

On the Relationship between Andrei Oțetea and N. Iorga

Contextualizing some Evocations from 1948

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ON 24 January 1948, understaffed and under communist ideological pressure, the Nicolae Iorga Institute of World History in Bucharest resumed its activity in the wake of major changes. The new director, Andrei Oțetea, delivered a presentation of the achievements of the past year (although he had been in office for only three months). The event became part of tradition, to be held on a yearly basis on St. Nicholas' Day (6 December), reviving in fact a custom established following the assassination of N. Iorga in 1940. This had been impossible in 1947, given the repair work being done on the building of the institute, highly damaged by both the earthquake of 1940 and by World War II.¹ But in 1948, as 24 January was the day of the union of the Romanian Principalities (1859), Oțetea, in one of the rare moments when he resorted to personal memories, argued, in his speech, largely devoted to the founder of the institute, that Iorga would not have disliked this (temporary) change.² He went on and added that Iorga had foreseen "the promise of a new force in the field of the specialty that he had raised so high and to which he had dedicated all the toil of his prolific life."³

Our approach aims to analyze and explain Andrei Oțetea's recollections of N. Iorga's professional career. Deemed a fellow traveller (companion) of the communists and placed at the head of the institute immediately after the dismissal of Gheorghe I. Brătianu, Iorga's directorial successor, Oțetea, intertwined his own past with that of Iorga (an approach Oțetea deemed natural due to his obviously proven commitment to Iorga up to his assassination). He avoided nevertheless an in-depth analysis of his own relations with Iorga. It is to these gaps in the selective memory manifest in Oțetea's speech from 24 January 1948 that we devote our attention in the present paper.

Until autumn 1947, Oțetea had been a professor at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Iași. A member of the commission for the purge of the university, he had been elected rector of the university. A study on the materialist conception of history, published in 1938, had earned him from the communists a place among the intellectuals sympathetic to Marxism-Leninism. He was thus also active within the ranks of the National People's Party, intended to attract intellectuals towards the communist-controlled structures (Oțetea was deputy for Dorohoi County). Oțetea was then trans-

ferred to the University of Bucharest and appointed director of the Institute of World History.⁴ He was deemed capable to lead, in a communist politically correct manner, an institute whose activity had drastically decreased after the war and was quite strongly connected to the memory of its founder—e.g. Mihai Berza’s 1947 study “Nicolae Iorga, istoric al cruciatelor și al Statelor latine din Răsărit” (Nicolae Iorga, historian of the crusades and of the Latin States in the Orient)—the ten year anniversary of the institute or the posthumous work of Iorga, *Istoriologia umană* (Human historiology), forthcoming at that time.⁵

Andrei Oțetea from Paris to Iași

I ORGA HAD come to know (or indeed discover) Oțetea⁶ only after the latter defended his Ph.D. thesis at the Sorbonne in December 1926 (entitled “François Guichardin: Sa vie publique et sa pensée politique,” the thesis had a complement in the secondary thesis on the Florentine’s correspondence). According to Oțetea, it was not so much Iorga’s knowledge of his studies, but the favorable references of his Parisian professors Henri Hauser, Henri Hauvette and Charles Diehl (quite an honor for a Romanian student)⁷ that gained him Iorga’s attention and interest. Oțetea desired to create a “conference” (that was to become a chair) on the history of the Renaissance at one of the faculties of letters in Romania.⁸ As the integration of Romanian history in a wider context was virtually a prerequisite for any academic appointment, Iorga, impressed by Oțetea’s readiness to focus his work on world history and by his mature narrative approach, suggested to him to pursue his Italian archival researches with a study on the Neapolitan Legation in Constantinople (Istanbul).⁹

Consequently appointed a temporary professor at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy in Iași, Oțetea delivered a lecture at the International Congress of Historical Sciences in Oslo (August 1928), a privilege reserved to few historians. The presentation was entitled “Esquisse historique suivie de la correspondance inédite des envoyés du roi des Deux-Siciles à Constantinople (1741–1821),” and was published in 1930 in the fourth volume of the “Études et recherches” series of the Romanian Academy: “Contribution à la question d’Orient: Esquisse historique, suivie de la correspondance inédite des envoyés du roi des Deux-Siciles à Constantinople (1741–1821).”¹⁰

Oțetea responded to Iorga’s goodwill through the laudatory notes published in *Viata românească* (Romanian Life) review.¹¹ He openly joining the homage paid to “the undisputed head of historical research in our country and the animator of the entire generation committed to the study of history” and published, as a *Festschrift*, by Constantin Marinescu (*Mélanges d’Histoire Générale*).¹²

Following Iorga’s lead, Oțetea had indeed been able to provide a major contribution to the understanding, in Romania in particular, of the Oriental Question in the 1700s and early 1800s. Based on his researches on Italian merchants in the Danube Principalities, Oțetea developed several analyses on early capitalism, published in Ilie Minea’s review *Cercetări istorice* (Historical Researches).

The “out of the blue” relation between Iorga and Oțetea was duly emphasized by the latter, who had had no connection with the Romanian School at Fontenay-aux-Roses (led by Iorga) and who, again according to himself, had avoided, unlike most Romanian students in Paris, grabbing Iorga’s attention, after the lectures delivered by the great historian at the Collège de France and at the Sorbonne.¹³ In fact, Oțetea was highly critical of the Romanian School in France and of its patron.

In a letter sent to Ioan Lupaș he described in grim terms the lack of professionalism of the School’s staff and the clientele promoted by Iorga, as a reward for personal, not national services, a clientele that moreover was filled with “hatred” towards Transylvanian personalities such as Ioan Lupaș, Octavian Goga, or Vasile Goldiș. Like other students in Paris (e.g. D. D. Roșca and Nicolae Tolu), Oțetea targeted the press office of the Romanian Legation in Paris, filled with Iorga’s cronies. Oțetea wanted a couple of positions in the press office (if not its leadership) or at least the removal of the incompetent figures in the office’s staff.¹⁴

About N. Iorga at the Beginning of the “Socialist Era”

ANDREI OȚETEA’S career had not been perfectly tailored to suit Iorga’s pattern, but Iorga’s endeavors had also not been made to fit a communist Romania in the making (a making in which Oțetea was involved). Oțetea had joined the group of intellectuals gathered around *Viața românească*, the magazine led by G. Ibrăileanu. This had ended in disappointment, from Oțetea’s point of view.¹⁵ Already as a student, Oțetea had contributed to the journal. He increased his activity in an attempt to secure a chair at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Iași, where he had arrived as a replacement for Gheorghe I. Brătianu (who had moved to the University of Bucharest). Even though Oțetea was disappointed by this experience (possibly because *Viața românească* promoted some of the ideological ideas of Constantin Stere, one of Iorga’s political and intellectual adversaries), his involvement with *Viața românească* was most useful for his career in the late 1940s, because the magazine had also published the work of intellectuals sympathetic to the communist movement (illegal in interwar Romania).

Oțetea underlined that he had not grown in Iorga’s shadow and carefully pointed out that in 1938 in a lecture delivered precisely at the Institute of World History he had signaled his adherence to the materialist conception of history.¹⁶ Both on the personal and on the professional level, Oțetea was different from other Romanian historians (most of whom were disliked by the communists) and therefore in the fortunate position of offering a balanced perspective on Iorga and his studies. A victim of the Iron Guard, Iorga was an asset of potentially tremendous value for the communists.

Oțetea even assigned to Iorga a role of “forerunner of socialist civilization” in Romania,¹⁷ based on the collective research stimulated by Iorga through his institute, both rigorous and progressive. Oțetea then formulated the needed improvements

*the activity of our historiography, confined almost exclusively to universities, is too personal and too disorderly. I think that a concentration of our different institutes and a systematization of their activity would create the premises for a revival of our historiography . . .*¹⁸

This critical approach aided in fact Iorga's cause. According to Oțetea,

*through his work, done with the only reward of the happiness of creation, Iorga showed to a reluctant generation that the most important thing for a civilization is the work accepted and done with joy. In this feeling he saw the primordial condition of any real progress and the basis of true morality . . .*¹⁹

Iorga's political career, marred by its own failures,²⁰ had been but a misfortunate, yet costly detour: "in the heat of the political controversy in which, unfortunately, Nicolae Iorga got too involved, the imposing proportions of his role in world science were overlooked."²¹

Beyond Memory: The Role of N. Iorga in Andrei Oțetea's Professional Integration

IORGA HAD aided Oțetea in his quest for an university chair, according to the custom of the time, which occasionally (in Iorga's case as well) meant even defying the law. This usually occurred in the cases of the alumni of the Romanian School at Fontenay-aux-Roses (e.g. for Gheorghe I. Brătianu and Constantin Marinescu, Iorga forced the splitting of a chair at the University of Iași).²² But Oțetea had been no member of the Romanian School in France.

In his memoirs, when reviewing his years spent as a professor at the University of Iași, Iorgu Iordan confirmed that Iorga had supported Oțetea. This came much to Ioan Lupaș's dislike. In May 1927, while in Paris, Lupaș stated in front of the Romanian students that he hoped that Oțetea would reject Iorga's harmful influence.²³ Oțetea's connection to Iorga did not aid him on Transylvanian soil, in the academic environment of Cluj.²⁴ Still, Oțetea did not sever his ties to Iorga.

In 1948, Oțetea used the positive aspects of this relation to justify his status of member of the Romanian delegation at the International Congress of History in Oslo (August 1928). The large-scale event focused on exciting questions at that time, on how historical education could have helped alleviate the conflicts between nations. Oțetea was appointed secretary of the Modern and Contemporary History section.²⁵ Iorga's speeches were intended to gain the listeners' attention and sympathy, after the lectures of other major names had left the audience in state of fatigue. In 1948, Oțetea claimed that Iorga won the crowd with his very first words: "Les princes du seizième siècle de mon pays étaient obligés, à leur avènement, de payer toutes les dettes de leur prédécesseurs. Je ferai comme eux et je serai bref."²⁶ Iorga was a very dynamic presence and his lecture

(“The Interpenetration between East and West”) converged with the main guidelines of the congress (e.g. the question of nationalist overtones in historical textbooks), as Oțetea later recalled, in the mid-1960s as well.²⁷

Oțetea’s bright recollection of the congress in Oslo served as counterweight for the charges brought against him (when he competed for the Chair of Modern and Contemporary History at the University of Iași) that he was just one of Iorga’s followers.²⁸ Oțetea equally used the Oslo episode to emphasize Iorga’s outstanding international status:

*in these gatherings of scholars, some of whom are world-renowned, Iorga seemed, through the power and prestige of his genius, a unique and incomparable phenomenon. He no longer belonged to a country or a specialty, but was the superior incarnation of spirit and science. The center of general attention, Iorga achieved in these congresses his greatest and purest successes.*²⁹

Iorga was indeed instrumental in Oțetea’s scholarly evolution. Oțetea made no secret of it. Yet, as revealed also by the omissions in his speech of 1948, Oțetea professional development was less the product of Iorga’s influence, for Iorga took his distance from the issue of Oțetea’s disputed Chair of Modern and Contemporary History at University of Iași.

Initially Iorga had been nominated for the jury.³⁰ He refused and was replaced by Constantin C. Giurescu.³¹ Iorga had feared that his presence might be detrimental to Oțetea’s cause. He had been involved in a series of clashes with the professors who did not support Oțetea. Moreover, Iorga had severely critiqued some of the writings of Ioan Hudiță, Oțetea’s rival competitor. And, “something else, Mr. Oțetea, Mr. Hudiță’s opponent, was Mr. George Brătianu’s substitute and recognized as his protégé.”³² This also did not play in Oțetea’s favor in Iași. He therefore expressed his concern about the composition of the jury:

*given that Iorga is not in the country, and even if he were, he would not come to Iași to be part of a jury with [Alexandru] Philippide and [Ilie] Bărbulescu. I can only count on [Gheorghe I.] Brătianu, [Romulus] Cândea and [Constantin] Marinescu. As an unexpected opportunity for Mr. [Ilie] Minea’s maneuvers.*³³

Oțetea turned to his former professors at the Sorbonne, especially to Henri Hauser, who had to intercede with Iorga, prime-minister at that time.³⁴ Foreign support was deemed of paramount importance under the circumstances, as Oțetea himself claimed that he had exhausted all legal domestic means. A letter sent in 1931 states that Oțetea had called upon Henri Hauvette and Marcel Marion to persuade Iorga to expedite his appointment to the vacant chair. According to Oțetea, during the “contest” of 1930, all major historians had supported him (Gheorghe I. Brătianu, Ilie Minea, Constantin Marinescu and Constantin C. Giurescu). Yet, Iorga was unwilling to intervene and violate university autonomy, vigorously advocated by a strong group of

professors at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy (Giorge Pascu, Ilie Bărbulescu and Alexandru Philippide). In return, as Oțetea told Hauser, the rector of the University of Iași, Petru Bogdan, was well disposed towards him. All he needed was Iorga's ministerial intervention, which Oțetea hoped to secure through their mutual French "friends," so that the "vacancy" of the chair could be ended through a "recommendation" by the Ministry of Public Instruction.³⁵

Oțetea further informed Iorga of the serious public dimension of the dispute over the Chair of Modern and Contemporary History. In 1933, he wrote to Iorga about the practices of the "illustrious Sorbonnard" (Ioan Hudiță's nickname). As the University of Iași had a new rector, Traian Bratu, whose sympathy was much needed, according to Oțetea, Iorga was the only one with enough prestige and authority to clarify the matter.³⁶

Conclusion

BY CAREFULLY reviewing and presenting his relation with N. Iorga, Andrei Oțetea, the newly appointed director of the Institute of World History, aimed to foster intellectual legitimacy at the head of the institution formally led by the late Iorga and then by the deposed Gheorghe I. Brătianu. Oțetea was both the representative of the new power(s) in Romania and of the interwar Romanian intellectuals. The prestige he had won at the University of Iași served as the promise of a shield in the face of imminent ideological interferences. This allowed Oțetea, not one of Iorga's proper disciples (although Oțetea had inflated his closeness to Iorga in order to secure a university chair), to actually defend his new position, which rested in fact on the brutal removal of Gheorghe I. Brătianu from both the University of Bucharest and the Institute of World History. Equally attached to and detached from Iorga's towering personality, Andrei Oțetea's oratorical memoirs reveal not only the peculiar relation initiated between a renowned scholar and student from Transylvania, more than fortunate to study at the Sorbonne after the Great War, but also, if not mainly, the uncertainties that plagued Romanian academic institutions at the dawn of the Soviet-controlled Republic of Romania. □

Notes

1. Raluca Tomi, "Institutul de Istorie Universală 'Nicolae Iorga' în anii directoratelor Gheorghe Brătianu (martie 1941–sept. 1947) și Andrei Oțetea (octombrie 1947–iulie 1948)," in *Institutul de Istorie "Nicolae Iorga" 1937–1948*, edited by Raluca Tomi (Bucharest, 2009), 110–111.
2. Astra County Library, Sibiu, Andrei Oțetea coll., Andrei Oțetea's speech at the Institute of History in Bucharest (24 January 1948).
3. Ibid.
4. Tomi, 121.

5. Astra County Library, Sibiu, Andrei Oțetea coll., Andrei Oțetea's speech.
6. Like other young Romanians from Transylvania, Oțetea, a man of modest peasant origins from Sibiel, was able to study in France because of the support of the Romanian Ruling Council of Transylvania and of the Astra Society.
7. Astra County Library, Sibiu, Andrei Oțetea coll., Andrei Oțetea's speech.
8. Ibid. Oțetea's most important contribution to the study of the Renaissance was a synthesis published in 1941: *Renașterea și Reforma* (Renaissance and Reformation).
9. Ibid.
10. In the mid-1960s, Iorga reappeared in Oțetea's recollections. According to Oțetea, Iorga was instrumental in sending young historians to investigate foreign archives. Moreover, in Oțetea's case, his own researches in Naples proved vital after the local archive was destroyed during World War II (Astra County Library, Sibiu, Andrei Oțetea coll., excerpts from an interview entitled "De vorbă cu acad. prof. Andrei Oțetea despre Nicolae Iorga," 23 May 1966).
11. *Viața românească* (Iași), 2nd series, 21, 5–6 (1929), 330.
12. *Viața românească* 19, 10–12 (1927), 310.
13. Astra County Library, Sibiu, Andrei Oțetea coll., Andrei Oțetea's speech.
14. Central Historical National Archives Bucharest, Ioan Lupaș coll., fols. 2–4.
15. Astra County Library, Sibiu, Andrei Oțetea coll., Andrei Oțetea's speech.
16. Ibid. The historian refers to the text entitled "Concepția materialistă a istoriei ca metodă de cercetare și de expunere."
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Eventually, the chair was held by Gheorghe I. Brătianu alone. Constantin Marinescu became professor at the University of Cluj. Petre Țurlea, *Școala Română din Franța* (Bucharest, 1994), 67–68.
23. Iorgu Iordan, *Memorii*, vol. 2 (Bucharest, 1977), 181.
24. Astra County Library, Sibiu, Andrei Oțetea coll., Letter sent by Nicolae Tolu to Andrei Oțetea (31 August 1927).
25. Iași County Branch of the Romanian National Archives, Facultatea de Litere și Filosofie coll., file 357/1932, 201.
26. Astra County Library, Sibiu, Andrei Oțetea coll., Andrei Oțetea's speech.
27. Ibid.
28. Petre Țurlea and Stelian Mândruș, eds., *Nicolae Iorga și Universitatea din Cluj: Coreșpondență (1919–1940)* (Bucharest, 2005), 298–299.
29. Oțetea was part of the Romanian delegation also at the International Congress of Byzantinology in Rome, in 1936, and at the International Congress of History in Zurich, in 1938. Astra County Library, Sibiu, Andrei Oțetea coll., Andrei Oțetea's speech.
30. Iași County Branch of the Romanian National Archives, Facultatea de Litere și Filosofie coll., file 308/1929, 13.
31. Central Historical National Archives Bucharest, Ministerul Instrucțiunii coll., file 470/1930, fols. 68–69.

32. Astra County Library, Sibiu, Andrei Oțetea coll., an article from the newspaper *Adevărul* (9 June 1930).
33. Ibid.
34. Astra County Library, Sibiu, Andrei Oțetea coll., Letter sent Andrei Oțetea to Henri Hauser (October 1931).
35. Astra County Library, Sibiu, Andrei Oțetea coll., Letter received by Andrei Oțetea from Henri Hauser, undated.
36. Romanian Academy Library, Bucharest, Manuscrise–Carte Rară Section, S 47/CDLXXXI, Letter sent by Andrei Oțetea to N. Iorga (24 July 1933).

Abstract

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The communist takeover produced major transformations in the academic sphere in Romania. After the removal of Gheorghe I. Brătianu from the head of the Bucharest Institute of World History, Andrei Oțetea (1894–1977) was tasked with reorganizing the historiographical activity in the institution founded by N. Iorga. The memorialist evocations of the new director from 1948 had the role of creating an image of apparent continuity in the existence of this well-known research center. At the same time, Oțetea's intended to forge his own professional path in the wake of Iorga and preserve the traditional Romanian historiographical foundations, amid the uncertainties caused by revolutionary trends in science. The recourse to memory, albeit in the selective manner dictated by the context, has the role of shedding new light on the relationship between N. Iorga and Andrei Oțetea during the interwar period.

Keywords

Andrei Oțetea, N. Iorga, memorialist evocations, academic sphere, Bucharest Institute of World History