

TRANSYLVANIAN ECHOES OF THE UNION OF THE ROMANIAN PRINCIPALITIES

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Abstract. *Based on documents and published literature, we will show how the Union of the Romanian Principalities in 1859 and the figure of the ruler Alexandru Ioan Cuza had echoes in Bihor and Maramureş, two Romanian areas in Western Transylvania which were subjected to a ruthless process of Hungarianization before 1918. It should be noted that the political event of 1859 and, above all, the figure of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, had lasting influences well after 1866, both in the lives of ordinary Romanians and in those of the cultural, religious and political elites. The examples provided by us will support the view that has been already established in our country's ancient and modern historiography, according to which the pre-modern and modern times served as a consistent and sound foundation for the creation of Greater Romania in 1918, from a social, economic, cultural, political and moral perspective.*

Keywords: Small Union, 1859, Alexandru Ioan Cuza, Transylvanian echoes, 1859-1918.

The Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic geographic space and the Romanian people who were born within its boundaries had the misfortune of being in the path of the great migrations at the dawn of the Middle Ages, only to get entangled in the interests of some of the surrounding kingdoms and empires throughout the Middle Ages and the modern era. These facts of life were actual disruptive factors in the process of state organisation, particularly when it comes to the formation of the backbone of the Romanian national sentiment: a unitary state lying on both sides of the Carpathian Mountains.

History researchers, geographers, demographic researchers, philologists, and sociologists have all demonstrated the geographical, linguistic, and religious unity of the Romanian people, as well as the permanent economic, cultural, and political links between the three Romanian Principalities. These gradually formed the foundation of the kindred spirit that was specific to the Middle Ages and then, of the modern national spirit.

The permanent exchange of people, goods, books, ideas, news, and sentiments meant that events in the three Romanian Principalities have often interfered with one another and have become known on both sides of the Carpathians¹. All the more

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so were the events that marked the fight for independence, the defence of language and religion, and the tendencies towards political unity, in particular the temporary or partial wins under Michael the Brave or Cuza.

This is where the impact of the Union of the Romanian Principalities under the ruler Alexandru Ioan Cuza comes into play in the Romanian society. The impact was double fold: one resides in the interest shown by the Union ruler in the Romanian people living in Transylvania² and the other in the echoes of the formation of the backbone of a Romanian modern state in the lives of Romanians in Transylvania³. Having as starting point a number of works published in the westernmost parts of Transylvania, Bihor, and Maramureș, an area sometimes referred to as “the Hungarian parts of Transylvania” (meaning those parts of the territory close to Hungary), we will try to highlight the echoes of the Union of 1859 in the life of the Romanian population.

On 30 January 1859, just a few days after the election of Alexandru Ioan Cuza as ruler of both Romanian Principalities, George Marchiș, a young teacher with the Greek Catholic Gymnasium in Beiuș⁴, wrote two documents which strongly reflect the joy of the Union of the Romanian Principalities. The documents are a letter sent to the editor of the Bucharest newspaper *Naționalul* and a poem inspired by the great event.

George Marchiș was born in 1836 in a peasant family from the Tămaia commune, Satu-Mare County. After studying at the Gymnasium of Baia Mare and the Greek Catholic Seminary of Oradea, where he received his baccalaureate diploma, he graduated from the Academy of Theology of the University of Vienna with honours (*eminens*). In 1859, he became a teacher in Beiuș, where he taught Latin, German, Romanian, history and geography. Animated by patriotic feelings, he became a correspondent for the newspapers *Gazeta Transilvaniei* and *Foaia pentru minte, inimă și literatură* from Brașov, *Familia* and the theological magazines *Sionul* and *Amvonul* from Oradea where he published literature, but also political articles.

From a vast bibliography, the following should be noted: Nicolae Stoicescu, *Unitatea românilor în evul mediu (Romanian Unity in the Middle Ages)*, SRR Academy Publishing House, Bucharest, 1983, pp. 17-25; Ion Toderașcu, *Unitatea românească medievală (Medieval Romanian Unity)*, Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, Bucharest, 1988, pp. 96-127.

² For details, see: C.C. Giurescu, *Viața și opera lui Cuza Vodă (The Life and Work of Cuza the Ruler)*, Ed. Științifică, Bucharest, 1966, pp. 431-433; V. Curticăpeanu, „Alexandru Ioan Cuza și Transilvania” (*Alexandru Ioan Cuza and Transylvania*), volume *Cuza Vodă in memoriam (In Memoriam Cuza the Ruler)*, Junimea Publishing House, Iași, 1973, pp. 409-444; Dan Berindei, *Epoca Unirii (The Union Age)*, Publishing House of the Academy of the Socialist Republic of Romania, Bucharest, 1979, pp. 200-201.

³ Ștefan Pascu, *Marea Adunare Națională de la Alba Iulia. Încununarea ideii, a tendințelor și a luptelor de unitate a poporului român (The Great National Assembly of Alba Iulia. The Culmination of All the Unity Ideas, Trends and Struggles of the Romanian People)*, Babeș-Bolyai University Publishing House, Cluj, 1968, pp. 117-124.

⁴ Established in 1828 by the Bishop Samuil Vulcan, a true citadel of Romanian education in its part of Transylvania, a genuine seedbed of Daco-Romanian spirit.

George Marchiș became a member of the Reading Society in Oradea⁵ which gathered Romanian students from the Law Academy, as well as Romanian students from the Teachers Preparatory School and the Premonstratensian Gymnasium; at one point, he also acted as the notary of the Reading Society. In addition to his teaching activities in Beiuș, George Marchiș will campaign for the establishment of a Romanian high school in Seini, for the children of Maramureș, Sălaj and Chioar⁶. *The Letter* describes the status of the Romanians in Transylvania, who were subjected to campaigns of Germanization and Hungarianization. These campaigns were represented locally by Count Haller, a Hungarianized German, who was the Count of Bihor. Unfortunately - the author notes - the Greek Catholic Bishop of Oradea had no reaction to the anti-Romanian actions of the Hungarian political elite⁷.

The Letter is accompanied by a poem meaningfully entitled *A Voice from Across the Carpathians*. Throughout its six stanzas, the poem expresses feelings of joy for the historical actions of the "blood brothers" from across the Carpathians, who overcame sufferings, tribulations and foreign oppression. The poem praises national virtues, resistance to assimilation and denationalisation, and shows the longing and hope of the Romanians for a dignified future. The last stanza expresses a desire for the unification of all Romanians in a single state and asks the brothers from across the Carpathians to never forget about the people in Transylvania: "We wish you happiness from all of our hearts/ In these hard times for us, beloved brothers!/But in these days of pleasure and content/Do not forget about your own blood brothers!"⁸.

The poem and the letter were sent by post to the editorial office of a newspaper in Bucharest. After being intercepted by the border police of the Habsburg Empire, Professor Marchiș was summoned before the Consistory of the Greek Catholic Diocese of Oradea. There, he reaffirmed his national feelings and protested against the practice of violation of the secrecy of correspondence by state authorities, as well as against the Germanization and Hungarianization of Transylvanian Romanians through schools and other means. Showing a certain degree of complicity, the Bishop's investigation punishes George Marchiș only with a "harsh reprimand", while asking him, as he did on other occasions, to abstain from interfering in "things that do not belong to his area of concern" as a teacher.⁹

The teaching environment in the Gymnasium of Beiuș was imbued with Daco-Romanian ideology, which was passed on from teachers to pupils. Teachers and

⁵ For details, see: Viorel Faur, *Societatea de lectură din Oradea (The Reading Society of Oradea)*, 1852-1875 (monographic study), Muzeul Țării Crișurilor Publishing House, Oradea, 1978.

⁶ Iudita Călușer, "Un document inedit despre ecoul Unirii de la 1859 în Bihor" (*A novel document on the echoes of the Union of 1859 in Bihor*), published in the *Crisia Magazine* (Oradea), 1981, pp. 242-246.

⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 246-247.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 249.

⁹ See the text "Interogatoriului" (*The Interrogation*) of 28 February 1859 in *Ibidem*, pp. 249-251.

pupils alike participated in political meetings and exchanged letters with Romanian newspapers and cultural institutions. In 1861, a number of teachers were held accountable by Hungarian authorities for "denigrating the Hungarian nation". Two of those teachers, namely George Marchiș and Ignatie Barțan, were discharged from their teaching duties as a result.¹⁰

However, the Greek Catholic Diocese of Oradea showed appreciation for the national sentiments and actions of the priest George Marchiș, even if they had to adopt measures that seemed pro-governmental in relation to the Hungarian administrative authorities. In the following years, until 1884 when he died, George Marchiș would be employed as priest in various parishes in Bihor and Satu-Mare¹¹. Moreover, he would be promoted to various ecclesiastical positions such as honorary vice-dean (1874), episcopal vicar of Sătmar and protopope of Carei, a position he would keep until the time of his death (in 1874).¹²

The moment of the full administrative and political union of Moldavia and Wallachia – i.e., 24 January/5 February 1862, with the formation of the first single Government and the first single Parliament in Bucharest, the city proclaimed as the only capital of the country Romania, was immediately welcomed in Transylvania¹³. Exactly on 24 January 1862, in Bihor, the Greek Catholic priest Justin Popfii¹⁴ from the Leta Mare commune¹⁵ published in the *Concordia* newspaper of Budapest a poem dedicated to the ruler Alexandru Ioan Cuza and the then-current historical event, a step forward in the consolidation of Romania and the strengthening of its international prestige. In its verses, the poem made reference to the unification event: "From now on, proud Moldavia and its sister Wallachia/Embrace each other with great joy/ Summoning the world and holy God as witness/Of their one fate for

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 251.

¹¹ Parishes: Chioag, Sarcău, Nădar, Sfârnaș (1861-1863) (the county of Bihor), Resighea (1863-1865), Homoroadele românești (1865-1874) (the county of Satu Mare), cf. *Ibidem*, p. 246.

¹² *Ibidem*. See also other biographical data in: Silviu Sana, Tiberiu Alexandru Ciorba, Traian Ostahie, *Seminarul Tinerimii Române Unite din Oradea. II. Studenții teologi (1792-1948)*, *Dicționar biografic, (The Seminary of the United Romanian Youth in Oradea. II. Theology students (1792-1948) Biographical Dictionary)*. Foreword: Virgil Bercea, Mega Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2022, pp. 207-208.

¹³ Dan Berindei, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

¹⁴ Born on 23 November 1841 in the Dijir commune, Bihor County, he died on 27 March 1882 and is buried in Leta Mare (Létavértes - currently in Hungary). Important regional intellectual, educated at the St. Barbara Institute in Vienna, he held important teaching positions in Greek Catholic educational institutions in Oradea, including the Greek Catholic administration of the diocese, to finally settle as a priest in Leta Mare. Cultural promoter in Vienna and Oradea, a poet and a writer, he wrote full volumes of poetry and critical studies dedicated to the Romanian literature. See: Justin Popfii, *O privire fugitivă peste literatura română și lipsa unei istorii critice a literaturii române (1870)* (*A Brief Look Over Romanian Literature and the Lack of a Critical History of Romanian Literature (1870)*), Restoration, preface, edition curated and commented upon by Ion Simuț, Biblioteca Revistei Familia Publishing House, Oradea, 2016, Preface by Ion Simuț, pp. 7-54;

¹⁵ Létavértes, currently in Hungary, is located only a few kilometres away from the Romanian western border and had a majority of Romanian population at the time.

better or for worse/ Their union is holy and it will never break/Under enemy spears as long as the Romanians live!”¹⁶

The echoes of the historical moment of 1859 and of the figure of Alexandru Ioan Cuza continued even after 1866, the year when the Union ruler was removed from power as a result of a famous coup d'état. The effects were felt both by the political elites and the common Romanians.

For many years after 1866, particularly on solemn holidays, Romanian peasants in Transylvania greeted each other with the words "Long live Badea Ion!"¹⁷, a direct reference to the name of the union ruler.

In the years of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy (1867-1918), the figure and deeds of Alexandru Ioan Cuza were cultivated by the major Romanian elites of Transylvania in a multitude of ways and forms, from references to his name by priests during anniversary church services, to lessons given by teachers in village confessional schools, articles in the cultural and political press, and studies and biographies written by intellectuals. Political speeches also frequently mentioned the name of the first Romanian ruler of Lesser Romania as one of the great national figures to gradually build a modern state.

A special case is that of the decision made by an intellectual from Maramureş to baptize one of his sons as Alexandru Cuza. He was the Greek Catholic priest Alexiu Anderco¹⁸ from Borşa, who was also the protopope of Vişeu.

Despite having only secondary education, Alexandru Cuza Anderco (1869-1949) was a distinguished businessman who became the owner of more than 150 acres of forest around the border of the Borşa region. Part of the wood in his forests was used as planks in his own sawmill. He gave work to hundreds of families in Borşa, to help them with their difficult living conditions. Alexandru Cuza Anderco provided homes and hayland to many young married couples. He organised popular assemblies in the autumn of 1918, celebrating the people's desire for unification with the Kingdom of Romania. He participated in the Great National Assembly of Alba Iulia as a delegate elected by the local community. For his national political

¹⁶ An ode “for enemies to see that the glorious people” live on. Cf. Justin Popfii, *O privire fugitivă ... (A Brief Look...)*, Preface by Ion Simuţ, p. 13.

¹⁷ Cf. Vasile Netea, *Spre unitatea statală a poporului român (Towards the State Unity of the Romanian People)*, Bucharest, 1979, p. 58; *Din istoria Transilvaniei (From the History of Transylvania)*, vol. II, 1963, p. 187.

¹⁸ He comes from a Macedonian family settled in the Sătmar area (Homorodul de Jos). Born in 1821 in Homorodul de Jos, after completing his theological studies in Budapest, he became a priest in Borşa, Maramureş, in 1849. He married a local woman, Ana Mihali, and had eight children, four boys and four girls. He was a member of the Maramureş Astra association, founded the *Dragoşiana* cultural society and popularized scientific information in the magazines of the time. Two of his sons stand out due to their outstanding achievements: Ioan Artemie – medical doctor and writer, and Alexandru Cuza – major landowner and mayor of Borşa. He died in 1888. Cf. Nicoară Mihali, *Borşa – oameni de seamă (Borşa – Prominent Figures)*, Casa Corpului Didactic “Maria Montessori” Publishing House, Baia Mare, 2011, pp. 13-15.

activism before 1918, he was elected mayor of Borșa for 25 years. During the inter-war period, he was several times a senator in the Romanian Parliament and a leading member of the National Peasants' Party. His civic actions and political career seem to follow in the path of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, not only through name, but also through his deeds, which took further the ideals of his famous namesake.¹⁹

Twenty years after Cuza's removal from his position as head of the modern Romanian state, the cult of the Union ruler continued to exist. In September 1876, in Cernat Săcele, Brașov, twin boys were born in the family of the young Ion Alexandru Lapedatu, a teacher with the Romanian Greek Orthodox High School in Brașov.²⁰ Without trying to give any forced interpretation, it is interesting to notice that one of the boys was given the name Ion and the other Alexandru, while their father had the same first names as the ruler Cuza. In other words, the protective qualities of the Union ruler were summoned to watch over the destiny of the newborns from the very beginnings of their lives. And since destiny and fate have always been, to a certain extent, a part of our national identity emerging from the traditional popular culture of the Middle Ages²¹, I believe that the division of the father's name between the two twins was also a reference to the modern ruler Ioan Alexandru Cuza.

After they both attended primary school in their home town, and following a short period of time studying at the Greek Orthodox High School in Șcheii Brașovului, the twins completed their high school studies in Iași. While Alexandru, the future historian, continued his university studies and intellectual career in Bucharest²², Ion, the future economist, studied in Budapest and made a name for himself in the financial and banking system of the Dual Monarchy in Transylvania²³.

In support of our demonstration concerning the existence of a Romanian destiny, the twins would go on to perform both scientifically and politically in interwar Romania, one as a distinguished historian at *Universitatea Daciei*

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 237-251. Alexandru Cuza Anderco from Borșa was the only major Romanian landowner in the area who could rival the major Israeli forest owners and moneylenders. His employees had Sundays off, as he observed Christian principles, unlike his Israeli counterparts.

²⁰ *Fraților Alexandru și Ion I. Lapedatu. La împlinirea vârstei de 60 de ani (To the Alexandru and Ion I. Lapedatu Brothers. On their 60th Anniversary)*, M.O. Imprimeria Națională Publishing House, Bucharest, 1936, pp. VII-XXIII.

²¹ *Dreptul la memorie în lectura lui Iordan Chimet, Intrarea în lumea modernă (The Right to Memory as read by Iordan Chimet, Enter the Modern World)*, vol II, Dacia Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 1992, p. 7.

²² *Fraților Alexandru și Ion I. Lapedatu. La împlinirea... (To the Alexandru and Ion I. Lapedatu Brothers. On their...)*, pp. XXV-LVI.

²³ *Ibidem*, pp. LVIII-LXXIV.

Superioare in Cluj,²⁴ the other as an economist and academic with the Academy of Higher Commercial and Industrial Studies in Cluj and, finally, as a Governor of the National Bank of Romania (September 1944 - March 1945).²⁵ Moreover, in their political lives, the twins would contribute to the creation and consolidation of Greater Romania, a historical roadmap devised between 1859 and 1866 by Alexandru Ioan Cuza himself.

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The few examples of the Transylvanian echoes of the 1859 Union and of the personality of the ruler Alexandru Ioan Cuza, particularly in the western part of Romania (Banat, Crişana, and Maramureş), which was primarily subjected to processes of Germanization and Hungarianization, are proof of the demographic and mental strength of the Romanians in the face of the compact Hungarian bloc in the Pannonian Steppe. This strength meant that the Romanians were able to resist and assert themselves as part of the modern Romanian nation. Resilience manifested itself both in the common man and in the minor and major elites of the Romanian society in the times until the Great War. The examples we gave are among the many more others that are already known or that future research will bring to light and encompass all the spheres of life: economy, culture, and politics.

²⁴ For details, see: Ioan Opreş, *Alexandru Lapedatu și contemporanii săi (Alexandru Lapedatu and His Contemporaries)*, Albatra Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 1997.

²⁵ See: Idem, *Ion I. Lapedatu, Memorii și amintiri (Ion I. Lapedatu. Memoirs and Memories)*, Institutul European Publishing House, Bucharest, 1998; Idem, *Ion I. Lapedatu. Ultimele însemnări (Ion I. Lapedatu. Last Notes)*, County History Museum, Braşov, 2006. All editions, prefaces and notes curated and prepared for publication by the historian Ioan Opreş.