

## **Student Associations and Societies of the University of Iași in the Modern Period (1860-1918)**

The issue of the student associations and of the academe in general is very little investigated in Romania. If we can find a number of analyses for the inter-war period, the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> have not drawn the researchers' attention by now, with the exception of the anniversary moments, mainly when the universities' jubilees were in question. In spite of the ideological potential for the left-wing historiography, the topic has only inspired sequential and methodologically rather limited approaches in the period following World War II. More attention was paid to those segments that were able to provide new data or arguments on the students' contribution in the national movement, and particularly in the fight for the unification of the Romanian territories (C.Gh. Marinescu, *Pagini din lupta studențimii pentru Transilvania [Fragments from the Students' Fight for Transylvania]*, in *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie "A.D. Xenopol" Iași*, XVII, 1980, pp. 425-440 and Valeriu Florin Dobrinescu, *Poziția studențimii din Iași față de unele probleme fundamentale ale României moderne [Position of the Students of Iași towards Some Fundamental Problems of Modern Romania]*, in *Hierasus*, 1978, pp. 404-412).

The case of the University of Iași is particularly interesting as much as the investigation of the student associations' topic is concerned. The first university to be established in Romania (in 1860, shortly followed by the University of Bucharest, in 1864), the University of Iași has had a difficult life, being always threatened with the abolishment of different departments or faculties and even with amalgamation with the University of the capital, and therefore with losing its autonomy (see Florea Ioncioaia, *Înființarea și începuturile Universității 1860-1864 [Establishment and Beginnings of the University 1860-1864]*, in Gheorghe Iacob, Alexandru-Florin Platon (eds), *Istoria Universității din Iași [History of the University of Iași]*, Editura Universității "Al.I. Cuza", Iași, 2010, pp. 129-150). In this situation, a role was played by the insufficient number of chairs (so wide epistemological areas were uncovered), the professors' and students' absenteeism, the unsatisfactorily evolution of the intellectual local market and the low number of students, at least for the first two decades.

Established out of rather political reasons, which aimed at compensating the city of Iași for having ceded the status of capital (after the Unification of 1859) and at transforming the old capital of Moldavia into a strong cultural centre, the University of Iași was therefore quite unstable, especially from the point of view of the academic population. While the University of Berlin had, when established, over 250 students and 50 professors, a figure that augmented every year, the institution of Iași had, in 1860, only 107 students, recruited among the pupils of the Academia Mihăileană and of the

Theological Seminary, their number significantly decreasing in the years that followed (in 1863-1864, the institution had only a derisory number of 65 matriculated students, see Leonidas Rados, *Studentii Universității 1860-1914* [*The University Students 1860-1914*], in Gheorghe Iacob, Alexandru-Florin Platon (eds), *Istoria Universității din Iași* [*History of the University of Iași*], Editura Universității “Al.I. Cuza”, Iași, 2010, p. 182). It is true that a role was played by the fact that, out of the four faculties the University had to hold, according to its Statutes, only three actually worked (Law, Philosophy and Theology), because the budget of the Medical School had not been approved by the government, which would impede, by 1878, the actual existence of this school. Moreover, the Theology suffered of an acute lack of professors and students, being abolished at the end of 1864 (see Mihai Mănuță, *Facultatea de Teologie din Iași, 1860-1864* [*Faculty of Theology of Iași*], in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* [*Romanian Orthodox Church*], LXXVIII, no. 9-10, pp. 873-904).

Under these unfavourable circumstances, the student associative spirit was hard to generate, though intentions existed since the very first years, when Professor Simion Bărnuțiu’s personality was a strong glue here; he managed to coagulate around him the first “school” known as the “free and independent faction”, but things did not evolve. The first attempt to found such a society dates back to 1864 and must be related to the suggestions coming from the area of German culture, through the initiatives of the itinerant student Alecu Boteanu, who wished for an association to be created at Iași similar to the one of the Romanian students at the University of Vienna. Because of the conservativeness of the local environment and of the students’ lack of maturity, the procedures are interrupted, and resumed only in 1870-1871. But not even now the efforts that are made do not give the expected results, though a positive example existed at the University of Bucharest, where the students had managed, since 1866, to form a student association. It is only in 1875, a quarter of a century after the foundation of the University, that the students of Iași have a group of their own: the “Students’ Club of the University of Iași” and a slogan (*concordia, labor et spes*).

Although they appeared late and did not enjoy an important number of members, the student associations played a fundamental role in the life of the University of Iași, especially after 1880, the date of the first student strike (see D. Berlescu, *Universitatea din Iași de la 1860 la 1918* [*The University of Iași from 1860 to 1918*], a chapter from *Contribuții la istoria Universității din Iași 1860-1960* [*Contributions to the History of the University of Iași: 1860-1960*], vol. I, București, 1960, pp. 204-208 and Leonidas Rados, *op.cit.*, pp. 207-209), significantly influencing the existence of the students’ mass.

The field is so more interesting as at Iași, the most important Romanian socialist centre of the time, the left influences were counterbalanced by the nationalist spirit, continuously increasing in

intensity at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; the clashes between the two trends were particularly obvious within the student congresses and association meetings, like the Congress of Bârlad (1887), where student representatives of the universities of Iași and Bucharest participated. In the aftermath of the meeting, the authorities, frightened by the socialist and Darwinist conceptions, thought that energetic measures were needed to stop this “harmful ideas”, stopping, in a first phase, the scholars from participating in these meetings.

The whole span between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the next one is marked by the influence of the political factor upon these associations, secretly sponsored by politicians in order to use them as resources in their political actions. The nationalist pushes are received with maximal intensity by the students’ mass, who enthusiastically participate (often without understanding very well what this was all about) in a wide range of movements meant to support the fight for the unification of the territories that were part of foreign states (especially the case of Transylvania) or to oppose the Jews, on the grounds that they “would be eaten by the Yids and assimilated by them”, fears circulated even by some of the University Professors.

An interesting fact is that the Jewish students who did not have Romanian citizenship (that is the great majority of them) did not have the right, according to the law, to participate in these associative student groups. A proposition made by the socialist sympathizers in the Student Congress of Piatra Neamț, for the Jewish students to be allowed to enter these societies, was brutally rejected by the audience, who were yelling “rip it to pieces” (see Constantin V. Vasiliu, *Congresul de la Piatra al studenților universitari. Dare de seamă* [The University Student Congress of Piatra. A Report], București, Lito-tipografia Eduard Wiegand, 1888, pp. 51-52). Yet, the Jewish students establish themselves, in 1894, with some Romanian mates, the “Society of the Medical Students”, which will become, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the field of violent student clashes; the Romanian students will leave the society, one by one, founding another one with the same name.

Things develop and, under the new legal realities and on the authorities’ suggestions, the national student Congress taking place at Iași in 1909 brings a radical change in the organization of the student associations, deciding the creation of the “Academic Centre of Iași” as a branch of the “General Society of the Romanian students”, an organism that was entrusted, in rather vague terms, the exclusivity of the associative organization. Obviously, the nationalist side prevailed in the Centre’s manifestations, as it generally happened in the case of the associations appeared at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which distance themselves from the recent student societies, regarded as “cosmopolite”. Resistance to “the foreigners and the estranged who were fighting to monopolize our means of existence and the powers of our people” (an allusion to the Jews) represented the most valued activity

of the new structures, relegating to second place the specialized education (see Ioan Dinescu, *Scurtă privire asupra activității Societății studenților în medicină români din Iași, de la 1897 la 1912* [A Brief Review on the Activity of the Society of the Medical Students of Iași from 1897 to 1912], Iași, Tipografia Dacia, 1911, and *Studențimea ieșană. Din activitatea „Centrului studențesc-Iași” de la 1909-1912* [The Students of Iași. The activity of the ‘Student Centre’ of Iași], Iași, Tipografia națională I.S. Ionescu, 1912).

Special attention must be paid to the student associations during World War I, when, claiming to be a “new power in the State”, according to the students’ leaders, they insistently asked, for Romania’s military intervention against the Triple Alliance, and the conflicts with the opponents of this direction become more and more violent (Gr.T. Popa, *Din viața universitară. Amintiri, critici și propuneri* [The Academic Life. Memories, Criticism, Propositions], București, Atelierele Adevărul, 1924, pp. 54-56); for instance, the personalities around the cultural magazine of “Viața românească” (especially the Rector C. Stere), were easily labelled as “traitors”.

A history of the student societies in Iași should focus on both the general elements of the academic history, and the influences, harmful most of the time, of the political sphere, through more or less hidden sponsorships, or promises for public positions for the students’ leaders. We should neither ignore the students’ perception of their own groups, of the problems of the country, as well as the students’ and associations’ image in the eyes of their fellow-citizens.

The project has several objectives, perfectly achievable by a small research team for a 24 month period.

1. An inventory of these societies (and, where there is enough information, even an account of their members) and of the main actions of these organizations, from the foundation of libraries, the organization of parties and balls for funds, charitable or educational actions (especially in the villages, where the true Romanian spirit, in its unaltered form was supposed to survive), to the actions of protest, course boycotts and student strikes. This is necessary because some of them had a rather ephemeral existence, with no worthy results (like “Carmen Sylva” or “Dreptatea”), while others managed to survive and to become a partner (an uncomfortable one sometimes, indeed) of the academic authorities.
2. The relations between the student societies of Iași, and the relations with the associations of Bucharest and from abroad. It is interesting to analyse here how much they are connected to the major trends and directions of the regional or European student movements. The research in the

project should reveal whether the contacts with similar associations from abroad were sporadic and limited to the participation in given events and especially in the jubilees of some foreign universities (see the case of the University of Leipzig, which celebrated, in 1909, 500 years of existence), as we believe at the moment, or there were concrete, institutionalized forms of collaboration. Naturally, with the associations of Bucharest there relations were consistent and facilitated by the Romanian academic legislation itself, but even here one should have in view the institutionalized forms.

3. The implication of the associations in the political life, an obvious thing if we analyse their funding by political parties or personalities, and the fact that the former leaders of the student associations, after having finished their mandates, joined the political parties. We are also interested in their position towards the “Jewish issue” and their relations with the Jewish mates.

In order to achieve the project objectives, we have in view a monographic and analytical approach of the student association issue. The documentary research will play a fundamental part, as long as the bibliography for this topic is very limited, almost inexistent. The most important approaches are the following, some of them methodologically outdated or having suffered ideological influences: *Contribuții la istoria Universității din Iași 1860-1960* [*Contributions to the History of the University of Iași*], vol. I, București, 1960, Gh. Platon, V. Cristian, *Istoria Universității din Iași* [*History of the University of Iași*], Iași, 1985, Gh. Iacob (eds), *Universitatea din Iași. De la modelul francez la sistemul Bologna* [*The University of Iași. From the French Model to the Bologna System*], Iași, 2007, Gheorghe Iacob, Alexandru-Florin Platon (eds), *Istoria Universității din Iași* [*History of the University of Iași*], Gheorghe Iacob and Alexandru-Florin Platon, Iași, 2010, Leonidas Rados (editor), *The first female students of the Iasi University. Vol. 1. The Faculty of Letters and Philosophy (1879-1897)*, Iași, 2010.

Methodological suggestions can be borrowed from the works on the universities or student movements abroad, but considering the notable differences, they can only serve as theoretical examples: M. Sanderson, *The Universities in the Nineteenth Century*, London, 1975; L. Vos, *Nationalism and Student Movements: Conceptual Frame-work and a Flemish Case-Study*, in M. Norrback and K. Ranki (eds.), *University and Nation: The University and the Making of the Nation in the Northern Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Helsinki, 1996, pp. 77-87; Lieve Gevers and Louis Vos, *Student movements*, in *A History of the University in Europe, Vol. III: Universities in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries 1800-1945*. Ed. Walter Rüegg. New York, Cambridge

University Press, 2004, pp. 269-337; J.C. Caron, *Généralions romantiques. Les étudiants de Paris et le Quartier Latin*, Paris, 1991; K.H. Jarausch, *Students, Society and Politics in Imperial Germany: The Rise of Academic Illiberalism*, Princeton, 1982, etc.

Fortunately, an important part of the University archives are kept at the National Archives of Iași, where one can consult the collections of “Rectorat/ Rectorate”, “Facultatea de Litere/ Faculty of Letters”, “Facultatea de Științe/ Faculty of Sciences”, “Facultatea de Drept/ Law School”, “Facultatea de Medicină/ Medical School” as well as the students’ personal files, more numerous and better preserved in the cases of the Faculty of Letters and of the Medical School. In the archives of Bucharest there is the collection of “Ministerul Cultelor și Instrucțiunii Publice/ The Ministry of Cults and Public Education”, where we are interested in the files with the correspondence of the University of Iași, and of its faculties and of the different organizations with the Ministry. An extremely important source is the articles or notes from the periodicals and the publications of the time on this topic.

In order to construct an adequate image and to achieve the objectives, an interdisciplinary research is needed, with conceptual suggestions coming from anthropology, sociology and political science. At the same time, the field research is very important where different events took place, student meetings or congresses (for instance, at Piatra Neamț, Ploiești, Focșani, Galați, etc), given that given testimonies that should be registered and interpreted are to be found in the press and the local archives. Furthermore, for each objective and each stage, the provisions of the laws will be taken into account, but we will also resort to memoirs, diaries, which could also include interesting data for our topic.

To achieve objective no. 1, we must extract that data that interest us from the official publication of the University (the Annals of the University of Iași), where data referring to the objectives of interest for *alma mater* are recorded starting with 1895. The archive files could partially complete this picture, both those from the “Rectorate” collection of Iași, and those in the above mentioned collection of the “Ministry of Cults and Public Education” that can be found at Bucharest. Naturally, everything will have to be correlated with the general framework of the academic legislation in Romania regarding the right of association and the norms that were to be observed by the student associations. Each student society needed, in order to exist from a legal point of view, an approval from the University Senate and from the Ministry, a thing certified by the archives. As far as the protest movements were concerned, like the one in 1880, we will also focus on the relation with the socialist movement.

We will then pay attention to the way in which the internal actions and documents of these societies reflect, on the one hand, the students’ interests, and on the other, the major preoccupations of

the Romanian society. We must have in view here the obvious dissonance between their internal statutes and acts and the practical action, as their conduct often exceeded the limits imposed by their own decisions and rulings, while the concern for the improvement of the studying conditions remained an exclusively theoretical provision. We are interested in the image of these societies and of the students in general in the eyes of their contemporaries. In a first phase of analysis, we find out that the student's specific image, a mixture of study and libertinage, is accompanied, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with mainly negative elements, related to the civic and professional irresponsibility of the students associations, who were saying one thing and doing another, in almost all fields.

In order to achieve objective no. 2, research is needed both in the archives and libraries of Iași and Bucharest and in those of the cities where such meetings took place, with an emphasis on the local press and on the files to be found in the collections of the municipalities, institutions that eventually had to approve of the places and dates of these events, files where the possible deviation from discipline or legality committed by the student representatives are registered. Some information is also present in the memoirs or diaries of former students (N. Iorga's case is famous), but this kind of sources need to be dealt with cautiously, for the well-known reasons.

For objective no. 3, an excursion is needed in the history of the political parties and organization, which maintained obvious or hidden relations with the students associations or with their leaders. Things are harder to demonstrate, although the contemporaries openly spoke about it, the archive documents giving way to the information from the press and from the occasional publications, as well as from the memoirs. The students' attachment to the nationalist cause can be analysed if we direct our attention to the actions of such organizations as the "Cultural League of All Romanians", with a big impact on the youth. Along these lines, we should also follow the intensity with which the anti-Jewish trends develop, so powerful at the University of Iași starting with the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We deem it essential, at this point, to get suggestions from the works on the Jewish communities (see Carol Iancu (ed.), *Permanențe și rupturi în istoria evreilor din România (secolele XIX-XX)* [*Permanence and Rupture in the History of the Jews of Romania (19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries)*], București, Editura Hasefer, 2006 and Iancu Brauștein, *Evreii în prima universitate din România* [*Jews in the First University of Romania*], Iași, Editura Dan, 2001).

Naturally, several stages are necessary to successfully end the project, and they correspond to the mentioned objectives. The first stage would last nine months (April 1, 2012 - December 31, 2012) and will end with the fulfilment of the first objective. The second stage would last six months (January 1, 2013 - June, 30 2013) and will concern the fulfilment of objective no. 2. The third stage will last

other nine months (July 1, 2013 March 31, 2014), a time spent to fulfil objective no. 3, to homogenise results and to draw up the monographic study.

A research on the evolution of the student societies will bring immediate suggestions for the field of the University history, of the students, of education and of modern Romanian political life. Very important to us also seems to be the potential contribution to the research of the manner in which students participated in the academic life, the way in which they used to assimilate the academic project. Furthermore, the project will clear up the relations of the associations with the political area and the way in which students responded the imperatives of the national State, a fact that is often stated, but rarely demonstrated or soundly argued.

The project will also cover a lack in the history of the European student associations until World War I, as Romania is the only country where there are no thorough, complete studies in the field.

The conclusions of the project will be useful for the research of the socialist movement in Romania as well, a not quite seriously analysed sphere by now because of the intrusion of the political factor. From the standpoint of the relations between the associations of Iași and those abroad, the whole field of the history of student movements would benefit from the present project.

Last but not least, the information we will bring forth through this project will be useful to the research of student extremism in the inter-war period, whose roots are to be found in fact at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and which developed very fast, especially during the Romania's armed neutrality (1914-1916), when the student movements start refusing the idea of dialogue and grow more violent.

The project aims at circulating a history of the student associations of the University of Iași and of their relations with similar societies in Bucharest and abroad, until War World I. The field has not been investigated in Romania, for apparently inexplicable reasons (especially that the results of the European researches in the sphere are notable), except for those segments who analyzed, on ideological criteria, the students' participation in the fight for national ideals. For a detailed research, very important are the late genesis of these student organizations, but also their atomization later, and their reprovable acts of verbal and physical violence at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, with an increased intensity, during Romania's armed neutrality (1914-1916), as well as the involvement of the political factor in the life of these societies. The politicians' intention to use these associations (through their leaders) and the students in general as easy, cheap and naive resources in the political fight led to an accentuated discrediting of the students and to the erosion of this social category's image, a fact that is worth investigating too. The project will analyse the influence of the socialist movement (a very powerful one at Iași, especially at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) and, counterbalancing, of the nationalist movements, which is better and better regarded in the student circles at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the next one. Last but not least, the inter-denominational and inter-ethnic relations in the academic area deserve increased attention, given the big number of Jewish students at the Medical School and the critical conflicts at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.