

**Mihai Berza, De la Méditerranée à la Mer
Noire, ed. by Andrei Pippidi**

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Prepared by Andrei Pippidi, a renowned historian and student of professor Mihai Berza, and published by the Istros Publishing House of the 'Carol I' Museum of Brăila under the auspices of The Institute for Advanced Studies in Levant Culture and Civilization, the volume titled *From the Mediterranean to the Black Sea (De la Méditerranée à la Mer Noire)* brings together 40 scientific papers by historian Mihai Berza (1907-1978), of which three – regarding the regime of Ottoman economic domination over the Romanian medieval provinces – are seeing print for the first time. The work is, first of all, a tribute to the great Romanian historian whose scientific and academic career has known broad international recognition as early as the time of World War II, and in spite of the difficulties that the Communist authorities in Bucharest subsequently created for Berza's professional ascent. At the same time, however, the volume demonstrates beyond any doubt the importance which the South-Eastern European space has always held with regard to the history of relations between Western and Eastern European cultures. This latter aspect explains the editing of this monumental, 868-page work by The Institute for Advanced Studies in Levant Culture and Civilization in Bucharest. Established in 2017 as a centre of excellence of the World Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Institute aims to recover the works of specialists concerned with the history of the Levant, and publish them in a series of collected volumes that now sees its second iteration.

A graduate of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy at the University of Iași (1929), and having benefitted from a state-sponsored scholarship at the Romanian School in Rome (between 1931-1933), Mihai Berza began his career through a thorough study of the Papal and archival documents of Early Medieval Italy. Upon his return to Romania, he joined the 'Nicolae Iorga' Institute of Universal History, and later taught at the Higher School of Archiving and Palaeography (established 1924). After the World War II, he taught at the Faculty of History of the University of Bucharest (with several interruptions owed to Communist persecution), eventually coming to head the Department of Medieval, Modern and Contemporary History from 1964 onwards. Through his efforts, the Institute of South-Eastern European Studies in Bucharest (created by N. Iorga in 1914 but abolished by the Communist authorities in 1948) was re-established in 1963, under the auspices of the Romanian Academy. M. Berza dedicated almost the entirety of his post-war scientific career to the history of this European geographical region, whose importance for the history of Europe and of the Levantine space he repeatedly emphasized. Until the end of his life in 1978, Mihai Berza contributed to the creation of a vast network of

scientific and institutional collaboration between Romanian scholars and the international scientific milieu, he himself acting as the vice-president of the International Association of South-East European Studies, founded in Bucharest in April 1963, the president of the Commission on the History of Ideas that operated within this association, as well as the vice-president of the International Association of Byzantine Studies.

The present volume, published in 2019, collects a series of studies, communications and addresses given by M. Berza throughout almost 40 years of professional activity, organized according to the chronological thread dictated by the author's chosen topics of inquiry. Of these, twelve studies focus on Western European history, wherein the historian tackles a broad range of topics. The first three papers (totalling over 140 pages) represent the research the scholar undertook during his scholarship years in Rome, perusing papal and archival documents for information relating to Amalfi – a republican state on the Neapolitan coast that played an important commercial role in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. The author's meticulous interpretation of the historical documents and his correlation of the available information highlight the role the Amalfitans played not only in the commercial and political relations within southern Italy, but also for the diplomacy of a time when the Middle Mediterranean Sea was disputed between the Saracen and Byzantine powers. The latter, moreover, proves to be a hallmark of political legitimacy still invoked in Medieval Western writings, as evidenced in Professor Berza's study of the Italian chronicler tradition, first published posthumously in 1985 (pp. 211-218).

Particular topics - such as Pope John VIII's visit to France using a sea route through the Tyrrhenian Sea (pp. 173-190) or the royal French elections in 878 (pp. 191-202) bring to light the professionalism with which M. Berza approaches historical documents, as well as the clarity of his interpretations underpinned by thoroughly detailed and contextualized analyses. The same instruments afford the author an opportunity to highlight socio-cultural behaviours and ways of self-representation among the southern Italic communities in an article on national sentiment and the local spirit in southern Lombardy (pp. 203-210), or to present the 15th-century operational mechanisms of a Florentine colony established in the Byzantine capital of Constantinople (pp. 291-307), starting from the statutory documents of this community. This latter case highlights both a positivist approach of a thorough analysis of the colony's consular powers (portrayed not only as an exemplary representative of the home republic with multiple economic, judicial religious and even moral attributions – including the capacity to 'censor' the community's vestments) as well as interpretive nuances regarding the real function of political

authority in a small community. The same methodological register transpires from the author's analysis of the anti-Ottoman crusades of the 15th century (pp. 231-261), penned by M. Berza in 1942, by way of a masterful contextualization of such Christian military expeditions within the broader history of Europe. Moreover, through an in-depth study of the term 'causidicus' (pp. 220-230), we are introduced to an analysis of the legal vocabulary of medieval documents, fast becoming acquainted with the evolution of this concept's meaning from that of *attorney* and *advocate for a public case* (early 6th century), through *barrister of one's own case* (the second half of the 6th century); later arriving at *witness in a trial* (7th – 8th centuries) or *witness for the cause of the oppressed or of the monasteries* (9th – 10th centuries), with certain specific extensions of competences for individual communities (for example, the chief justice and head of police of the city of Strasbourg, in the 10th century), before the term ultimately disappears entirely from the legal lexicon of the Middle Ages. Each of these examples also constitute just as many testimonies of the high craft of a specialist who treats the historical document with utmost seriousness both as a whole, and with due attention to its particularities.

Also worthy of emphasis is the fact that Mihai Berza never abdicated from his scientific rigour, regardless of circumstances or the audience before whom he spoke. In this regard, we invoke an address given at one of the many Marxist historical reunions, held in 1958 in an extremely difficult period in terms of state censorship by the Communist regime (included in the present volume between pages 313-333). This exquisite and nuanced analysis of feudal revolts is a splendid example of courage and professionalism, considering that the topic of revolts was a favourite subject of Communist ideology and despite the author's obligation to rely on Marxist works as bibliographical references. The content of his analysis is well-structured and extremely rigorous, balanced, customized to local situations and continuously and flawlessly supported by references to historical documents. The root causes of the revolts (both immediate and general), their program, the actors involved, the issue of rebels' alliances, the movements' rural or urban character, their particular modes of operation and struggle, as well as the general and particular causes of these initiatives' ultimate defeats, all become, under the historian's pen, necessary and congruent pieces in a clear demonstration that the topic of feudal revolts must be approached with reference to the particular conditions of their emergence, that these events led to the transformation of the feudalism, sometimes producing consequences that work against the insurgents themselves and, not least, that history does not necessarily

represent a linear evolution of class struggle, as the ideologues of the time often proclaimed.

A great many of the studies collected in the volume under review pertain to the history of the South-Eastern European space, a history which also integrates the evolution of the Romanian provinces. The reader is again offered the opportunity to review a diverse topic, one which we will herein present thematically, due to its considerable scope. The geostrategic importance of the Black Sea is pursued in correlation with the political balance of its riverine states, significantly altered first by the Mongol expansion of the 14th – 15th centuries, then by Ottoman ambition (following the battle of Gallipoli in 1354), and later through the establishment of Venetian and Genoese merchants in the Black Sea region and the final throes of Byzantine control over the Pontic area (pp. 263-289). Through a series of conferences held at the Collège de France in 1966 which this volume presents for the first time under print (pp. 433-523), the author's positivist approach is intertwined with a fine interpretation of the material obligations of the Romanian voivodeships under Ottoman rule, making relevant statistics of all categories of contributions which Romanians made to the Sublime Porte readily available to the interested reader, namely: tribute (*kharadj*), annual or triennial gifts confirming the right to rule (*peshkesh*), occasional contributions, the obligation to supply troops, or the preferential redirection of goods to Turkish merchants. The author's research takes into account the various categories of written sources (internal documents, Turkish documents, and foreign diplomatic acts), the financial-monetary situation (including the multitude of monetary issues and aspects related to currency devaluations), the actors involved and the consequences of this Ottoman economic domination on the internal elites and on the fiscal policy of the rulers themselves, going in chronological order from the earliest attested tributes paid to the Ottoman Empire to the beginning of the 19th century. The impressive review of the available documentation allows for an appreciation of the full cost of living in the Romanian countries, both internally and in terms of revenue that took the path of Istanbul.

Portraits of notable personalities of their time – be they political leaders such as Stephen the Great (pp. 343-353) and Dimitrie Cantemir (pp. 743-754), or political and cultural personalities such as Eudoxiu Hurmuzachi (pp. 811-822) – join important Romanian and South-East European historical topics in which military events are analysed both historically and historiographically. Thus, the internal and external documents that exemplify Romanian-Ottoman relations during the 14th – 18th centuries are presented in a critical spirit and are analysed

comparatively (pp. 651-687), highlighting not only historical information but also the outlook of their authors. The same filter is applied to modern secondary literature covering the wars of Michael the Brave's time (pp. 395-397). The appearance in the same year (namely, 1976) of two works about Vlad Țepeş (Vlad the Impaler) was, for M. Berza, an opportunity to masterfully revisit the greater issue of available source material on the reign of this character whose legend began circulating while he was still alive, and who would in time become a literary and cinematographic hero (pp. 355-393). The author's critical considerations of these reviewed works, their comparison and the thorough validation of their content, for the most part, exemplify the attention and even respect that Berza had towards written sources and towards openness to an important field of research – the circulation of cultural ideas.

The latter research field, alongside other cultural topics, is represented by a special category of articles containing information on the relations established by the Romanian countries with intellectuals originating from the Ionian Islands (pp. 777-782) or from the Italian peninsula (pp. 783-810); on the ways in which the boyar, noble and royal families were influenced by Byzantine (through direct contacts or mediation by the South-Danubian cultural environment) or Western European culture (mediated by Poland and Hungary). Berza employs the circulation of intellectuals and ideas to outline the evolution of a so-called 'old Romanian culture' (pp. 635-639; 689-707), beginning with the Romanians' ethnogenesis (considered not a 'enigma' per se, but nevertheless a 'miracle' due to its unpropitious historical conditions – pp. 335-342) towards the end of Late Antiquity. The period of Romanian culture of Slavonic expression, fostered by the continuous contacts with the south-Danubian space (populated by southern Slavs who maintained contact with the Byzantine culture permeating the Balkans) is followed – in Berza's argued opinion – by the stage of a Romanian culture of Greek and Latin expression, the latter eventually diminishing in importance as Greek expression became more accentuated. beginning with the 16th century. From here, we proceed towards an analysis of the phenomenon which the author calls 'Byzantine humanism', corresponding to the entire Romanian cultural evolution of the 17th – 18th centuries. These latter considerations, presented at the second AISEE Congress held in 1970 in Athens (pp. 641-650), depend at their core on two levels of analysis. The first, terminological level, is informed by the concept of *humanism* as its principal landmark, and is equally understood as a foundation of socio-cultural concerns well-proven in many other cultures of the world, and not least as the essence of the Western cultural current focused on rediscovering Antiquity.

However, Professor Berza draws attention to the fact that, unlike Western Europe, Southeast Europe had never lost contact with that ancient culture, owed in no small part to its continuous connection with the Byzantine state, such that in this region there was no need for a 'rediscovery' of the old Classical culture. The second level of the author's analysis is focused on the emergence and production of humanistic culture, which in Western Europe is closely tied to the development of the urban environment, as opposed to South-Eastern Europe where cities observed a slower evolution with poorly-represented bourgeois elites. The issue of differing urban evolution between the Balkans and Europe, taking into account the period of Ottoman domination, is, moreover, excellently expanded upon in a study which demonstrates the intertwining of ecclesiastical and urban culture in this part of the Old Continent (pp. 743- 754). The peculiarities of the Balkan world do not stop here; Berza shows how, at the dawn of the 19th century, the ideals of the French Revolution reached South-Eastern Europe, spreading and reinvigorating the sentiment of freedom and the desire for education (pp. 709-719). However, the author goes on to demonstrate that the Enlightenment had also already fuelled national sentiment across the Balkans (and, therefore, also in the Romanian Principalities) by way of an evocation of the communal past and an invocation of linguistic specificity –hence the revival of interest in history and language perceived as markers of ethnic identity.

With regard to this latter aspect, the theme of the Romanian people's Latinate origin is viewed by the historian as an issue that, beyond its historical content, also provides important information about the mentality and ideology of the periods in which it is referred to in historical works, either in medieval chronicles, or in modern or contemporary works (pp. 861-868).

As the collected studies of the volume under review show, Professor Berza was concerned both with the definition of broad stretches of time, and with their integration into universal history. Consequently, Romanian culture is thereby defined as an intrinsic and organic part of Balkan and European culture – beyond all its peculiarities, and in particular the existent chronological gaps. Furthermore, the history of South-Eastern Europe is presented as a complex evolution from Byzantine to Ottoman structures (pp. 525-544), while the study covering the Phanariot era (pp. 755-775) is predicated on a thorough revision of the socioeconomic, political, and cultural processes deeply connected to the broader evolution of the Balkans.

The volume under review highlights the author's predilection for broad topics (more often penned during the latter part of his life) and the assumption of his mission as a *magister* for future research (pp. 565-577;

593-605; 607-637). Professor Berza was an avid promoter of pluridisciplinary approaches, in which quantitative and serial history, as part of broader South-Eastern European research trends, needs to be rigorously intertwined with a detailed review of history's subjective dimension and with the understanding that 'one of the objectives of the historical sciences is their contribution to better comprehending modern societies', as Professor Berza had stated as early as 1975 (p. 598).

Erudition, method, and new directions for exploring historical documents are, in brief, merely a few features of Professor Mihai Berza's work showcased by the volume under review, which testify to the high academic level that Romanian research on the history and culture of Europe and the Levant had already achieved in the past century.