

NICOLAE IORGA – THE UNIVERSAL ROMANIAN

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Abstract. Nicolae Iorga was endowed with outstanding intellectual qualities. It has carried out an intense activity on multiple levels: university professor, historian, head of institutes, newspapers and magazines. At the same time, he was an important political leader: party chief, deputy, senator, prime minister of Romania. Being a universal Romanian, he benefited from a wide international recognition: doctor *Honoris Causa* of several Universities around the world, vice president of the International Committee of Historians etc.

Keywords: studies, professor, director, political leader, doctor *Honoris Causa*

Nicolae Iorga was a “natural phenomenon”, a man gifted with an extraordinary intellectual capacity and an absolutely exceptional power to work. In his book entitled *My Horizons. A life of a man as it was*, published in 1934, N. Iorga declared: “I have not learned how to read and write: these are things that came to me naturally. I do not remember any «pedagogic» training course to discover letters and merge them into syllables, which then reveal me the word”¹. In the same book, N. Iorga wrote that French “wasn’t challenging for me when I was five years old”, language which he practiced without a dictionary, reading “the whole book, the book that a man writes for people, and not the reading for children made with a high-pitched voice by the systematic teacher”².

Born in 1871, N. Iorga graduated in record time from the primary school in Botoșani, from the High School and from the University of Iasi, afterwards he continued his studies in Paris and Berlin, and in 1893 he received his PhD in Leipzig.

N. Iorga returned to the country and became a professor at the University of Bucharest, where, in his inaugural lecture, held on 1st of September 1894, he raised an extremely complicated subject, which only a man with a rich scientific experience could address: *About the current conception of history and its genesis*.

He gained from the beginning the sympathy and trust of the students, thanks to the extremely rich and accurate information provided, as well as the oratory talent. His lectures were attended not only by students, but also by a very

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¹ N. Iorga, *O viață de om. Așa cum a fost*. Ediție Valeriu și Sanda Râpeanu, București, Editura Minerva, 1972, p. 9.

² Ibid., pp. 9-10.

wide audience – teachers, engineers, lawyers, officers, pensioners, etc. – so that the amphitheater was too small and many members of the audience were crowded in the aisle, to be as close as possible to the door, which always remained open, to hear the master.

George Călinescu described in his monumental work *The History of Romanian Literature from its origins to the present day* how the professor delivered a lecture: “N. Iorga had a lot of points of resemblance to the dragon from the fairytales. As the dragon mace preceded his master by striking into the entrance gate and then hanging itself on a peg, so the voice of the professor Iorga sounded indistinctly on the stairs and on the corridors, progressing in a stormy way, entering then brought by a wave of late students in the middle of the devote audience. At the end appeared as well N. Iorga, identifying itself with the author of the voice. The great historian calmed down his accelerated breath with a few spirits, looked restlessly through the lecture room, flashed with anger the door shook by the back of the people sitting on the aisle, became animated, shouting loudly, beheading with his finger through the air an unseen enemy. Then he'd become happy! He had found spiritual ties, which he often forgot to communicate also to the audience. He was talking to the lazy grace of the woman who's getting a sweet violence. He had small vanities in his eyes, laid his ear on the soft soundness of the words, set with the listener small delicate correspondences, through languid smiles or confidential glitters [...] Sometimes, he looked with concern towards doors and windows as to evade hidden spies. His voice was lowering, pretending to be a cautious whisper, with the air of making serious revelations to the audience. Everyone's breath remained cut off by curiosity and fear, a tense anxiety was pressing everywhere, and in autumn, you could have heard the slow rhythm of rain hitting on the rooftops, or the monotonous muttering of the eaves. Suddenly, N. Iorga became angry. He felt in the field of heads the betrayal, the hostility. Vindictive, the speaker subjected the public to a noisy indictment. The lecture room was filled with hailstone, fog and thunders. Pierced by N. Iorga's revengeful finger, the invisible enemies collapsed dully on the floors, while words fell like thunderbolts in a knotty tree. Then the storm was over. As the children, after a gesture of violence, unload their heavy heart by crying, so the exhausted speaker became humble, supplicatory: begging for protection, benevolence, and little love. He was looking among the listeners for a friendly face, a smile of hope, a comforting eulogy [...] But quickly N. Iorga was becoming dissatisfied. The patient was despised, reprimanded, finger-pointed in the direction of the ribs, then, through a clamorous process, delivered to public vengeance. Finally, the lecturer, followed, gave signs of universal deception. In biblical sentences he rose above the small passions, closed on itself in the smoke haze of an inaccessible height and just like Moses, breaking the tables of the law brought to an ungrateful people, thundering on the lecture room great prophecies,

he was running away gloomed by a rightful anger in the roaring applause of the audience¹.”

Over time, thousands of young and less young people have evoked these lectures, with the pride of being N. Iorga's students.

He imposed himself in the intellectual elite of the country from a very young age and was elected a corresponding member of the Romanian Academy in 1897, when he was 26 years old². He never signed “Academician N. Iorga”, because the title of “academician” was established only in 1948, until then being used the addressing formula “member of the Romanian Academy”. N. Iorga valued the most the title of professor, considering himself a teacher of his nation.

N. Iorga is the universal Romanian. His scientific work is overwhelming. He published hundreds of volumes: collections of documents found by him in Romanian and foreign archives; summaries on Romanian history and universal history; histories of trade, industry, church, army, literature, press; monographs about Ștefan cel Mare, Mihai Viteazul, Constantin Brâncoveanu, Alexandru Ioan Cuza, Carol I; he wrote books on the history of Byzantium, the Ottoman Empire, France, Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, etc. He published the *History of Romanians* in 10 volumes, *Essai de synthese de l'Histoire de l'Humanite* in 4 volumes, and he worked until the last day of his life on a complete history of the world, entitled *Human Historiology*.

In 1911, on his 40th birthday, N Iorga was celebrated by the Romanian Academy. Speaking on this occasion, his former teacher, A.D. Xenopol confessed his amazement: “You wonder, with astonishment, how a brain could conceive so many works and a hand to write them”. Such an appreciation was made after less than two decades of creation, but N. Iorga would continue to publish, with the same intensity, for almost three decades.

A statistical evaluation (incomplete) shows that N. Iorga published 1 003 volumes, 12 775 articles and studies, 4 693 reviews³. As far as I know, it does not exist in the history of humankind a personality that equals him in terms of prolificacy. Sociologist Dimitrie Gusti wrote that, going through the list of works signed by N. Iorga, “you would think it was a work for centuries and not the result of a single life, but of a number of different personalities, with different activities, thoughts and feelings. N. Iorga was the most representative and synthetic personality of the Romanian nation”⁴.

¹ G. Călinescu, *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent*. Ediție Alexandru Piru, București, Editura Minerva, 1982, p. 615.

² Dorina N. Rusu, *Române Membrii Academiei. Dicționar. 1866-2003*, București, Editura Enciclopedică și Editura Academiei Române, 2003, pp. 413-414.

³ *Enciclopedia istoriografiei românești*. Coordonator Ștefan Ștefănescu, București, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1978, pp. 183-184.

⁴ Dimitrie Gusti, *Ethosul lui Nicolae Iorga*, în “Revista Fundațiilor Regale”, no. 12 of December 1944.

N. Iorga was not only a history professor and researcher, but also an active citizen, a builder of institutions, founder of magazines and newspapers, author of theatre and poetry volumes, cultural animator, political activist and peerless speaker.

He founded the Institute of South–East European Studies (1914), the Institute of Universal History (1937), the Romanian School of Fonteney aux Rosse, located 10 km from Paris (1921), the Historical–Artistic Institute (known as the Romanian House) in Venice (1930).

He initiated, in 1908, the Summer Courses in Vălenii de Munte, attended mainly by young people from the Romanian territories under foreign occupation (Transylvania, Bukovina, Bessarabia). In 1922 the “N. Iorga” Popular University was founded at Vălenii de Munte. He was president of the Cultural League – later the League for the Unity of All Romanians – for which he managed to build in 1926–1929 an impressive palace in the center of the capital, on the ground floor of which was located the Popular Theatre of the Cultural League (today the “Lucia Sturdza Bulandra” Theatre).

He led prestigious scientific journals – “Revue Historique des Études Sud–Est Européennes”, “Revista Istorică” –, newspapers and magazines, such as “Neamul Românesc”, “Neamul Românesc pentru Popor”, “Cuget clar”, “Semănătorul”, “Ramuri”, “Floarea Darurilor”.

He played an extremely important role in promoting national values and consciousness, being considered, even in his lifetime, the “apostle of the nation”. For nine years (1931–1940), he had a live radio show, “Advices in the dark”.

N. Iorga founded and led the Nationalist Democratic Party (1910–1938), served as parliamentarian for more than three decades (1907–1940, with a break during the foreign occupation in 1918) and was President of the Assembly of Deputies (1919–1920), President of the of the Senate (1939), President of the Council of Ministers (1931–1932), Minister of State (1938) and Royal Counselor (1938–1940).

Regarding the international relations, N. Iorga promoted the idea of “equality between nations” and “moral principles” between states. It’s a fact that N. Iorga noticed from the beginning the danger that Adolf Hitler posed to the peace of Europe. The German dictator acted for the annulment of the 1919–1920 peace treaties, which were of particular importance for Romania, as they had confirmed the acts of Union with the motherland of Bukovina, Transylvania and Bessarabia.

He condemned the Legionary Movement and the work of its leader, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, who declared in November 1937 that “in 48 hours after the victory of the Legionary Movement, Romania will have an alliance with

Rome and Berlin”¹. On 14 September 1940, the Legionary Movement came to power, and on 27 November 1940, N. Iorga was assassinated by legionaries².

The Romanians, and not only them, learned about N. Iorga’s death from a simple press release of the Council of Ministers, which announced: “On the morning of November 28th, the County Police of Prahova found the inanimate body of Professor Nicolae Iorga in the village Strejnic (county Prahova) pierced by 6 bullets of revolver”³. The government chaired by general Antonescu – the ruler of the state – banned any comment in the press or on the radio, did not even allow the publication of the announcement regarding the place, day and time of the funeral. Not only no state obsequies were organized for a former prime minister, but also it was forbidden to give a speech to the catafalque of the one who was the universal Romanian.

The great scholar entered history through his work, through the generations of students he formed and through his moral verticality. Few personalities in the world have benefited from the same recognition of their value, as did the Romanian N. Iorga. He was invited and lectured at some of the most prestigious universities in the world, received the title *Doctor Honoris Causa* of the Universities of Paris, Oxford, Rome, Warsaw, Krakow, Bratislava, Vilnius, Stockholm, Strasbourg, Geneva, Algiers, Santiago de Chile, etc. He was a member of the Institute of France, the Academy of Krakow, the Academy of History of Santiago de Chile, the Serbian Academy, the Academy of Stockholm, the Society of Geography of Lisbon, the Academy of Lincei (Rome), the Czech Academy, the Institute of Byzantine Studies in Athens, the Academy of San Lazzaro in Venice, the Polish Academy,⁴ etc. He conducted numerous international scientific sessions, and in 1938 he was elected Vice-President of the International Committee of Historians. These evidences show that N. Iorga was a truly universal Romanian.

¹ „Buna Vestire”, 30th of November 1937.

² *Pe marginea prăpastiei. 21-23 ianuarie 1941. Antonescu și Mișcarea Legionară*. Ediție Nicolae Rauș, București, Editura Scripta, 2014, pp. 175-176.

³ „Timpul”, 30th of November 1940.

⁴ *Enciclopedia istoriografiei românești*, pp. 183-184; Dorina N. Rusu, *op. cit.*, pp. 413-414.