

TUDOR VLADIMIRESCU'S ARMY - NUCLEUS OF THE MODERN ROMANIAN ARMY

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Abstract. The 19th century was characterised by a deepening and diversification of the movements of European peoples oppressed by the great empires for national and social liberation. The French Revolution opened up the whole period of this century, and a wave of revolutions swept through almost the entire European continent, leading to the period being described as *the 'century of revolutions'* or the *'century of nations'*.

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The Romanian principalities, being no exception to this rule, were also dominated by a double exploitation, internally, the social one, by the great landowners, and externally, by the Ottoman domination through the Phanariot dominions for Moldavia and Muntenia and the Habsburg imperial one for the Principality of Transylvania.

As a result of the deepening contradictions in the Romanian society since the beginning of the 19th century, the Habsburg and Phanariot, against the background of the hardening of exploitation at its peak, will join the general European revolutionary wave (the uprising of the Balkan peoples, but also of the oppressed peoples of the centre and south-east of the continent, the Romanian revolutionary movement, led by Tudor Vladimirescu).

Deeply rooted in the Romanian realities of the era of the **Revolution of 1821**, it was part of the wave of revolt and social and national movements that swept the European continent from Spain to the Ottoman Empire and across the Atlantic Ocean to Latin America.

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The special significance of the events of 1821 in the Romanian Principalities embodies two essential aspects in the history of our becoming a modern European state, rightly placed, from now on, next to the great modern cultures and civilizations, on the one hand, by the fact that this revolutionary movement has removed forever the Phanariot domination, returning after more than a century on their thrones "*earthly dominions*", and on the other hand, by propelling forever the Romanian society in the modern era of its history.

"*The year 1821 marks the beginning of Romania's modern history, the year 1821 marks the end of our middle age*", wrote Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu, and for Nicolae Iorga, a Romanian historian and scholar of the elite Romanian intelligentsia, the year 1821 represented "*a powerful and bold revolution*" which, seen not only in the national context, but also in the international one, marked "*a step forward in the conception of the middle peasantry* (see *Tudor's Pandurii*), but also of a small national-patriotic bourgeoisie in full process of formation or that patriotic group of small boyars, a progressive social category that at times supported the revolutionary actions of the peasantry, was the Olteanian Tudor of Vladimir.

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In his speech for the opening of the national history course, held at the Mihăileană Academy, on 24 November 1843, Mihail Kogalniceanu pointed out that Tudor Vladimirescu raised *the national flag, announcing to the Romanians that the time had come for the country to shake off the foreign domination, to put away the abuses that surrounded it and to acquire national government*".¹

Eyewitnesses of the 1821 Revolution gave Tudor Vladimirescu 40 years. The year of his birth is very likely to be 1780. However, he was at the age of great responsibilities and accomplishments, when he raised "*in the sky of the country, like comets ..., the quiver and thrill of the great events that are to be*" (Gala Galaction). He was born into a family of farmers in the commune of Vladimir, Gorj district. Tudor "*was an earthling from Mehedinți county, born of poor parents from the Pandur family*", Naum Râmnicăanu writes, turned against Tudor. Tudor was a "*moșnean*", writes Nicolae Iorga. "*I knew him personally, he was of his kind, from the county of Gorjului*" (Ștefan Scarlat).

Coming from the peasantry, Tudor Vladimirescu was the authentic representative of the fundamental interests of the Romanian people. His social origins were peasant, but he had ceased to be a peasant, as he "*made his fortune from shops and trading with oxen*". He learnt Greek and entered the service of the

¹ Mihail Kogălniceanu, *Historical Writings*, vol. II, Academy of the Russian Federation, 1976, p.396.

landlord Glogoveanu as a servant, then as a logistician and administrator. In 1806, he was appointed land-owner at Cloșani (Mehedinți), a position that put him in touch with the Craiova chieftaincy and made him known to the wide circles of Oltenia. He knew German and Greek. At the age of 18, he joined the Pandurs. Between 1809 and 1812 he took part with Russia in the Russo-Ottoman War, for which he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant and decorated with the Order of St. Vladimir with swords, and the Russian Emperor Alexander I sent him a ring with his initials. After the war he went into business. Turkish looting north of the Danube (in 1814 his household was destroyed) and the abusive practices of the Phanariots increased his rebellion and his determination to raise the banner of national and social emancipation.

Tudor Vladimirescu was known to people, from those who wanted him to stay among them to do them justice, to some prominent figures of the time. In 1818 we find him in front of the court of the Royal Council losing a trial with Nicolae Glogoveanu. It was then that he uttered a sharp retort to the Divanised nobles: *"Wherever your ladies put their ribbons, one day my Oltenes will put the belts on their shoes"*.

In 1819, on the occasion of the New Year, angry with the great landlords of the Divan, he said again in a harsh tone: *"If I live, I will make 12 pairs of slippers from the skins of 12 Divan landlords"*.

During the preparation of the revolution, Tudor Vladimirescu believed that the Romanian people could more easily conquer their national freedom by joining forces with the movement of the Balkan peoples, with the actions of the Serbs, Bulgarians, Macedonians, Montenegrins and Greeks, the latter led by the Eterie (Brotherhood), an organization based in Constantinople and with branches in other countries. However, the Romanian Revolution of 1821 cannot be classified as part of the Eterie or subordinate to it. As is well known, the leader of the Eteria was named Alexander Ipsilanti, son of the former Phanariot ruler Constantine and the Tsar of Russia, Alexander I. Although the Tsarism, an enemy of the Ottoman Empire, was willing to tacitly encourage action against the Porte, it was also an opponent of the aspirations for social and national liberation of the peoples. Among the heads of the Etheria were agents of the Petersburg Court, through whom Tsarist Russia kept the organisation under control. A leader of European politics, Tudor Vladimirescu did not believe the claims that the Tsarist army would come to the Principalities to support the national struggle of the Romanians. He also knew that Alexander Ipsilanti was a supporter of the *'Holy Alliance'*, whose aim was to suppress the revolutionary struggles of the peoples.

The figure of the great patriotic revolutionary Tudor of Vladimir shines in time, like a hero of a national epic, becoming for the generations that followed a high example of brave manhood, heroism and patriotic dedication. Here is what Balcescu said about the legitimacy of Tudor's raising of the liberating battle flag:

"Its (the Romanian Country's) political rights have been trampled underfoot, its treaties forgotten ... Many, thinking that it (Romania) is close to the grave, wanted to strike the final blow, denying the very existence of the Romanian nationality. Tudor's rise was the awakening of the nation ..."

Tudor Vladimirescu was: the exponent of the Romanian people's age-old aspirations, a personality produced by the Romanian realities existing at the beginning of the 19th century. He appeared on the firmament of our history, propelled by the thirst for truth and unboundedness of the many with the force of history. A fearless and dignified defender of the rights of his country, of his people, Tudor Vladimirescu looks back over time to us, today, who, in honouring him, pay homage to the idea of the fatherland and the people, to the idea of unremitting struggle for a free and dignified life.

His keen intelligence, his firm character, his superior commanding qualities, his determination to carry out his actions to the end, his love for the country and its people, his knowledge of it and of the needs of the people, all these and other qualities recommended Tudor Vladimirescu - a typical representative of the progressive movement - as the man best suited to give the signal for revolution in Wallachia and to lead it.

The program of the revolution, naturally, included the possibility of its realization through a close cooperation of the Romanians from all their historical provinces, first of all from the extra-Carpathian ones. On 5/17 April 1821, Tudor urged the Divan of the country to cooperate with the brothers beyond the Milcov, so that *"being of one mind and with one voice with Moldova, we may win the rights of these principalities alike, helping each other"*. The leader of the Revolution of 1821 thus felt, like his predecessors, the need to solve the pressing problems facing Romanian society in full solidarity of thought and deed with the patriotic forces of the other Romanian provinces. Only by uniting could the Romanians be victorious against much stronger adversaries, only by acting together could they promote their ideals of freedom and national unity.

Through its proposed immediate and prospective objectives, some openly formulated, others merely stated or implied, the revolutionary programme of 1821 accumulated a complex problem of profound renewal of social structures and the fulfilment of the demands of non-compliance requirements and national unity. It was aimed at affirming the right of the Romanian people to a sovereign and independent life of their own, as well as the need to carry out structural reforms in the domestic social-economic and political fields, in order to ensure a more appropriate participation and representation of all social classes and categories in the management of public affairs and the country's progress (establishing a balance between the executive and legislative powers, by establishing the control of the country's assembly over the former, initiating the solution of the agrarian problem, reorganising and modernising the military institution, etc.).

The political preparations initiated by Tudor as early as 1914 were accompanied by military preparations. Tudor, who was also a *"man of war"*, understood the need to create a strong Romanian armed force, organised on a broad social basis and on modern principles, involving, as far as possible, the entire national military forces. He had expressed his opinion in this regard as early as 1815. *"I alone, with the country's pandurs"*, Tudor stressed, *"without any foreign soldiers, will not move a blade of grass on the country's soil"*, a statement which was practically equivalent to rejecting the so-called *"right"* of the Porte to ensure the external security of the extra-Carpathian Romanian principalities.

Consequently, long before the outbreak of the revolution, he began recruiting soldiers, with the support of some captains known and respected by the people, and built a real store of arms and ammunition *"in the cell of his vineyard near Cerneți"*¹, as well as at the house of the Rascans in Gornovita.² Having always around 30-40 captains, secretly recruiting and training other troops, especially Pandurs from Oltenia, at the time of the revolution, Tudor had a significant armed force, the core of the future revolutionary army and later of the modern Romanian army.

In the spirit of the times, the military commander of the Pandurs felt an urgent need to make substantial innovations in the organisation of his revolutionary army. He focused on the basic weapons, restructuring the infantry, cavalry, artillery and specialised elements of the genistic installations (see: *reinforcement works in the Oltenia Subcarpathian area, as well as the concentration camps in Bucharest and Țânțâreni*).

Seeking a good supply of troops with all the necessary, the leader of the Revolution of 1821 created real specific logistical structures, especially in the area arranged for a prolonged resistance of the monasteries, which made up the fortified belt of Oltenia - Tismana, Strehaiia, Motru, Cozia, Bistrita, Polovragi and Crasna. *"The monasteries across the Olt"*, declared Tudor, *"I have filled them with supplies and panduri; there I can stay for two or three years, for the rights of the country, until I get them"*.³

Tudor Vladimirescu also brought major changes in strategy and tactics. He abolished the battalion echelon, replacing it with the regiment, a tactical unit with a superior, stronger structure, capable of carrying out a wider range of actions and, as such, much more manoeuvrable and effective in combat.

At the same time, Tudor paid great attention to equipping the revolutionary army with the appropriate weapons and to modernizing the process of selecting and appointing brave commanders capable of commanding their troops in an increasingly modern battlefield.

¹ C.D. Aricescu, *History of the Romanian Revolution of 1821*, Craiova, 1874, p. 26.

² G.D. Iscreu, *The Revolution of 1821 led by Tudor Vladimirescu*, Bucharest, 1982, p. 112.

³ C.D. Aricescu, *op.cit.*, p. 26.

Troop discipline, a component of combat readiness, was continually reinforced, with any abuse or violation of the commander's orders being severely punished. "*A disobedient army,*" said Tudor, "*is worse than a pack of hungry wolves*".¹

The organization of the revolutionary army under the leadership of Tudor Vladimirescu was the concrete expression of the superior use of the local experience, offering, at the same time, an original solution to modernize the military structures, to renew the Romanian military power. The 1821 Army - due to the revolutionary goals it served, its social composition, its high degree of training and disciplinary level - was basically a **modern military body**, descended from the military structures of the previous period, constantly and organically evolved towards the organizational and functional forms characteristic of the battlefield of the time. But, at the same time, it undoubtedly represented a higher stage in the evolution of the Romanian military body, in which elements of modernity - in the principles of recruitment, training and organization - prevailed. In fact, the "*People's Assembly*" constitutes, in the national military history, the birth of the modern Romanian army, a product of entirely Romanian origin, in initiative and effort of organization and equipment. It incorporated - in a homogenous body - modern structures together with native popular formations, which had been maintained from the previous period and had proved their usefulness in the effort to defend the country.

¹ C.D. Aricescu, op.cit., p. 218.