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PEDDLERS, PEASANTS, ICONS, ENGRAVINGS: THE PORTRAIT OF THE TSAR AND ROMANIAN NATION-BUILDING, 1888-1916

Abstract

The present contribution examines how, in late-nineteenth-century Romania, a subversive political object transformed the dynamics of nation-building. Brought in by Russian peddlers selling religious icons on transregional routes, engravings of the Russian tsar in peasants' homes attracted the attention of political elites and catalysed top-down attempts at nationalising the peasant majority. By considering a case in which the rural masses were exposed to the "wrong" political symbols before official nationalising and dynastic paraphernalia could reach them, the study homes in on the attempts of both state and church to solve a surprisingly long-standing state of affairs, from 1888 to 1916.¹

Keywords: nation-building, nineteenth century Eastern Europe, cultural history of nationalism

Introduction

What happens when yet-to-be-nationalised masses are exposed to the "wrong" political symbols? How does the symbolic culture of nationalism displace inconvenient, pre-existing allegiances and become normative? And, how is the continued spread of subversive symbols contained and prevented by nation-state-builders? The present paper aims to address these three interrelated research questions by taking as its point of departure the moral panic surrounding the discovery of engravings bearing the likeness of the Russian tsar in peasant homes by Romanian elites at the tail-end of major rural uprisings in 1888, and following the thread of an abiding political anxiety up to Romania's involvement in World War One alongside Russia, in 1916. Brought in by peddlers who met the demand for cheap religious iconography in the Orthodox Balkans, these political images, distributed alongside icons, were seen as proof of imperial attempts to extend Pan-Slavic agitation to a Romance-speaking people,

under the pretext of the tsar's self-proclaimed role as protector of Eastern Christendom.² In the nineteenth century, Russo-Romanian relations were, at best, ambivalent: a Russian protectorate between the 1830s and 1850s impelled state-building and modernization in the Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, but faced the opposition of increasingly nationalist local elites which achieved their union in 1859, whereas Romania's independence, won in the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878, came at the price of Southern Bessarabia's annexation by the erstwhile ally. Indeed, apprehension over Russia's influence was a fairly common concern for politicians.³ However, in 1888, Petersburg appeared to be just as surprised by the peddlers' presence as Bucharest:⁴ the agency of peasants and icon-merchants as subaltern political actors came to shape the policies of states and empires alike, through their patterns of goods consumption.

In an age when the peasantry was equated with the nation itself, the possibility that peasants' identities and affections failed to fit officially prescribed categories troubled Romanian elites. Overwhelmingly illiterate, land-starved and increasingly proletarianised, the peasantry appeared to be susceptible to rumours and uprisings, with a particularly earth-shattering *jacquerie* breaking out in 1907.⁵ Rallying against perceived "national indifference"⁶ and the effects of a "displaced naïve monarchism",⁷ teachers, priests, MPs, and a host of other actors joined in efforts to replace the image of the tsar with that of the legitimate reigning king, thereby explicitly catalysing the very first attempts at nationalising the rural masses. Although efforts to foster a symbolic sphere conducive to the emergence of a desirable "banal nationalism"⁸ continued well into the early twentieth century, extant historiography has remained virtually silent on the topic. And yet, once identified as a subject of inquiry, traces of peddlers and portraits insistently recur across corpora, providing an entry-point for observing the mechanisms of nation-building, as a case-study illuminating elite and popular reactions to a mass-consumed,⁹ subversive political commodity outside its "legitimate" and intended cultural sphere of influence. Likewise, attempts to produce icons that would prevent the demand for those imported by peddlers were also prioritised – emphasizing the role of anxieties as a catalyst, the present paper therefore attempts to sketch a reactive process that aimed to do away with what one might call "objects out of place", and nationalise the private sphere.

Two reigns marked the course of the events we shall deal with here: that of the Prussian-born Carol I (1866-1914), which saw Romania gain

its independence as of 1877-1878, the proclamation of the kingdom as of 1881, and, more generally, the consolidation of the nation-state; and the reign of Ferdinand I (1914-1927), his nephew, who would achieve the maximum territorial expansion of Romania after the Great War, as a co-belligerent of the Entente. While critical secondary literature on the iconography of royal power in the Romanian context remains scant,¹⁰ as opposed to that on Tsarist Russia,¹¹ our focus here will not be on the gradually-expanding reach of national and dynastic portraiture in an urban setting, but rather on the rural hinterland, and the difficulties of reaching it.

The first proposal that this chapter makes, therefore, is to consider Russian icons and engravings as “objects out of place”, from the standpoint of Romanian nation-building elites. With a nod to Mary Douglas’ classical definition of pollution,¹² the problem posed by the physical and symbolic presence of the images was not their existence as such, but by their geographical displacement, which transformed them from legitimate expressions of political and religious devotion into subversive objects. In this sense, Russian icons and engravings were doubly out of place, as far as literate elites were concerned – both in peasants’ homes, and in peasants’ hearts and minds. That these objects enjoyed physical durability, constant visibility, and (in the case of icons) a protected status therefore made their displacement *qua* purification all the more difficult.

In turn, this ties into what we might call a vision of the “well-bounded state container”: for nation-builders, an independent nation-state was presumed to be free from ideological interference competing with its own nationalising project. This also extended to foreign presence more broadly – and, in the Romanian case, one only need think of the anti-Semitic anxieties that framed Jewish presence as nothing short of an “invasion”, or Jewish lobbying for political rights as an infringement upon Romanian sovereignty.¹³ That Russian peddlers and prints could leave their mark throughout the country regularly made observers rhetorically equate the unnerving permeability of the “state container” with its absence altogether: as symbols signalling political allegiance, their presence was taken to de-nationalise the very spaces they inhabited.

To say that all of this ultimately boils down to a study of the material culture of nation-building,¹⁴ however, means we must also include the broader issue of infrastructure. This was a matter of objects being produced, or not; circulating, or failing to circulate. Both in the case of icons and of patriotic engravings, infrastructure determined the disparity between the Russian and the Romanian print industry, the attempts at

setting up a system of distribution, or a human network to enforce the displacement of problematic objects. On a basic level, this chapter can be read as an account of how the production and distribution of political and religious imagery in the service of the Romanian national project navigated infrastructural constraints, and reassembled infrastructures in the process.

Another theme that underpins the present narrative is that of so-called “national indifference”,¹⁵ as a shortcoming perceived by nation-builders on the part of the rural masses. What the presence of Russian objects appeared to foreground was, in fact, a deeper and more complex entanglement between religious affiliation and (non-)national self-description. As we shall see, peasants were sometimes found to be insufficiently invested in “Romanian” as a self-description; the primacy of religious affiliation, in turn, opened the gates for pan-Orthodox solidarity with Russians, further compounded by the perception that the Russian tsar was the protector of Eastern Christendom, and therefore a mightier ally than the (German Catholic) Romanian king in the peasants’ political pantheon. Without disentangling dynastic loyalty-building from nation-building in nineteenth-century Romania, the chapter will highlight how these processes – as well as that of distributing cheap, mass-produced icons – were at least in part reactive, in their attempts to reach the rural majority and displace inconvenient beliefs and artefacts.

This brings us to the final key point that we shall deal with: the semiotic continuum between icons and political engravings. Not only were icons historically, since their very inception as a religious visual language, connected with late Roman and early Byzantine representations of the emperor – or, indeed, deeply connected with the “scenarios of power” of the Romanov court, its legitimation, and public visibility. In our case, icons and political images were, firstly, quite literally brought together by the circumstances of their physical origin and distribution. This meant that, in order to prevent the continued entry of unwanted political imagery, the nation-state and the national church had the converging goal of producing religious images that would satisfy local market demands. Secondly, literate elites feared that peasants would perceive and relate to Russian political imagery in the same devotional manner they venerated icons, especially if peddlers would persuade them to do so. However, this was not simply a category mistake presumably made by the peasants: on their part, nation-builders also occasionally referred to desirable imagery depicting the royal family or the heroes of the Romanian national pantheon while “icon” was also still used as a general term for “image”. Nationalising

religious iconography, on the other hand, remained problematic: apart from stemming the tide of Russian icons as a matter of national import (or, indeed, of Catholic icons as one of dogmatic conformity), the project of reviving a purer “Byzantine” style of iconography while re-integrating local traditions into the process only slowed down the production of iconography for the masses.

Part One: The Portrait of the Tsar

Ever since the mid-nineteenth century, the gradual birth of a nationalised, literate urban stratum meant that patriotic imagery, be it in the form of royal portraiture or historical scenes, began to make its way into the private sphere. The material nature of royal iconography diversified, first with the spread of photographic *cartes de visite*, then with the introduction of modern postcards in urban areas. However, we may also safely note that the visibility of the ruler’s effigy on coins, stamps, matchboxes, or medals (distributed to veterans post-1878) meant that contact with it on the level of everyday life even in rural areas was likely. Still, the focal point of debates concerning our study remained lithographs, as objects with a more permanent and privileged visual presence in the domestic space – and this held just as true for icons, as religious objects whose disposal was an inherently contentious issue. The pioneering entrepreneur most closely associated with patriotic engravings was Col. Dimitrie Pappasoglu (1811-1892), a collector who first began printing them by the end of the 1850s, and who is estimated to have printed a grand total of about one million copies of at least 222 different lithographs, over some three and a half decades of activity.¹⁶ Though also openly advertising his lithographs in the press, Pappasoglu cultivated his connections with central and local authorities,¹⁷ so as to ensure a steady income; indeed, as we shall see, public buildings such as schools and village halls would often be noted to be the only places where royal portraits were visible, into the 1900s. With a keen sense for political developments, a flyer advertising Pappasoglu’s engravings (probably from the 1880s or early 1890s) explicitly encouraged prospective customers to buy them so as to replace “unpatriotic” foreign prints.¹⁸ However, though not included in that list of engravings, advertisements in the contemporary press show that Pappasoglu had also printed a portrait of the Russian imperial family during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, when Romania gained its independence as a co-belligerent of Russia. Just how many were in print or

were sold is not known.¹⁹ What could briefly be a legitimate object depicting a wartime ally could, equally, become an object out of place soon thereafter.

A potential link between the presence of Russian engravings in Romanian homes after 1877-1878 and the presence of Russian troops may be plausible given that the war had seen a massive investment in illustrated prints as a means of information and patriotic entertainment for Russian soldiers on the frontline.²⁰ Even as the war effort and the elation over the country's independence saw a massive spike in the production of patriotic engravings, Romanian anxieties over Russian competition remained constant. By May 1878, newspapers were ablaze with rumours that Russian soldiers had, in some cases, spread the promise that the tsar would bring land reform and do away with the *boyars* – rumours also confirmed, it seems, by archival material.²¹ Throughout the 1880s, scattered references referred to the presence of icons and engravings that had breached the limits of the newly-reinforced, independent state-container. Already in 1881, one agrarian periodical cautioned that Russian icons were sold to unwitting peasants by monks who claimed to have travelled from Jerusalem, under the pretence of collecting alms.²² And, in 1884, folklorist, storyteller and printer Petre Ispirescu (1830-1887) published a travelogue in the prestigious cultural monthly "Convorbiri Literare", chronicling his journeys from Bucharest to the town of Roșiorii-de-Vede in the nearby county of Teleorman, some two and three years earlier. Finding it relatively removed from the influence of the capital, Ispirescu reflected on the permeable nature of what ought to have been a well-bounded state container, for want of infrastructure writ large. The author "crossed himself" upon noticing the overwhelming presence of Russian and Bulgarian images in shops, which gave him the feeling that he was in Bulgaria, rather than in Romania:

Isn't it that our people were left to go astray? (We are speaking here of the inhabitants of Roșiorii-de-Vede and its surroundings), with Bulgarian icons, images and portraits in their homes. They do not read, for they have nowhere to buy their books from. They are abandoned by the heart of the country, torn from its ribs near the shores of the Danube, as they are not directly linked to the capital by either roads or a postal service. What can they do, but buy whatever they find, wanting to decorate their shops and houses? Romanians have fought a rather glorious war – where are the images that might depict their glorious deeds? Russian and Bulgarian icon-merchants roam our country with various icons and portraits – where are our own? Statesmen and master painters, it seems, are too great to think

of their poor people. Whatever they do is for the relatively well-heeled (*poporul mai spălăţel*); the plebs (*mojicimea*) are for the Russians and Bulgarians to mould, to civilise – as they say.²³

Roads, mail, books, engravings: absence and distance prevented the nation from reaching its normative potential of self-understanding. Moreover, the idea that the people were somehow not fully aware of their own role in the War of Independence, or even that the presence of Russian lithographs depicting the war prevented a more national interpretation, would become a recurring theme in years to come.

Apart from one MP's speech on the dangers of foreign iconography during debates on the general import tariff in 1886²⁴, it was only in the wake of 1888, however, that icon-merchants became a topic for public debate, in the attempt to make sense of that year's jacquerie.²⁵ Mainly restricted to southern Wallachia and centred on villages around Bucharest, the uprising was brief (March to April) and the dissent quelled by army troops, with some loss of life and many an arrest. The exact cause of the uprising was a political bone of contention, as the most unruly villages were not necessarily seen as particularly impoverished. What appeared to be the extension of inter-partisan strife at the end of a twelve-year spell in government by the Liberal party nevertheless quickly led to a moral panic surrounding potential Russian involvement. After all, the precedent recently set by Russia's involvement in Bulgarian politics and its attending crises²⁶ made Romanian politicians feel they were caught in the crossfire, and note similarities and connections.²⁷ To note once again, Petersburg appeared to be just as surprised by the peddlers' presence as Bucharest:²⁸ Official Liberal newspapers gave some credence to the rumours,²⁹ dissident Liberals did not fully exclude their plausibility,³⁰ while the so-called Radicals oscillated between acceptance and denial.³¹ As per the official reports submitted by the commanding officers in charge of the uprising's armed repression, however, foreign subversion was scarcely even alluded to – instead, the evils of the (outgoing) administration and the non-enforcement of legal frameworks that regulated the buying of land and economic relationships between peasant and landowners were highlighted, as was the purported influence of the Socialist movement.³² Still, as the reports examined for the collective amnesty of arrested peasants noted, some had indeed demanded that money purportedly sent by Russia be distributed for their benefit.³³ While the incoming government would be helmed by a young Conservative faction, the *Junimists*, the mouthpiece

of the Conservative party proper, partly accepted that the portrait of the tsar had something to do with all of this. If the market would have been adequately stocked with religious engravings produced locally, then the peddlers – be they deliberate agents of Russian expansionism or not – would simply not have had buyers.³⁴ Such was the line of thought espoused by Mihai Eminescu (1850-1889), for instance, now pantheonised as Romania's national poet, but equally appreciated as a fierce pamphleteer in his time:

The portrait of the emperor may prove a problem, but he is not immortal, and once he has gone the way of all flesh, his graven image will mean nothing to the next generation, who will forget his name and treat him as a senseless figment of the past. By contrast, icons will persist for as long as we keep our faith, and it is in the name of this faith that we were once occupied by the Russians [...]. We are certain that, were we not of the same creed as the Russians, not one of their icon-merchants would be in our midst. It is therefore both relatively inexpensive and of the essence that we set up an industry of our own.³⁵

This article, part of an exchange with a Liberal notable who had become one of the main advocates of interpreting the uprising as a consequence of Russian meddling, made the point that a demand for icons was what kept the door open for further troubles on the horizon.

As we shall see in the second half of our argument, the Orthodox Church hastened to rectify this. But, at the same time, so did the state begin actively looking into how peddlers might be stopped. A brief diplomatic scandal erupted at the end of 1888, when the expulsion of some icon-merchants soured Russian-Romanian relations, to the effect that the orders were revoked soon after.³⁶ Still, finding the right means of dealing with peddlers and their wares remained a priority. As published in the Official Gazette on 26 June 1891, regardless of their specific medium, printed material “depicting religious subjects (icons) or portraits and scenes from foreign history” were banned as part of the custom tariff regulating imports to Romania,³⁷ an amendment already proposed by the Chamber of Deputies committee before the final vote, under a Conservative government.³⁸ This was a blanket ban, which applied to all countries, even if its origins were relatively obvious. If high art was exempt from this, as one later comment by the maverick Liberal orator Nicolae Flevea (1840-1920) put it, “what is at hand, gentlemen, is trade in ordinary icons.

It was decided that they be prohibited. Very well. The credulousness of the public, of the peasant, was abused, and emperors, absolutist lords, despots whom we mustn't admire as we would admire God were sold as His image. [...] But who may judge artistic value?".³⁹ This, then, was coded as a class dimension of aesthetics – naïve visual consumption was a mark of peasant “credulousness”, finding a strong connection between how a peasant might relate themselves to an icon and a political image.

It was in the 1890s, and even more visibly in the early 1900s, that an interest in both making sense of and getting across to the peasantry manifested itself on the part of literate elites. The vanguard of the movement were rural teachers, who became increasingly aware of their status as a professional corps, publishing an ever-growing number of periodicals discussing pedagogy, village life, and their mission as a force for nation-building. Perhaps the most interesting corpus produced by teachers was a series of village monographs published in the early 1900s, which highlighted the perceived importance of the royal pair's visual presence in peasant households. Part of the questionnaire for compiling monographs, published by the Ministry of the Interior in 1903, and addressed to teachers, priests, mayors or notaries in the countryside, explicitly demanded that would-be authors investigate the extent to which royal portraits were available in a given village, and, with similar intent, determine whether the linguistic/conceptual apparatus of self-identification with the “motherland” as a superordinate category existed among the peasantry.⁴⁰ On both accounts, however, a number of monographs made plain that national and dynastic affiliation were not yet achieved – or, in current analytic parlance, that signs of national indifference were still pervasive. As one monographer was surprised to see, “whatever images [peasants] might have in their homes oddly enough do not depict the royal family; I have seen the portraits of: the late queen of England, the late king of Serbia, etc.” and only far more rarely the portraits of the legitimate sovereigns, perhaps indicating the usage of newspaper clippings for home decoration.⁴¹ Was this simply a means to fulfil a need for beautifying one's home, or did the presence of such images also fulfil some apotropaic role, in the same sense that icons did? In any event, to claim that acceptable royal portraits were common in a given village appears to have been a rarity.⁴² In one village, apart from the mayor's office and the local school, only one royal portrait could be found.⁴³

Peasants, however, offered a simple explanation: in the village of Văleni, Olt county, no images of the king or heir apparent existed outside

the village hall on account of their supposedly steep price: “we have our King and our Prince on matchboxes, Sir”,⁴⁴ the author noted that the peasants replied, which shows that, on the other hand, the everyday presence of royal likenesses on mundane objects did no go unremarked upon. Indeed, as another author opined, the peasants merely lacked access to the proper imagery, which they favoured over that brought in by “those foreign peddlers of portraits who roam the villages and sell various printed cloths to our peasant women, bearing all manner of faces, save for those of our great and glorious king, which the peasant would more gladly buy, as it is more beautiful. Whenever peasants come across a postcard with queen Elisabeta, princess Maria and her young children, they cannot admire them enough, finding them so interesting and beautiful.”⁴⁵ Another monographer who noted the absence of royal portraits lauded their potential pedagogical effects in terms of the personal (even gendered) connection that they could cultivate between male and female peasant-folk and king and queen, respectively – but also spoke of how “nevertheless, the face of His Highness looks at the peasant from every penny with which he pays his dues; that face speaks gently of [the virtues of] work, thrift, and steadfastness, as if captured by some masterful hand at the very moment when it uttered a maxim: *if the peasant has money, then everyone has it, too.*”⁴⁶ These, then, were the very foundations of everyday nationalism and dynastic sentiment – or at least so they were hoped to be.

The trouble was, however, that peasants so often evinced contradictory and, from the standpoint of local elites invested in normalising national self-identification, pernicious beliefs when it came to defining themselves as a nation apart. Thus, in the village of Priboeni-Muscel, peasants rarely referred to a motherland (*patrie*) on an abstract level, “but rather merely ‘country’ [*țară*], ‘Wallachia’ [*Valafie – sic!*].” What was even more worrisome was the dilution of the privileged national ethnonym in common parlance: “they say *rumân* instead of ‘human’; if they see anyone of any nation or creed fallen on hard times, they will help them by saying that, ‘the poor fellow’s a *rumân*, too’, or a ‘Christian’, or ‘a *rumân*’s flesh’”.⁴⁷ While peasants in the village used Russians as the subject of negative proverbs, the same teacher wrote, “some show sympathy toward the Muscovites, or at least the vain belief that ‘the whole world will fall under the Muscovite, when there shall only be one flock and one shepherd’”.⁴⁸ Or, as another teacher noted, literate peasants or those who had served in the army, while “incapable of conceiving the abstract notion of a motherland, understand their country from a geographic and ethnic

point of view"; still, "what one cannot get out of their heads is their belief in the Russians. 'They are of the same faith', they say; and having served on the same side in 1877 only strengthens this conviction".⁴⁹ Still other villagers, in the Wallachian county of Prahova, held that "the Russians are thought to be our brothers, for 'they believe in the same God and cross themselves in the same way'; or even better than us in the eyes of God, since the Muscovite crosses himself at all times, whenever he eats or drinks. When told that the Russians are not their friends, [peasants] are confused, as 'Russians have always been on our side'".⁵⁰

Several different interrelated problems become apparent here. One is the ambiguity of self-classification along national lines; another is Russophilia as a consequence of shared religious belonging – yet another, however, is the mention of a "shepherd" and a "flock". This was a direct reference to an apocalyptic belief, likely drawn from an eighteenth century philo-Russian Greek prophetic book which had long enjoyed a broad circulation across the Balkans: the so-called prophecy of Agathangelus.⁵¹ Not only had this text, which predicted the liberation of Constantinople and all Eastern Christendom by the Russians, been present through a number of Romanian manuscripts and printed editions well into the mid-nineteenth century,⁵² but contemporary observers also alleged that priests would sometimes continue to reference it in church.⁵³ As a more elaborate re-telling had it, a final showdown between the Antichrist and the prophets in Constantinople did not end with the return of Christ in glory, but with "the Russian rising from Russia, conquering Constantinople (*Țarigradu*), and only then will there one true flock and shepherd be".⁵⁴

So, what could be done to root out the influence of peddlers, portraits, or pan-Orthodoxy as pro-Russian sentiment? From the standpoint of infrastructure, much was owed to the joint initiatives of trailblazing Minister of Instruction Spiru Haret (1851-1912) and royal confidant Ioan Kalinderu (1840-1913), head of the Crown Estates and subsequent president of the Romanian Academy. The rise of a complex pedagogical practice of engaging the peasantry in the early 1900s combined evening sittings (*șezători*), village theatres, conferences, and more. The *șezători*, for instance, drew upon the folk custom of communal work and storytelling, often gendered and seasonal, but reinvented as a means of cultivating/collecting folklore, handicrafts, and national education. As noted by one female teacher from the Moldavian village of Lipovăț in 1916, this provided her with the occasion of noticing the presence of lithographs depicting the Austro-Hungarian imperial family in peasant households, which she

had the chance of not only preaching against in the course of subsequent *șezători*, but also actively replace by paying for some fifty engravings of the royal family out of her own pocket, with a further twenty donated by another teacher from the village school.⁵⁵

The barrier of literacy proved a problem. Thus, a three-volume popular history in which the evils of Russian occupation were explained for the benefit of the peasant readership could not have the broad reach of the visual and the oral.⁵⁶ As such, village theatres, also set up at the joint initiative of Haret and Kalinderu, involved peasant children for the pedagogical benefit of both themselves and their illiterate parents in the audience. Thematically, plays also broached the subject of popular Russophilia, and the evils of foreign portraits. For instance, one such production, “Our Merchants” (*Negustorii noștri*), set in a Moldavian town overrun by a gallery of foreign rogues – Turks, Jews, and Greeks – also featured the Russian Izot the Icon-Merchant. Symptomatic of broader anxieties surrounding the absence of an ethnically-Romanian merchant class,⁵⁷ the play featured a wily salesman from the west-Wallachian region of Oltenia, seen as a bastion of Romanian traders:⁵⁸ seeing Izot selling a portrait of the tsar as an icon of St. Nicholas to a crowd of peasants and crossing himself before it, the Oltenian interjected, warning that it was only good for kindling, and that the fate of de-nationalised Bessarabian Romanians ought be a stark reminder of Tsarism and its evils. “Remember to tell all others who have such devilish icons in their homes to cast them into the fire”, the protagonist suggested, encouraging his on-stage and off-stage audience to replace them with portraits from the emerging national-historical pantheon, “but especially those of His Highness, Carol, who is our king and our parent”.⁵⁹

Conferences also played a part in responding to the perceived Russian menace: for example, one teacher in the westerly county of Gorj used a conference to encourage peasants to report the presence of “charlatans” who supposedly circulated petitions to the tsar demanding land – “what has this got to do with Romania? We have our own king, with whom we have conquered our independence, and under whose reign we will also conquer our economic progress”.⁶⁰ It was not much later that, in the course of an uprising in the nearby town of Slatina, caused by the failed election of an outsider candidate who allegedly carried an icon in his overcoat in order to encourage voters to pledge their support by swearing on it, peasants were reported to invoke the coming of former ruler Alexandru Ioan Cuza’s (1859-1866) son and Russian aid – “to no avail did the county

prefect and the prosecutor tell them that we are a free country, with its own king – ‘it may be so’, answered the peasants, ‘but the Muscovite is mightier.’”⁶¹ And, even though the Great Peasant Uprising of 1907 was marked by a host of other tropes (such as that of “students” as subversive agents), talk of secret orders for land redistribution sent by the tsar were also occasionally recorded.⁶² Thus, the promise that historical engravings would soon be distributed through schools made another teacher in the same county reflect on the “imminent danger” that foreign portraits represented: “our most imperious duty that we spare no effort in casting out philo-Russian sentiment and picture from the peasant’s home and heart.”⁶³

One decisive first step towards grappling with such folk beliefs was taken with the establishment of the quasi-official “*Steaua*” (*The Star*) society in 1900, involving the likes of Haret and Kalinderu. While the primary goal of the institution was that of providing cheap and adequate reading material to villagers, with some seven titles totalling 280,000 copies already printed by 1903, the report published in that year also proudly announced that “work toward printing the portraits of their Majesties, artfully designed [...] has already begun, so as to be especially distributed throughout the countryside, with a view to replacing foreign portraits and icons”.⁶⁴ This, quite openly, was an admission of how a major attempt at reaching the village with the visual culture of dynastic loyalty functioned as a reactive, corrective measure. In practice, distribution was facilitated by awarding portraits as prizes for contests or school ceremonies.⁶⁵ By 1913, however, the yearly report of the society noted that, while it planned to expand its repertoire of patriotic prints with a number of historical figures, it had already incurred some debts with the printing of royal portraits which it had still failed to sell, noting that the price of half a *leu* was already too steep for the public.⁶⁶ In 1915, “*Steaua*” could pride itself with some 47 titles totalling 736,000 copies, and some 111,000 copies of engravings depicting the royal couple, the heirs to the throne, and the medieval Moldavian ruler Stephen the Great – though not yet with a dedicated network of distribution for sale in villages.⁶⁷

Private initiatives also addressed the issue of production and distribution. One example would be the popular edition of “*Neamul Românesc*” (*The Romanian Nation*), a periodical published by nationalist historian Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940), as part of his bid to gain political traction at the head of the anti-Semitic Nationalist-Democrat Party. For instance, playing upon the recent interest in Stephen the Great (1433-1505, r. 1457-1504) that was catalysed by his country-wide commemoration

in 1904 as something of a holy figure, on the four hundredth anniversary of his passing, Iorga published a text in 1910 pleading that priests begin celebrating him in church as a saint in earnest. The portrait reprinted in the same number came with the caption: "Stephen the Great, whom you may count amongst the saints", which, in the original Romanian (*îl puteți pune în rând cu sfinții*) read ambiguously enough to also suggest that the physical image could, indeed, be placed amongst icons.⁶⁸ Indeed, subsequent numbers would speak in similar terms of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, whose statue was soon to be inaugurated in Iași:

It is fitting and even necessary, brothers, that the portrait of Cuza Vodă not be absent from anyone's home, and, just as holy icons must be in every home, so too, must be the portrait of this good prince who is holy to us. I know that many among you have in your households the portraits of people foreign to our nation and country, whom you do not even know. Abandon them, for if a foreigner saw them, they would not believe you are Romanians; and replace them with those of our princes, but especially with those of Cuza and his right-hand-man, [prime-minister Mihail] Kogălniceanu [1817-1891], who was like a brother to him.⁶⁹

Was capitalising on the popular affection for the two architects of the Land Reform of 1864, which had ended the *corvée* and granted land to the peasantry, a form of subtle anti-dynasticism? Not necessarily: the presence of Carol I among the peasantry at the unveiling of Cuza's statue in 1912 was connotated as a form of two-way legitimisation.⁷⁰ On Iorga's reading, this was more a matter of fostering a living cult of national heroes as a means of raising political awareness among the peasantry than one of combatting the actively pernicious influence of foreign prints. As an advert for the 1913 edition of Iorga's full-colour "Romanian's Cultural Calendar" (*Calendarul cultural al românului*) put it: "the beauty of its colourful images has already left its mark in Romanian homes, otherwise so full of foreign or unintelligible (*neînțelese*) portraits."⁷¹

In quick succession, however, things changed dramatically: the deaths of Carol I and Elisabeth, in late 1914 and early 1916, respectively; a rapprochement with Russia as of early 1914; a decision to refrain from entering the war that was now raging throughout Europe, upheld by king Ferdinand until the summer of 1916. Two articles published for the benefit of a peasant readership in the widely distributed "Albina" (*The Bee*) (also under the patronage of Kalinderu for much of its existence) are,

however, revealing of continuities. The first, by writer Dumitru Teleor (1858-1920), broached the subject of "Russian Commerce in Romania" in May 1914, before the official visit that the Russian imperial family would pay the Romanian royals in the port city of Constanța. On the one hand, the article began by encouraging its readers to interpret the visit as "a great honour that the mighty Emperor bestows upon us, with felicitous consequences for our country"; on the other hand, revisiting the history of Russian-Romanian commercial relations, the author noted, among other things, the importance of "icons, on wood and paper, which are still very much sold at fairs even today, as are shoddily chromolithographed images, representing the war [of Independence], the family of the tsar, the sovereigns of Europe, and many more."⁷² Not only do we find here that, as late as 1914, icons and portraits were still very much present in Romania, but, we may equally note, their implicitly undesirable presence had now to be reconciled with the new role that Russia promised to play as Romania's partner.

A second article, published two years later, just before Romania's political leadership resolved to join the Entente's war effort, paid homage to the late Carol I and sounded a call for patriotism in a climate of fevered expectation. Its author, S. T. Kirileanu (1879-1926), who also published a popular tract on the life of the late royal pair for a peasant readership under the auspices of the Crown Estates,⁷³ titled his article: "The Icon of King Carol I". A short, apocryphal story was meant to drive home the importance of the royal portrait, by ventriloquising Carol himself. After the War of Independence, Carol found himself at the monastery of Rarău, on a tour of the country, where a soldier accompanying him found a royal portrait painted by a monk in the form of an icon, if one imperfectly painted. To this, the king's reply was imagined to be: "If only one such portrait, even as bad as this, were in every home, I would find it of great comfort!". The conclusion, as spelled out by the author, was that "these were wise words, for in many households one sees the portraits of Russian tsars or tsarinas, of the Bulgarian tsar [Southern Dobruja had been annexed from Bulgaria in 1913], and even of the Ottoman sultan; and our royal family hardly ever receives its place of honour on householders' walls. Just as we have to have portraits of our parents and our dearly beloved, so too must the portraits of our country's fathers not be absent from our homes."⁷⁴ Not only was a connection made between icons, family photographs, and royal portraiture – but, as an admission of what was yet to be fully achieved, some almost thirty years since an uprising had brought the issue to the

fore, the people were still called upon to fully appreciate the importance of the *correct* visual markers of dynastic loyalty and national belonging.

Part Two: The Quest for National Icons

The other half of our story is that of how the Romanian Orthodox Church attempted to displace foreign icons from (peasant) believers' homes, as objects that were equally perceived to be out of place, from both a religious and a national standpoint. Both Church and state underwent a parallel process of consolidation in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the latter often managing to impose fundamental organisational and financial measures on the latter. Gaining autonomy from the Patriarchate of Constantinople along national lines, the Church enjoyed a privileged position within the Romanian state, given that the majority of ethnic Romanians were also Orthodox. Even as the state's financial support was inconstant, the number of churches and priests in decline, and monastic life greatly diminished in the wake of the secularisation of land holdings in 1863, the high clergy appear to have mostly been willing partners in the state's nation-building programme.⁷⁵ And, as of the 1890s, the emergence of a growing number of associations and periodicals marked the mobilisation of the lower clergy as a category willing to make itself heard: discontent with financial difficulties, and occasionally with its marginal role in the decision-making process of the Church as a whole, were doubled by a sense of mission, both in spiritual and nation-building terms. Indeed, this strongly resembles the case of the teaching corps, as mentioned above.

As omnipresent religious objects, both in church and in the homes of believers, the visibility and ritual importance of icons meant that they had the potential to become a source of contention. In the wake of 1888, foreign icons were thus considered by the clergy to be, on the one hand, as subversive of national sentiment as the foreign portraits alongside which they entered the household, and, on the other hand, detrimental to the aesthetic and religious sentiment of believers. While contemporary debates surrounding the idea of national essence in Romanian art or what exactly could qualify as a sensible return to a "Byzantine" heritage in a religious context lie beyond the remit of the present study, let us nevertheless note here that constant reference was indeed made to the "national" pedagogy that icons could propagate, and that the clergy, too, saw a connection

between religious and political iconography, as we shall now see. Indeed, from its very inception in the later Roman/early Byzantine period, Christian religious iconography partly found its model and justification by analogy to the iconography of imperial power.⁷⁶ This is not to argue for a reductionist interpretation of any icon as inherently political, however, but merely to highlight once more the potential permeability of two adjacent symbolic fields: that which was considered to be foreign to the normatively “national” had to be identified and excluded from the visual repertoire of symbolic presence. In Russia, too, similar debates marked religious and artistic debates throughout the period, with an added anxiety surrounding the proliferation of mechanically-printed icons as an innovation that deepened the aesthetic and dogmatic problems already long since posed by mass-produced painted icons.⁷⁷ There, too, an official interest in codifying and standardising the representation of the sacred made itself felt, and an ample body of literature has investigated the dynamics linking popular iconic devotion, the reaction of ecclesiastic authorities’, and the production of iconography.⁷⁸ By contrast, the circulation of cheap Russian icons outside of the Empire has been far less documented,⁷⁹ and even less could be said of attempts at historicising popular devotion in the Romanian context.

Still, traces of Russian icons making their way into Romanian lands do appear starting with the seventeenth century, first as luxury items,⁸⁰ and, by the early eighteenth century, as more affordable wares.⁸¹ By the end of the century, in fact, Russian icon-merchants would be a source of concern for imperial authorities in Transylvania on account of their potential involvement in peasant uprisings.⁸² Finally, one continues to find disparate references to the presence of Russian peddlers in Romanian lands well into the nineteenth century;⁸³ their presence, one might conclude, had long been a fact of life time in the Principalities.

What is certain, however, is that the second half of the nineteenth century was marked by a relative dearth of affordable icons on the Romanian market. While domestic production of painted, wooden icons is recorded into the 1860s, listed objects in Romanian museums are typically examples of religious art destined for church, rather than domestic use.⁸⁴ One famous icon, the purportedly self-painted and wonder-working “Prodrumița”, was a major object of interest beginning with 1863: made for the recently-established Romanian Athonite monastery of Prodrumu, a host of miracles were associated with it, beginning with its inception, which transcended the efforts of the local icon-painter commissioned

to depict the Virgin. As a pamphlet edited by Maj. Pappasoglu in 1867 suggested, this icon was worthy of being photographed along with its monastery, and prints could be distributed (to serve as icons, no doubt) across the country. Ever the entrepreneur – but also pious enough a figure to compile a proposal for the icon’s grand reception on a tour of Romania in the same year⁸⁵ – Pappasoglu estimated that a public subscription could cover the costs of a photographic expedition/pilgrimage, with the subtext that he would happily undertake the printing – which, it seems, never came to pass.⁸⁶

By that point already, the (presumably small) output of printed icons from the printing presses of Neamț monastery in Moldavia was also dwindling, given state efforts to root out the strong Russian presence felt there;⁸⁷ a similar decline was noted at the monastery of Sucevița, also in Moldavia.⁸⁸ At the same time, contemporary documents also mention the penetration of Greek prints or Transylvanian icons painted on glass, the latter seen as aesthetically and dogmatically unsatisfactory given their naïve style⁸⁹ – but also that Wallachian monasteries nevertheless offered Transylvanian icon-merchants lodging on their journeys.⁹⁰ Thus, just whether or not these were objects out of place is debatable; still, allegations that Russian prayer-books and religious objects entered the country with subversive intent were also made toward the end of that decade.⁹¹

More generally, after the secularisation of monastic holdings in 1863, many surviving monasteries were reduced to the status of mere churches, which must have also played a part in diminishing the availability of icons. Of 141 monasteries still documented in a report drafted in 1890 for the Ministry of Religious Cults and Public Instruction, only ten nunneries could pride themselves with textile handicrafts, one monastery with monks who practiced woodworking, textiles, and shoemaking, and only the monks at Ciolanul in Buzău county were explicitly mentioned to have icon-making as a constant activity, alongside woodwork.⁹² In sum, given the absence of domestic alternatives, the growing output of printed material in the Russian Empire could easily find an outlet on the Romanian market – and, alongside it, heterodox icons, which posed a separate dogmatic difficulty, but were most often mentioned in the same breath.

Thus, even before foreign icons and historical prints became prohibited items in 1891, the church began calling for an end to foreign encroachment. As an article published after the risings in October 1888 in the official church monthly cautioned, “there is no Romanian home without its icon. But where can [believers] buy them from? Certainly not

from our renowned painters, as this would be expensive and insufficient [in terms of output]. And, besides, a Romanian has, in fact, some three or four icons in their household. So as to fulfil this Christian need, merchants foreign to our people, Russians or Hungarians, manufacture icons which [are destined to] meet the needs of our peasant in particular. This, we must all know, means that the artistic taste of our peasant, and therefore of our nation, is altered; [...] with the destruction of national iconography, a taste and ambition for being Romanian is also destroyed.”⁹³ The connection between the peasant as the most representative, yet also most vulnerable part of the nation was clearly made, as was that between the politics of religious aesthetics and normative modes of national belonging: the problem to be solved was that of logistics.

Some one year later, the Orthodox Church Synod resolved to issue a “Decision on Icons, Architecture, Painting and Ornaments in Churches Throughout the Country”, as voted on 22 November 1889 – guidelines had to be established before production could begin.⁹⁴ As has been rightfully remarked, this decision was in part driven by a long-standing general discontent with how, for at least half a century by that point, influences in church art had been overly Westernising, with little positive consensus on what exactly a return to more dogmatic “Byzantine” aesthetics might entail in practice.⁹⁵ However, mural painting and architecture were not the sole focus of the Synod’s decision: icons in domestic settings were of equal importance. Bemoaning the “great influx of various foreign icons which have flooded the country from all corners”, this was a rallying call against Russian imports as it was against Catholic images, most likely brought in from Austria-Hungary via other networks of peddlers and fairs. Bishops were therefore tasked with enforcing dogmatic conformity within their jurisdictions, and “make priests receive for consecration in their churches only those icons which are approved and recommended by ecclesiastic authorities, or made in the workshops of Romanian painters which are known to and vouched for by at least two or three members of the higher clergy. Icons that have not been consecrated as per the ritual of our Church will gradually be removed from Christian homes through our priests’ moral influence, recommending approved ones in their place”. Mayors, too, were to be involved in policing the sale of religious objects within their jurisdiction, so as to ensure the monopoly of local parish churches on their distribution. With severe penalties in place for the clergy in case of disobedience, this was something to be taken seriously.⁹⁶ The emphasis on state-church cooperation and on the need to privilege the national over

the foreign were openly emphasized, as was the involvement of clergymen of all stations. As consecrating an icon for domestic use required keeping it in church for some forty days,⁹⁷ priests had time enough to detect those that failed to conform to the regulations.

The first solution proposed after 1889 was that of using four icon models made by the Socec printing emporium, designed by the painter Jean-Jules-Antoine Lecomte du Nouÿ (1842-1923), who had notably worked with his brother, architect André Lecomte du Nouÿ (1844-1914) on the restoration of the cathedral in Curtea de Argeș. As the Synod noted on 20 November 1889, this had been encouraged by the Junimist Minister for Cults and Instruction, Titu Maiorescu (1840-1917, better known as a literary critic), during his tenure between March 1888 and March 1889; if the religious figures depicted in the icons had the fault of being somewhat too Western and “blonde”, the images were nevertheless fitting, at least as a stopgap measure.⁹⁸ In the interim, however, other priests still had to catch up with decisions of the Synod. Thus, from 1892 to 1894, circulars sent by the upper clergy in the southerly county of Romanaiți insisted that “heavy punishments await those who continue to accept foreign icons for consecration in church; only those edited by Mr. Socec and approved by the Holy Synod are allowed”.⁹⁹ After some inspections were carried out, another circular stressed that foreign vestments and textiles also be banished from church use, that the royal family be properly mentioned in church, and called for zero tolerance for foreign icons at home and in church.¹⁰⁰ In the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional province of Dobruja, the local bishop made a point of carrying out and publicising a tour of his inspections from the autumn of 1892, chiding local communities for both unsuitable mural paintings¹⁰¹ and foreign icons, cautioning that “keeping them in church allows for the introduction of heresy and other harmful tendencies.”¹⁰²

By 1895, church authorities resolved to take matters into their own hands, again on dogmatic, aesthetic, and “national” grounds, by planning to open a lithograph section at the Church Book Printing Office.¹⁰³ The problem, however, was that printing icons would immediately prove financially unviable for church authorities, not least because paper had to be imported, and tariff deductions were inadequately small.¹⁰⁴ Still, in 1897, when production was still ongoing, the Synod saw fit to reject a further offer of some 30,000 icons at a tenth of a *leu* apiece from Socec & Co., as they had neither the money nor the willingness to cede their new *de facto* monopoly. Even if their own first print run had been somewhat

unsatisfactory, wonderworking icons (including the aforementioned Prodromița) were now suggested as models for a print of Virgin Mary.¹⁰⁵ By 1898, however, the lithographic print shop had run a massive deficit and had failed to distribute much of its production quickly enough,¹⁰⁶ which meant that production had to be suspended indefinitely.¹⁰⁷ It seems that the icons were well-received, however, and the short-lived initiative only strengthened calls for the necessity to drive out “Muscovite and German icons” from Orthodox households.¹⁰⁸

For a number of years, icons were printed on Mt. Athos and imported to Romania.¹⁰⁹ It would be only in 1905 that a petition from Vasile Damian (1857-1915), a church painter who submitted some forty-three sketches for icons to be printed at various sizes, emboldened the Synod to aim toward mass production once more, finally printing some of them in 1910.¹¹⁰ By 1908, an attempt had been made by the Synod to also re-launch local production, by subcontracting the printing to: *Librăria Națională*, or the “National Bookshop”, established in 1904 as a co-operative society set up by a group of teachers and professors, publishing calendars for the rural market and a number of textbooks.¹¹¹ Being granted a monopoly on icon distribution, it was argued, was a sure means for peddlers to also sell books alongside them, which showed that icons were the more familiar and in-demand commodity.¹¹² This was an initiative which signalled the perceived importance of nationalising the trade in religious goods, as lauded by a clerical press anxious with non-Orthodox, or even Jewish salesmen.¹¹³ Heralded as a new chapter though it was, the National Bookshop was ultimately nothing more than a flash in the pan: in 1912, the monopoly was granted to the various clerical societies in the country, for the benefit of orphans and widows.¹¹⁴ The authorised salesmen of the National Bookshop were accused of selling icons to villagers at hugely inflated prices, the wooden frame and glass pane added to the print by no means justifying a mark-up from 1/3 of a *leu* to some 8-9 *lei*, which was roundly denounced as “defrauding” the pious peasant, and in no way an efficient means of displacing foreign competition.¹¹⁵ What was even more aggravating, however, was that around the very same time, the revelation that a shop specialising in Russian products and located in the very building of the Bucharest Chamber of Commerce sold paper, tin, or wooden icons showed just how little enforcement the ban on imports had received.¹¹⁶

Still, it was around the same time that more concrete attempts were made toward reaching a consensus on an iconographic repertoire and

what reconnecting with a Byzantine style might entail. While debates on the latter subject continued to animate the art world,¹¹⁷ the Commission for Historical Monuments (*Comisiunea monumentelor istorice*) budgeted a series of grants for young artists who would tour Italy and Athos in order to gain first-hand experience in Byzantine art,¹¹⁸ and, in December 1910, the House of the Church (an administrative body overseeing church finances set up by Haret) inaugurated a small museum collecting noteworthy historical examples of iconographic art, touted as models for lithographs that could now be sent to the countryside.¹¹⁹ This, finally, allowed the Synod to approve a project regulating iconography, which had first been introduced in 1898:¹²⁰ the image of any individual saint had to be instantly recognisable as such, and a permanent iconographic repertoire containing all such models was established. Looking back on the pre-war efforts at displacing foreign icons, however, a 1920 monograph on the House of the Church concluded with chagrin that much was still left to be done in terms of reaching the houses of believers, all the more so in the context of a newly-expanded Romania.¹²¹

But, finally, what of dynastic loyalty and portraiture more specifically? True, the Orthodox Church was placed in the somewhat awkward position of offering religious legitimation to a royal pair who were not themselves Orthodox; however, as per the dynasty's commitment to raise their descendants in the Orthodox faith (Art. 82 of the 1866 Constitution) and given the privileged position occupied by the Church (Art. 21, respectively), coexistence would become the norm. As such, the country's rulers were mentioned in church prayers, appeared in votive paintings in historical cathedrals whose restoration they financed (such as in Curtea de Argeș or Iași), and publicly took part in all official religious ceremonies.¹²² By the 1880s, the continued resistance of some Romanian Athonite monks against praying for a Catholic king was as scandalous as it was marginal.¹²³ The anti-Catholic sentiment retained by many members of the Orthodox clergy high and low (evident in so many periodicals at the time) was thus, at least in most public contexts, uncoupled from the religion of the king.¹²⁴ Indeed, as a popular catechism published in 1905 by a high-ranking clergyman would make plain, the Romanian Orthodox believer was to "sacrifice their life for faith, country, and king, when circumstances demand it",¹²⁵ and "honour the king as one who is sent by God to rule our country, and know that his power is granted to him by God. Show him filial love, as to a Father of the country who is permanently concerned with our good and our happiness."¹²⁶

This, however, was also accompanied by visual attempts to publicise the image of the royal couple as Christian monarchs and patrons of Orthodoxy. Between mid-1911 and early 1913, the House of the Church sought to distribute a luxury print of the king and queen, kneeling amid the people at the blessing of St. Nicholas cathedral in Iași in 1904. The cathedral, which had been slated for massive renovation since the 1880s, bore a massive votive painting of the extended royal family, including the heirs to the throne, set against that of medieval ruler Stephen the Great, to whom Carol was compared in official literature destined for peasant consumption, given their long reigns and military victories.¹²⁷ The portrait, titled “Before God We Must All Pray”, was suggestive of the link between nationalism, dynastic loyalty, and Orthodoxy – yet there was a problem: as per the repeated orders of the House of the Church, buying it was mandatory, at the relatively steep price of 10 *lei*, which made some disgruntled priests question the urgency of its acquisition, seen as more of a business ploy on the part of the painter, I. Negreanu.¹²⁸ In fact, one circular suggested that payments could be made directly to the painter of the original model, which made still others wary of the monopoly on church goods granted by the House of the Church to the “National Bookshop”.¹²⁹ Order No. 11208/26 April 1912 had recommended the print as “an object of high moral value from a religious and patriotic standpoint”, and Negreanu himself hyperbolically presented it as “the illustration of the most important moment in the history of our Church”, yet – probably in light of priests’ protestations – Order No. 364 issued in June of that year relented on the obligative nature of its purchase.¹³⁰

Several points are in order here. One, its stated goal was precisely that of combining the religious and the patriotic, by capitalising on the connection between the role of the king as a patron of the church and his public performance of piety in a church associated with the national past. Two, the country-wide attempt to ensure the existence of such a print signals that, prior to that moment, no previous attempt of that nature had either been undertaken or had been successful in bringing a visual representation of royal piety to the masses. Three, the lower clergy’s reluctance did not stem from questioning its aesthetic or moral/patriotic value, but from its price and imposition, especially given the money that its designer would make, and its distribution – in short, a whiff of corruption seemed to be in the air. A minor episode, it nevertheless illuminates the difficulties of disseminating imagery, even when the proper backchannels

were in place. Infrastructure and production, semiotic proximity and pedagogical value: all could, contingently, mean little in practice.

Conclusion

This essay has attempted to capture the contingencies of nation-building, as triggered by the presence of “objects out of place”, whose symbolic pollution catalysed a reactive process. As we have seen, however, the logistics of displacement were not always quick to materialise: contingency and structural incapacity dictated the relatively slow pace at which progress could be made. On one level, this has been a story about how perceived national indifference/lack of dynastic loyalty was dealt with, top-down. But, at the same time, it has also highlighted the essential problems that the physical presence of unwanted objects, be they political or religious, were thought to pose – in a sense, how imagining the peasant mind and gaze could fuel the anxieties of literate elites. Subaltern actors such as peddlers and peasants, though almost completely voiceless in the historical record, nevertheless complicated the trajectories of nation-building. As shown across corpora and over some three decades, the importance of narratives’ constant recurrence speaks beyond their non-inclusion in the canonical grand narrative of national(ist) teleology: anxieties, not just triumphs, make history.

NOTES

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- ¹⁶ Ioan Strujan and Constantin Căzănișteanu, *Locotenent-colonel Dimitrie Papazoglu*, Editura Militara, Bucharest, 1972, pp. 107-109
- ¹⁷ Alexandru Istrate, *De la gustul pentru trecut la cercetarea istoriei. Vestigii, călătorii și colecționari în România celei de-a doua jumătăți a secolului XIX*, Editura Universității Alexandru Ioan Cuza, Iași, 2015, pp. 264-272
- ¹⁸ P LII/3 Arhiva Papazoglu, f. 28, *Fond Saint George*, National Library of Romania
- ¹⁹ *România liberă*, 31 July 1877. Let us note as an aside that Pappasoglu also had scientific contacts in Russia; Strujan and Căzănișteanu, *Locotenent-colonel Dimitrie Papazoglu*, pp. 92-94.
- ²⁰ See: Norris, *A War of Images*.
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