

Mélanges d'Histoire Générale: On the History of a History (1927-2007)

Habent sua fata libelli! Books like men have their fate. This is no novelty, but old wisdom. The volume at hand, bearing a seemingly old and outdated title, is proof for it. It stands for an interwar tradition that has to be restored. On one hand, the Communism regime broke off many of the ties that connected us to some of the major scientific achievements of the past. On the other hand, the Romanians have a talent, regardless of the totalitarian system they are in, to renounce, to erase their past, names, symbols or coats of arms and start all over again. Few institutions, associations have survived the centuries. Our modern free, now, eyes was witnessed this phenomenon. Hence the idea that Romanians have no tradition, no foundations, no values; that they have come out of nowhere. The kind ones called it the *Romanian miracle* or the *Romanian enigma*. Others used less pleasant terms for it.

Mélanges d'Histoire Générale was first printed in 1927, at the "Cartea Românească" [Romanian Book] Typography, of Cluj. Professor Constantin Marinescu was the editor of the revue published by the then "King Ferdinand" University of Cluj, respectively by the Institute of Universal History, founded in 1921. The institute was one of the several institutions founded at that time that successfully aimed at preserving and developing the university's scientific prestige on Romanian soil this time. As for the revue itself, it was a mixture between a volume in a series or, given the context, a self-standing scientific journal.

The first "issue" of *Mélanges* was published '*ad maiorem gloriam Nicolai Iorga*', or, as the text itself went, *to the illustrious historian and dear master Nicolae Iorga*, though science had already started gathering up evidence for the questionable nature of the formula. It was intended to open up a series of publications in foreign languages, *accesibile prin urmare lumii savante de pretutindeni* [*and*] therefore available to the scientific community from everywhere]. *Mélanges* was (were) thus different from the annuals published by sister-institutes, such as the Institute of National History (directors Alexandru Lapedatu and Ioan Lupaș) or the Museum of the Romanian Language (director Sextil Pușcariu); the latter annual was named, in accordance to the spirit of the age, *Daco-Romania*. Furthermore, as Constantin Marinescu put it, in his preface, *Mélanges* was no annual, although its manifest aim was to appear on a yearly base, for annuals require a certain periodicity and need a large number of collaborators. Naturally, everything was also then a question of money. The next "issue" was published only in 1938. Marinescu's precaution had been justified.

Still, the authors that published in those two "issues" were major scientific figures: Nicolae Iorga, Gheorghe Brătianu, Constantin C. Giurescu, Petre P. Panaitescu, Coriolan Petranu, Ștefan Bezdechi, G. D. Serra, Rigomera Eysser, Francisc Pall, Ioachim Crăciun or Carol Göllner. Only some survived the troubled 1940'. Marinescu fled the county.

The interwar 'scientific rules of engagement' are still, nevertheless, in part, valid until the present day. Scientific communication has to be done in international languages; otherwise, erudite works tend to die a slow death. The general ('international') frame of a medieval/modern event remains decisive for the understanding of an event. Subsidies tend to become an eternal problem; hence, the problems of a journal's periodicity. There are also novelties, for we move between *nihil novi sub sole* and *panta rhei*. English has grown into a, rather severe, universal language, in terms of both scientific and general communication. Europe and the EU are the new historic/historiographical frames. Interdisciplinary researches have become compulsory. New research methods and new topics are spreading. The *poids* of subjective perspectives seem also to have increased lately.

Past, present and future included, we have thus tried to keep the balance between antitheses. The old French title was preserved, an honor and a burden that we are willing to take. Our aim is a collection of volumes not a 'classic journal'. Yet, we are so bold to hope that we will be able to publish a volume every year and achieve our predecessor's goal. In return, some changes were made. Scientific advisors from Europe and Romania were asked to supervise the *nouvelle série*. Plans were made in accordance to precise topics. Partner institutions have been brought in to further the project. Grants were brought into play as funding is still an issue. In fact, we have tried to expand our foundations. The 'medieval hegemony' present in the interwar volumes has now some 'ancient', some 'modern' and some 'contemporary' counterparts, for history's borders are expanding too, from geopolitics to economics, from population studies to nationality, from art to the study of religions and confessions, from (ancient) culture to pragmatic international relations.

As for the medieval section in itself is devoted to personalities and phenomenons: Sigismund (Zsigmond) of Luxemburg, John (Ioan/ Iancu, János) Hunyadi, Stephen (Ștefan) the Great and Matthias (Mátyás, Matia) Corvinus, the Union of Florence, the Age of the Jagellonians. The first volume in the medieval section is in fact a comparative research devoted to East-Central Europe in the late 1400'. The volume is a collection of the lectures given at a 2004 joint Hungarian-Romanian conference, held in Szeged, dedicated to the reigns of Matthias Corvinus and Stephen the Great of Moldavia. It was perhaps the first time that Hungary's and Romania's 'national medieval symbols' were ever put face to face.

We are greatly indebted to our fellow colleagues Lauro Grassi (State University of Milan), Konrad G. Gündisch ("Carl von Ossietzky" University, Oldenburg) and Doru Radosav ("Babeș-Bolyai" University, Cluj-Napoca), for their support. The help and confidence they have entrusted in us were instrumental in starting the new collection and printing the first volume. We hope that, with their support and that of our other colleagues from Cluj and the continent, we will reveal ourselves worthy enough of the thought and idea of 1927.

Reviewing the volume, I found remembered one late medieval statement that suits rather well our 21st century times: *We are all subject to temptation and we all have our demons and devils*. The words of the late 15th century Hungarian archbishop of Kalocsa, Peter (Péter) Váradi, have, by the story of the prelate too, a particularly accurate meaning. They also make us think of the real value of personal ambition in relation to collective results, of individual achievement in relation to institutional stability. Maybe, even the new series of *Mélanges d'Histoire Générale* is a product of such dilemmas, of such choices.

To a certain extent, we could view the new series as an argument for history's status of science. Few of the authors of 1927 knew of such questions, of such doubts. Eighty years later not having, not confronting these doubts is as unnatural as several of values of the 1920' and 1930' that are now, most of them deservingly, obsolete. Documentary archive researches will however never be out of date, regardless of how much ground interpretation has won over information, for history, medieval or not, is not just the material for movie scripts. The seemingly conservative ideas are in fact, in these matters, mostly simple realistic assessments that have to be considered as such, regardless of language.

Mélanges d'Histoire Générale was, unquestionably, a local experiment, with international attendance. The context did not permit a different approach. The *nouvelle série* tries to step out of these boundaries. The context, in theory foremost, allows us to have this aim. Over the last decades, much talk was devoted to history in (East-) Central Europe. Much has been done too. Still, several opportunities, several topics were not exploited. This is one of the main reasons why we have thought of bring *Mélanges* back to historic light. Thus, a few well-known Latin words come to our mind: *Vivat, crescat, floreat!*