellectuals and journalists. The emotional language resuscitated and imagined the particularities of a local identity, whether it took the shape of a centre-periphery tension or it critically referred to the administrative centralism and pattern. Lamentation permeated literature, the press discourse and the memoirs, acquiring different cultural and political roles. Lamentation was not the only response to the loss of the status of capital, but could be validated by historiography as a cultural artifact of exceptional interpretative value, a ritual of performativity, a psychological witness and a political instrument.

The rhetoric assertion of "Moldavianism", the cult of the local memory, accompanied by what the conservative French critic Désiré Nisard called "l'orgueil du lieu" were defining aspects of the inter-war Iași specificity. Organizations like the Committee for the defence of the institutions of Iași, the Association for the Defence of Iași, the "Friends of the University" Association, the Circle of the natives of Iași in Bucharest, though had not genuine political identities, proposed new opportunities of political expression, as they placed their activity at the convergence of multiple investments: local identity, civic assertion, a specific type of political pedagogy and, above all, a certain imaginary of the past and of the place. The organization and the forms of the events associated to the "Month of Iași" festival underlined the fact that Greater Romania had not managed to create the reality or at least the appearance of a just distribution of symbolic and economic assets between the historical regions.

Conclusions

inhibition of the freedom of speech, and a significant restriction of the possibilities of civic organization.

