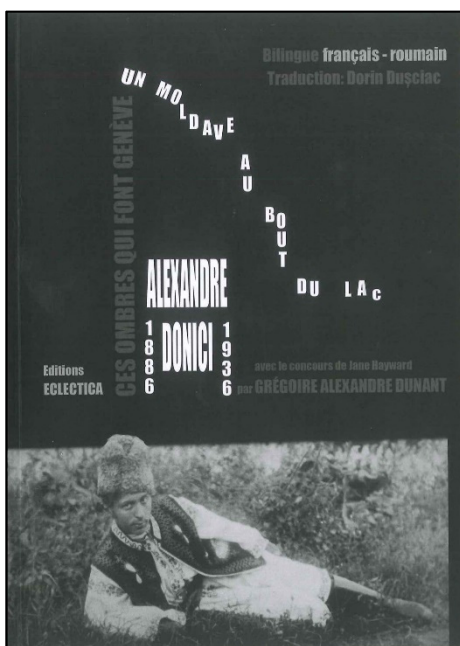


BOOKS

**Grégoire Alexandre Dunant. *Ces ombres qui font Genève –
Umbre Genevei: Un Moldave au bout du lac: Alexandre Donici (1886-
1936) – Un moldovean pe malul lacului: Alexandru Donici (1886-1936)*
[The Shadows of Geneva A Moldovan on the shore of the lake:
Alexandre Donici (1886-1936)] Genève: Editions Eclectica, 2018, 48 p.**

“What remains of Alexandre Donici’s legacy?” (p. 37) is the question Grégoire Alexandre Dunant asks in his biography of Alexandre Donant, a Moldovan researcher whose life becomes the subject of this particular book. As a French-Romanian bilingual edition translated by Dorin Duşciac, this ambitious study manages to capture and vividly portray the circumstances of Donici’s scientific activity in Geneva and the subsequent omission of his involvement in the creation of the Ethnographic Museum of Geneva.

Following a rather unusual structure, Dunant’s approach is one which could be considered inherently divergent from the biographical genre, for its first paragraphs focus not upon the incipient stages of Donici’s life but rather on the historical and sociological context in which



the researcher found himself during adulthood, a fact that would play a key role in his decision to become an exile, like many others during the onset of the October Revolution and the instauration of the communist regime. Though rather brief these two sub-chapters, provide a compelling image of Donici’s social standing as a member of a persecuted class whose relocation to Western Europe is portrayed as an act

of necessity rather than choice.

A more detailed look into the life of Donici is presented starting with the section titled “Landowner, Turned Anthropologist,” as it reveals, through an etymological study of his surname, not only the family’s possible Serbian roots but also their extensive connections to various noble lineages such as the Basarab dynasty and the Cantacuzino, Sturza, and

Basarab-Brâncoveanu aristocratic families. Though not revisited by the author later in the biography, this particular information casts a new light upon the severity of the persecution which the Donicis have endured and which is further expanded upon in a later part of the book ("Memories") by the inclusion of two particular incidents which portray the separate escapes of Donici and his wife.

The following paragraphs are dedicated to discussing facts pertaining to the earlier part of the researcher's life, such as his upbringing as an orphan under the tutelage of a priest, an event which Dunant theorizes must have played a significant role in the psychological formation of Donici, explaining his propensity to remain self-sufficient regardless of his circumstances. His meeting of and subsequent marriage to Alvina Macalester, an American-Scottish woman whose own biography is briefly explored by Dunant, is also concisely discussed as the author proceeds to focus upon Donici's religious orientation as a believer in theosophy, culminating with the researcher's relocation to Geneva, after the October Revolution, following his inability to retrieve the family's land taken during the revolt.

Nevertheless, Donici's decision to emigrate is considered sensible by Dunant who explains that this would represent the climatic event which will influence Donici's life, as it will facilitate his meeting with renowned Swiss researcher Eugène Pittard, as well as his involvement in the Ethnographic Museum of Geneva, which will ultimately become his life's work. Considerable importance is attributed to Donici's and Pittard's relationship during the ensuing paragraphs, as Dunant expands upon their initial mutual

respect for each other and their competence as researchers before revealing Pittard's decision to distance himself from Donici and replace him with Marguerite Dellenbach, his assistant and later successor as director of the museum.

The subsequent paragraphs are thus focused upon Donici's life after his retirement from the museum, the severity of the financial crisis of the 30s and its impact upon him and his family, as well as his developing health issues during his final years. Describing his death as "quite, as silent as the grave" (p. 26), Dunant manages to expertly accentuate the tragic nature of Donici's life as a man whose external circumstances have ultimately led to his exclusion from not only the majority of the Ethnographic Museum of Geneva's chronicles, but from, most importantly, Romanian and Moldovan history as well. For, though Donici's contributions to the field of anthropology are still valuable, he continues to remain in "the shadows" of Pittard, Dellenbach and the historical events that have fundamentally dictated his life and career.

It is for this particular reason why Dunant's study of his life ought to be considered an important addition to the scientific world, for it gives prominence to an academic personality who has remained unnoticed for an extended period. Through the author's efforts, Donici's significance is adequately argued for, by virtue of Dunant's decision to include not only lists with the titles of his papers, publications and collaborative undertakings, but also personal photographs and, most importantly, letters written by the researcher and addressed to (presumably) Pittard. What they reveal is a complexity of his character which could not be nor-

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mally portrayed otherwise in a biography, for their subjective appraisal of the situations which Donici underwent force the reader to reevaluate their perception of him and his importance. For, as the researcher himself asks does not “Romania,

like other countries, also need to have in Europe and, particularly, in Geneva – the nerve center of the United Nations, scientists who, through their work, contribute to the good reputation of their country?” (p. 42)

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