

Ovidiu Bozgan, Bogdan Murgescu (coord.) - *Universitatea din București (1864-2014)*, Editura Universității din București, 2014, 444 p., ISBN - 978-606-16-0478-4.

In recent years, and particularly after 2000, there has been a notable increase in the number of works focusing on intellectual or cultural history in the Romanian historiography, a research area notoriously misused or neglected during the communist years. The book that we are discussing here is no exception to this general trend. In fact, this volume, *Universitatea din București (1864-2014)*, illustrates, as one of the recent examples, the renewed interest in the narrow subfield of university history. Many of the leading Romanian universities or other higher educational institutions have recently celebrated various anniversaries and, due to this festive context, a good number of studies started to analyze their institutional history and their social significance. The public was thus presented in 2010 with a comprehensive research dedicated to the 150 years of evolution of the University of Iași: Gheorghe Iacob, Alexandru Florin Platon (coord.) – *Istoria Universității din Iași*, 2010-2011, 2 tomes. It was followed, in 2012, by a detailed account of the long and varied existence of the Cluj University, a tribute to the 90 years of academic teaching in Romanian language and to the 125 years since the foundation of a modern university in Transylvania: Ovidiu Ghitta (coord.) – *Istoria Universității Babeș-Bolyai*, 2012.

In 2014, the University of Bucharest equally celebrated a milestone – 150 years of uninterrupted activity since its establishment (the founding decree being issued on 4/16 July 1864 by prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza). This provided the perfect opportunity to investigate and evaluate with the help of a new paradigm, the twists and turns of university life in Romania's capital city. *Universitatea din București (1864-2014)* is a commemorative book that marks the 150th anniversary of a prestigious academic establishment and, at the same time, completes the panorama of the role played by universities in modern and contemporary Romania. Coordinated by two esteemed historians, Bogdan Murgescu and Ovidiu Bozgan, this book was written by a team of specialists that includes established scholars, with previous expertise and publications in educational history (Adina Berchiu-Drăgichescu, Ovidiu Bozgan, Cristina Gudin), in social and economic history (Bogdan Murgescu, Florentina Nițu), as well as a number of younger academics and researchers (Matei Gheboianu, Alexandru Murad Mironov, Mirela Rotaru, Andrei Florin Sora). Last but not least, the team of authors includes Ioan Pânzaru, former rector (2005-2011) and vice-rector (2000-2004)

of the University of Bucharest, one of the most influential personalities in the modernization of this institution after 1989.

The opening pages of this volume explain to the interested readers the background and the methodological principles followed by all the authors. This research chose to focus on the members of the academic community, as they are those who define and determine the "good functioning of the university" (p. 16). Consequently, *Universitatea din București (1864-2014)* is primarily a history of the university within the society, or, in other words, a social history of the university, looking at interactions between professors and students, and, also, at relationships established over time between this institution and various actors or authorities on the social stage. The second principle assumed by the authors and constantly reflected in their writing was that of academic freedom. We are warned that this book did not intend to be an "official" (meaning exclusively glorifying) history of the university, but examines both positive and controversial episodes of the academic life. The aim was to assess the existing situation, to "synthesize and make sense of a century and a half of university teaching, research and social involvement at the University of Bucharest" (p. 21).

Structured in six large sections, the book *Universitatea din București (1864-2014)* makes us travel from the late 17th century until the present days, in a chronological overview that outlines with remarkable attention the numerous transformations undergone by the university. Furthermore, readers can follow these changes with increased ease because, at every stage, there is a thorough analysis of the legislative and political context that shaped the existence of the university.

Several superior schools that played a significant role in educating the local elites preceded the appearance of the modern University of Bucharest. In the first chapter, Florentina Nițu discusses the main features of the Royal Academy founded in 1694 by Constantin Brâncoveanu and the School of Saint Sava, developed since 1818. Unlike many other similar institutions of Central and Eastern Europe, these forerunners of the modern university had a predominant laic character and were significantly influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment, as professor Nițu appropriately emphasized (p. 32). Another highlighted aspect is the gradual and constant effort made for teaching in the national language, namely Romanian, starting with the efforts of the Transylvanian Gheorghe Lazăr from 1818 onwards and continuing with the directives of the Organic Regulations of 1832 and of the 1847 reform of Prince Gheorghe Bibescu (pp. 41-44).

The second chapter, authored by Cristina Gudin, describes the founding of the Bucharest University in 1864 and deals with its evolution until the end of the First World War. As expected, these opening years were

marked not only by enthusiasm and energy, but also by many hesitations and debates over the best ways of developing the newly created academic establishment. It is relevant from this perspective that the final faculty structure of the Bucharest University was officially sanctioned after more than two decades after its opening: it was only in 1890 that the Faculty of Theology joined the rest of the original faculties, namely the Faculty of Law, the Faculty of Letters, the Faculty of Sciences and the Faculty of Medicine (the latter created in 1869). In our opinion, the most interesting parts of this chapter are those dedicated to the first rectors and founding fathers of different chairs and disciplines (pp. 79-93), as they include nuanced characterizations of many distinguished scholars, as well as references to the students' associations and newspapers that started to function in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (pp. 101-103). Equally worth mentioning are the short analyses regarding tense or conflictual moments of the university life, such as the boycotting action started by Nicolae Iorga in March 1906, which Gudin rightly considers as an example of "cultural isolationism" (p. 107), or the professors' attitude during the troubled years of the First World War (pp. 108-109). However, there is little, if no mentioning of the few professors that chose not to rally themselves with the Allies during the war, in particular after 1916, when Romania officially joined the Anglo-French camp. This is certainly a regrettable omission, especially as we are currently commemorating the centenary of the Great War and historians all over Europe are revisiting many aspects of this world conflict, including issues concerning the field of intellectual history.

The third section of the book, authored by Ovidiu Bozgan, presents the 1919-1938 period, a golden time in the existence of the University of Bucharest, when this institution exerted, as the author rightly points out, "*a comfortable hegemony in the area of academic teaching, as well as in the scientific and cultural life of Romania*" (p. 215). From the beginning, we are warned that this chapter is a republication, with some additions, of a previous text, since Bozgan has written extensively about the history of the University of Bucharest over the last decade and a half. Although this editorial choice is understandable, it is equally slightly disappointing. In our opinion, a fresh interpretation of the academic facts and events of the interwar years could have brought to surface or drawn attention to some less investigated aspects: for instance, the international scientific networks and relationships developed by the University of Bucharest, or the mobility of the Romanian academic staff back and forth between the University of Bucharest and the other Romanian universities.

The interwar years saw the growth of the University of Bucharest, as new faculties were integrated into its structures: the Faculty of Veterinary

Medicine (in 1921) and the Faculty of Pharmacy (in 1923). Ovidiu Bozgan also explores the evolution of the Law Academy from Oradea, which, for a short time, represented a point of contention between the University of Bucharest and the University of Cluj. After a rather long autonomous existence, between 1932 and 1934 the Law Academy of Oradea was integrated into the University of Bucharest. However, Bozgan explains that in 1934, "at the meeting of the Interuniversity Council, the influential rector of the University of Cluj, Florian Ștefănescu-Goangă pleaded in favor of merging the Academy with the Law Faculty of Cluj, which was going through some difficult times and had a teaching staff of uneven professional value; thus, the transfer of professors from the [Oradea] Academy was seen as a salutary solution" (p. 152). Goangă won the argument and the Law Academy of Oradea was finally absorbed within the University of Cluj. Another interesting part of the third chapter analyses, based on various statistics, the social situation of students during the interwar years, sometimes comparing the situation at the University of Bucharest with other main Romanian academic centers (pp. 175-199). The author equally discusses in a critical note the various forms undertaken by student societies and students' social and political manifestations, warning about the persistent lack of solid research on the interwar student movement, especially as regards the left wing student organizations, so much praised by the communist regime, which in fact did nothing, but distort their real role (p. 204).

The fourth chapter, jointly written by Alexandru Murad Mironov and Andrei Florin Sora, deals with a very difficult period: the 1938-1948 decade, when Romania was confronted with the authoritarian reign of King Carol II and then with the troubled years of the Second World War. The authors describe in detail the growing intrusion of politics within the University of Bucharest and its influence on the careers of the teaching staff, as well as the attacks and limitations imposed to principle of academic autonomy by all the regimes that succeeded one after another during this critical time. Readers can discover in these pages interesting and sometimes paradoxical information about the turnovers operated (or merely attempted) by some of the professors. For example, it is relevant to read that a prominent personality such as the sociologist Dimitrie Gusti turned from a strong supporter of King Carol II in the late 1930s into a member of the leading structures of the *Romanian association for the strengthening of relationships with the USSR* (ARLUS), while at the same time some of his scientific works were being purged by the communist Groza government. (pp. 222-223 and pp. 264-267).

The last two chapters of the book *Universitatea din București 1864-2014*, which address the communist period and the development of the

University of Bucharest after 1989, bring to light the largest quantity of previously unpublished, original materials. Most of the data testify to an intensive research work done by Bogdan Murgescu, Ioan Pânzaru and their younger colleagues (Andrei Florin Sora, Matei Gheboianu, Mirela Rotaru) in the national and university archives. This team of researchers attempted to recreate the specificities of the academic life in Bucharest in the last six decades in the most accurate and comprehensive way.

Communism affected the functioning of the university at unprecedented levels, from dictating how the university had to organize its faculties, departments and scientific institutes to what disciplines to teach and, most importantly, how to teach them. Even the selection of students accepted at the university was politically regulated. What becomes obvious as we browse the pages of the chapter entitled *Universitatea din București în timpul regimului communist* is that this university had to face a higher pressure from the communist authorities than, perhaps, other regional universities such as Cluj or Iași, because it was situated in the capital city and because it was considered to be the most important academic institution in Romania. The closeness to the epicenter of political power also gave birth to relevant actions of intellectual resistance. The pages that discuss the case of Mihai Botez, a notorious opponent of communism in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as well as those of Nicolae Manolescu or Iorgu Iordan testify to the surviving critical qualities of the academic community of Bucharest, even in very oppressive times (pp. 320-323). Another interesting part of this chapter is the section dedicated to the international relationships of the Bucharest University from 1948 to 1989, as they show, despite some difficult periods, an uninterrupted link with international science (pp. 362-368); for example, in 1980 the University of Bucharest managed to host the 15th International Congress of Historical Sciences. As the authors rightly conclude, "*the communist regime was a contradictory period for the University of Bucharest*" yet, despite all the hardships, the institutional and scientific development progressed (p. 369).

The final chapter of the volume deals with the last 25 years in the life of the University of Bucharest. Written for the most part by Ioan Pânzaru, a direct actor and contributor to the transformations that restored the normalcy in the academic life of Bucharest and developed its prestige, this is a fine example of recent history. The description of the university's involvement in the 1989 revolution and the 1990 events - namely the *University square* phenomenon (pp. 374-379) - deserves particular attention. Another interesting part is the presentation of the academic management and management strategies adopted by the university over these last decades, especially the section dedicated to the way in which the elections of

the succeeding university authorities (Rectorate, Senate) were organized (pp. 387-393).

In conclusion, *Universitatea din București 1864-2014* is a major contribution to the field of university history in Romania. Incorporating a lot of illustrations and with a beautiful layout, this book benefited from an extensive archival and bibliographical research. However, not every title mentioned in the footnotes is listed and can be identified in the final list of bibliography, which is a regrettable oversight. But, despite the minor imperfections mentioned in our review, this volume is a must-read, benefiting from all the qualities to both stand the test of time and impose a high standard for future commemorative publications of Romanian academic institutions.

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