

# RĂZVAN THEODORESCU - HISTORIAN AND PROFESSOR

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## Abstract

A scholar of Răzvan Theodorescu's stature cannot be easily evoked since his personality has surpassed exceptionality. We will not do it either, and it is not appropriate. Therefore, the pious evocation occasioned by this prestigious meeting at Apollonia University in Iasi is of visible one-sidedness. It is true that neither the brief respite elapsed since his unexpected disappearance, nor the tumult of radical changes in the contemporary world – which, visibly, engages us all – are conducive to a memorable restitution at all close to the encyclopaedic profile that accompanies the figure of the late scholar. Seldomly, and not in every generation, personalities like Răzvan Theodorescu appear.

**Keywords:** *Răzvan Theodorescu, history, culture.*

His disappearance therefore leaves deep traces and great emptiness in the Romanian culture. These are also felt in the Romanian neighbourhoods: a light has been extinguished from the South-Eastern European space. A strong one, recognized despite the continuous and arrogant Romanian disputes, by the fair and righteous people from home, but also by the foreign scholars, more just in their assessments.

For mass-media's favourite stars, divas and influencers, success demands a permanence on screen. But its recipe necessarily calls for a note of scandal and the promotion of sensationalism and drama, combined with eccentricity and deviationism of all kinds.

Following some orders with commercial recipes, CULTURE – as a superior form of behaviour and as an emblem of educated manifestations – is increasingly marginalized. It gets lost among competitions, festivals, eccentricities generously offered by the entertainment industry, which has become the replacement of other industries based on work.

Disregarding the major culture and replacing it with neighbourhood offers without value standards with immediate consequences reflected by a visible consumerism.

In this setting dominated by subculture, by ideological excesses meant to animate the new man, Răzvan Theodorescu's debut through Tele-Encyclopaedia marked a reference. While many intellectuals promoted the mass culture, specific to realism-socialism, the scholar presented the wonders and treasures of the world, the high artistic and architectural achievements, the universal patrimonies created throughout the ages, to which people refer and aspire.

From his debut in television, at its management, to broadcasting regulations and up to his last appearance on Alep-News, the scholar represented in a superior way, a civic conscience at the expense of the Screen, regarded as a great opportunity for cultural dialogue.

His vocation and altruism were associated in the MEDIA, adding answers to expectations, perplexities and questions. "Loved" by the camera, the scholar assumed the role of teacher, of guide in discovering and presenting universal values, inducing aspirations, in many generations, towards knowledge and understanding of direct contacts with the supremacy of human achievements.

This role has its explanation in his special grace, envied by many and manifested with great generosity. It should be noted that, in his case, the teacher and the communicator of universal values, as well as their interpreter, represent amazing facets of the same character. In the televised formula, his role as a public teacher was facilitated by the uniqueness of the form of presentation: free speech, with accents and unmistakable burr, visibly docile, but also enthusiastic, that of a connoisseur. This is how he entered, for decades, weekly, at night, in the private space of many Romanians. Many – very many! – admired his literacy and eloquence and enjoyed listening to him. But few – very few – understood that in his presentations, systematic and lengthy readings, archival research, imagination

exercises, comparisons and analogies were accumulated. As well as numerous interrogations and dialogues with his illustrious teachers, all of whom walked around the world. All his appearances, not only televised, but also on the occasion of conferences, book presentations, exhibitions, scientific meetings or public debates, had a solid foundation of interest and solid and enthusiastic research, based on a great passion for knowledge.

The commentator on the encyclopaedic theme was an encyclopaedist himself! A historian with a classical background, systematic, persevering and eager to improve, continuing his formative models. With a high cult of work and a freely assumed discipline, Răzvan Theodorescu pursued tenaciously and succeeded!

As a young historian, he understood better, sometimes more, often even than some of his fellow congeners, that the science he had hired to serve did not stop at chronological, eventful accounts of the achievements of the masses and ruling elites. It is that the matter of history obliges evaluations, it must be seen in relations of continuity and dependence, in time and space, local-zonal-national, internal and external, but especially from the perspective of the numerous conditions that give meaning to the directions in which communities have asserted themselves.

For Răzvan Theodorescu, the landscape, the neighbourhoods and neighbours, the natural resources, the cohesion of groups, the power of leaders – but also their capacity, strength, character and style – are parts of a whole. The books of his debut as a historian – from his doctoral thesis to his last – provide evidence of a complex conceptual and interpretative system, in which factology represents only a part. Appealing to interdisciplinarity – from old, classical texts, epigraphic evidence, numismatics, genealogy, to archaeological, architectural, artistic and ethnographic evidence and attentive to the manifestations of cultural anthropology – the scholar formulated new, modern theses and concepts, which substantially enhanced his work. Among them – inspired by the evaluations of Emil Condurachi, his great mentor and model – he went beyond the concept of a cultural platform assimilating influences and completed it with that of a cultural corridor, based on well-established communication routes configured

according to the origin of vital resources and ancestral occupations related to them – water, clay, stone, wood, metals, salt, animal and vegetable fibres.

The “movements” – some swinging, others uni-directional – due to resources, such as mining, transhumance, colonization, technological inventions, metalworking, religious proselytizing, etc. – due to such civilization-shaping factors are reflected in Răzvan Theodorescu’s work by presenting stages of evolutions, specific identity structures, determinisms visible in interpretations made at the expense of Romanity. An entity of evolution, with unmistakable specificity, but which gave and received, assimilating and processing in its own forms, visible in relation to its neighbours.

The pattern used by the scholar discerns with a measure a long process of living and continuity in the same space, but which has provincial differences, from which clear identity characteristics of Romanity flow and are observed.

Always surprising in his assessments, Răzvan Theodorescu made exemplary use of the ambivalence of written and unwritten sources, contained in the numerous varieties of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. More and better than other confreres, giving individualizing interpretations, he added in his written works a mentoring side – encouraging valuable collaborators, also with special merits – including through a protectionist system (organizational, legislative and operational) at the expense of protecting the cultural heritage. When he did not advocate directly, as a parliamentarian, he patronized the efforts of those with whom, in his ministerial mandate, organic laws were prepared, heritage institutions were founded and professionals in these special fields were encouraged. Through his example – and the chance of a more stable and open stage to protective measures sustained him – his effort to coagulate the patrimonial cases was concretely supported: civil-religious, sacred-profane, material and immaterial, built-mobile.

Its ministerial construction, which is found in the system of protection of cultural wealth, has not exhausted its validity, has validated itself as suitable in the long term and adequate to the Romanian realities. Of course, it was not perfect,

it implied additions and adequacy to the requirements stemming from a European dynamic.

Răzvan Theodorescu, professionally, leaves room for another praiseworthy comment: he gentle and open encouraged the affirmation of many valuable young people: historians, critics and art historians, theologians, plastic artists, archaeologists, architects, public commentators, protectionists. Many developed the information received as undergraduates, master's students, doctoral students, others were encouraged by his evaluations. Many find themselves in important public positions, supported by a cultural formation acquired also through the investment in their training.

If the professorial approach leaves room for admiring appreciation, not only at the expense of his vast knowledge, but especially of the way he transmitted it, it does not omit the elegant and unmistakable style.

I also confess - as part of some doctoral committees - that at the Bucharest University of Art, the defenses of doctoral theses led by the late professor were a real royalty.

Overcoming classical historicism, Răzvan Theodorescu understood the mechanisms of history, interpreted acrimoniously in relation and closely connected with its witnesses, sometimes a simple pamphlet, an effigy, a tapestry, a sculpture or a votive painting, sometimes a drawing, a chronicle text or a travel note. No detail of the gestures of the characters of the frescoes or the nuance of a period image escaped him in his analyses.

For him, as a historian, the mentalities of the top of society (voivode, king, boyar, hierarch, but also captain of land, merchant monk, chancery teacher, painter, or old man) represent the providers of characters and social characteristics. Studying them carefully, often compared with other foreign ones, researcher Răzvan Theodorescu extracts the behavioural and psychological specificity, which leads him to grasp the authenticity of identity. Therefore, his works add as eminence to those owed to illustrious scholars who fixed the profile of the Romanian, illuminating his great qualities and the philosophy that distinguishes him from others.

Through his books, the scholar facilitated the studios to perceive how certain societal mechanisms led to rapid changes through

education and faith, which influenced the history of Romania in the long run.

Seldom - and not only in the Romanian historiography - such superior interpretative quotas reached are reached as in his works. Two feelings emerge from them: the pride of belonging and, deeply, the trust in his Nation.

Overcoming an autochthonous approach, Răzvan Theodorescu urged his PhD students to boldly approach topics with a high degree of complexity, targeting wider areas, with multi- and cross-border cohabitation phenomena, both material and immaterial.

Among them we find approaches to the history and culture of the Eastern world, others to assess the identity specificity manifested by Balkan groups (especially of the Romanians from the South-Danube) or to present the increasing/decreasing role of some Great Powers manifested on navigable main roads (such as the Dniester or the Danube). Expanding the investigation in close correlation with political developments, I admired the research encouragement of the border settlements (Cetatea Albă, Mihăileni, Severin, Histria, Sânicolau Mare, etc.) that played a dynamic role opening new economic and cultural horizons.

He shone through the impulse given to the select group of art historians, architects and restorers, his studies directly supporting the masterful restoration projects of monuments on the World Heritage List. The result: studies and books, exhibitions and academic events of great resonance.

On numerous occasions, in Suceava, but more frequently in Iasi, at the "Monument," he offered suggestions of great value to specialists engaged in the difficult restoration and patrimonialization work, supporting them concretely. As minister, he multiplied the funds dedicated to this field, inspiring special programs for mural painting, liturgical textiles, bibliophile goods, but also for the public forum, wood and technical monuments.

From Professor Răzvan Theodorescu's judgment regarding his teaching role, it is deduced that, grateful to those received as a learner - he gave, in his turn, to others, with the joy of the gift and with confidence in the continuity of the deed on the part of the gifted.

If his passion and dedication were easily noticeable, his vocation and patient perseverance



were harder to spot. The days and nights of study, direct research, the effort to conceptualize and stylize his works do not even appear mentioned in the prefaces. These can only be deduced, the editors – a few brilliant ones – of his books are the only ones who can refer to the demands and difficulties they have encountered. He did it recently, in 2022, here in Iasi, his colleague acad. Gh. Cliveti excellently evaluating his latest book.

I had the chance to have been associated with many heritage works and to have worked together in the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs for 4 years. I accompanied him in the country, to direct evaluation works, we were together in professional meetings at national level and I witnessed some of his presentations in several other internationals. It shone among peers of the elite, offered a note of cultural superiority and produced effects at the expense of Romania's appreciation.

Parliamentarian Răzvan Theodorescu represented two counties on the eastern edge and had among his ministerial advisers the herald poet Grigore Vieru.

In the post-industrial society, especially among Romanians, historians have diminished their importance. It seems that the past and its correct assumption, with lessons and lessons, are no longer of interest. Therefore, I did not use properly the benefit of the chance or being contemporary with a superior scholar, a CHOSEN of the most illustrious congeners. Răzvan Theodorescu remains, however, through his work, a treasure bequeathed to him, of which future generations will be beneficiaries, but also obliged to recognize and recommend him as a generator of great humanistic value.

In this prideful Iasi Mall, located on princely ruins and guarded by a Cultural Palace that replaced a princely court, we feel obliged to pay homage to the historian who, consistently and respectfully towards his own, has always reminded his contemporaries of his obligations towards the Romanian past.

During spring, at the hour of evocation, we want the thought of pious gratitude fulfilled through a street that will bear his name and a bust that will recommend Răzvan Theodorescu as an illustrious model.



On the construction site in Capidava



At Tărtăria with acad. Al.Vulpe and Dr. P. Damian



At Martinuzzi Palace (Vințul de sus)



With dr. Mariana Magiru in the Folk Art Museum of Constanta





At the National Village Museum with dr. Paula Popoiu, acad. D. Murariu and I. Opreș



In the Art Museum of Dinu and Sevasta Vintilă - Topalu



Visiting the Museum of Roșia Montană



At Bran



Together with His Eminence Theodoridis, debating on the monuments of Dobrogea



Presenting the rigors of the preventive preservation of historical monuments

For the biographical references please address to the author.