

NICOLAE IORGA ON THE DEVELOPMENT STAGES OF ROMANIAN NATIONALISM

Mihai D. DRECIN*

DOI <https://doi.org/10.56082/annalsarscihist.2021.1.82>

Abstract. Known for his research on the elements of national unity which rose and developed in the minds of all Romanians and which eventually led to the establishment of Greater Romania, the great historian Nicolae Iorga identifies the stages through which the national sentiment of Romanians on both sides of the Carpathians had evolved from the Middle Ages to the modern era.

After having researched the published works of Romanian humanists and Enlightenment writers in the archives and libraries of Romania, Bucovina and Transylvania, Nicolae Iorga identified the following stages of Romanian nationalist manifestations: primitive nationalism (9th to 10th century), enduring nationalism - the foundation of modern nationalism (17th century), definitive nationalism (18th century), and modern nationalism (the 1848/1849 generation).

While Transylvanian nationalism was *petitionary* in nature, the nationalism that manifested south and east of the Carpathians was labelled as *political*, as it was accompanied by concrete own achievements.

"Romanian nationalism" is seen as cultural and democratic, based on the traditional hospitality of the Romanian peasants and the sentiment of unity.

These are the features of the Romanian national sentiment defined by Nicolae Iorga in 1922, which were used as a foundation for the Nationalist Democratic Party, the party he established in 1910 and whose leader he was until 1938.

Keywords: Nicolae Iorga, national idea, culture, democracy, unity

At the end of the 19th century, Nicolae Iorga researched the archives of Blaj and Oradea as documentation for the publication of *Histoire des Roumains de Transylvanie et de Hongrie (History of Romanians in Transylvania and Hungary)*¹ and *Istoria literaturii române în secolul al XVIII-lea (1688-1821) (History of Romanian Literature in the 18th century) (1688-1821)*, volumes I and II, dedicated to the Transylvanian School and its predecessors². On this occasion, Iorga would also read the Romanian books and articles published in Transylvania and kept in the libraries of Braşov, Sibiu, Cluj, Oradea, Sighet, and Aiud and

* Corresponding Member of the Academy of the Romanian Scientists.

¹ Nicolae Iorga, two volumes published between 1915 and 1916.

² Nicolae Iorga, vol. I, Ed. Institutului de Arte Grafice and Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1901, vol. II, Librăria Pavel Sima Publishing House, Bucharest, 1928. Last edition published in Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, Bucharest, 1969, curated by Barbu Theodorescu, vol. 1, 1688-1821, 455 pp., vol. II, 1688-1780, 544 pp.

would engage in debates with some of the top cultural and political Romanian Transylvanian elites. One of his discussion partners was Partenie Cosma from Sibiu, the executive director of the *Albina* Bank of Sibiu, in whose villa Nicolae Iorga was often a guest.

In 1910, Nicolae Iorga founded the Nationalist Democratic Party which was active in the period between the two World Wars until 1938. As it was necessary to popularise his party's political agenda, which focused on national unity and the defence of the interests of a unified Romanian national state, the great historian repeatedly explained the party's doctrine, as he saw it at the time. On these occasions, Nicolae Iorga would delve into the historical past of the Romanians on both sides of the Carpathians, seeking to explain the solid roots of the party whose leader he was.

In this context, Iorga would also focus on the topic of the development of the Romanian state as well as of local nationalism, with all their particular features.

What Nicolae Iorga understood by "nationalism", as the term was used at the time, was a cultural manifestation³ of people's love for their nation and homeland. He rejected right-wing extremist nationalism as well as left-wing internationalism. In his writings, he attempted to achieve a combination of "nationalism" and "humanity", a principle he applied both in his work and in his militant political life.

The guiding principles of his party were based on: a *democratic nationalism* rooted in the traditional village life of peasants and the minor elite (priests, teachers, notaries, educated farmers), *culture* and *a sense of national unity*.

Romanian nationalism, said Nicolae Iorga, has its deep roots in the soul of the Romanian people and is not imported from others⁴. On this background, the Romanian state was established⁵ by Menumorut, Gelu and Glad, Bogdan of Ieud, Negru Vodă of Făgăraș and their descendants in Baia and Suceava, Curtea de Argeș and Târgoviște - as a single nation we now call medieval which belonged to the same place (based on the ideas of autochthony and continuity), spoke the same

³ Nicolas Nagy-Talavera, *Nicolae Iorga O bibliografie (Nicolae Iorga. A Biography)*, Ed. Institutului European, Iași, 1999.

⁴ "But nothing which is borrowed is worth anything unless grafted onto your own substance. A brilliant doctrine can stem from a trunkless and rootless graft, but it will only last that long and never be anything but a dried-up stump that is unable to flourish". Nicolae Iorga, „Doctrina naționalistă” (*The Nationalist Doctrine*), vol. *Dreptul la memorie în lectura lui Iordan Chimet (The Right to Memory as read by Iordan Chimet)*, vol. II, *Intrarea în lumea modernă (Enter the Modern World)*, Dacia Publishing House, Cluj, 1992, p. 209.

⁵ "A people with no class differences". In the case of the French, the English, the Germans, and the Spanish, the state meant a gathering of nations which would become one in the modern era. *Ibidem*.

language, and was Christian from the very beginning, from the common people to the political elite leading the state. *This was the stage of primitive nationalism.*

The 17th century writers, both Wallachian and Moldavian boyars, but also Romanian Transylvanian natives (such as Miron and Nicolae Costin, Ion Neculce, Nicolae Olahus, etc.), transformed the primitive national instinct into *an enduring sentiment as the basis of the modern nationalist doctrine.*

The 18th century, through the works of Dimitrie Cantemir, Stolnicul Cantacuzino, Ioan Inochentie Micu-Klein and the Transylvanian School *established the idea of definitive nationalism.* It was, however, a nationalism of the elites, written in books in the form of philosophical expressions connected to the ideas of Western European scholars, but little understood by peasants. It was, nevertheless, still based on tangible realities: antiquity and indigenoussness, language and religion.

Finally, the 1840-1848 generation, including Nicolae Bălcescu, Mihail Kogălniceanu, Simion Bărnuțiu, and George Barițiu, established the idea of *modern Romanian nationalism.*

In this well-argued pattern of evolution for the idea of Romanian nationalism, the great historian focuses on the nationalism displayed in Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia (after the "Little Union"). Nicolae Iorga defines the modern nationalism cultivated by the Romanian cultural and political elite in Transylvania as *petitionary*, based on arguments such as the memoirs of Ioan Inochentie Micu-Klein, the *Supplex Libelus Valachorum* of 1791, the *Supplex* of Brașov, the Blaj Resolution of 1848, the Blaj Pronouncement of 1868, the Memorandum of 1892, and the Response of Aurel C. Popovici. In contrast, the nationalism of Moldova and Wallachia, i.e. the nationalism of the Romanian society across the Carpathians, is *defined as political, accompanied by concrete own achievements* (1859, 1866, 1877/78, 1881). We can also see here that Iorga's ideas are a manifestation of the pride of the people of Wallachia, who felt labelled by the people of Transylvania as "Phanariotes" or "old and new vulgarians".⁶

*

In the end, leaving aside the qualities and the flaws of the national movement of the Romanians in the entire Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic geographical area, the Union of 1918 was a goal for which Nicolae Iorga campaigned by way of his writings and concrete political actions, which after 1918 turned into actions in defence of Greater Romania.

⁶ *Ibidem*, passim.