

Journalism**The Annals of Braila - The Most Important Regional
Culture Journal in the Interwar Period of the Lower Danube**Cristina Dosuleanu¹

Abstract: “*The Annals of Braila*” is one of the most important regional cultural journals published in the interwar period, due to the cultural phenomenon of regionalism. This was the response of the Romanian intellectuals to the exaggerated influence of the West in all areas, that is the emergence of what Titu Maiorescu called forms without substance. As a result, immediately after the Great Union of 1918, young people, mostly students, who already exposed their ideas in scientific societies, began to organize information-gathering activities in all domains in certain areas and then they published them as scientific texts. That is how regional culture journals appeared in Craiova, Brasov, Timisoara and Constanta. Curiously, all have been mentioned in history books of press or in dictionaries except “*The Annals of Braila*”. A careful examination shows that the journal was probably not only a refuge, as the Braila journal was as important as the other. In order to support this we should mention: it appeared for 12 years despite the financial difficulties, while others were released for a smaller period of time, it had as collaborators important people of the Romanian culture and literature, and its studies concerned the entire area of the Lower Danube, the analysis, documents, information having considered other cities that are on the Danube shores. Therefore, we believe that the “*Annals of Braila*” journal must stand alongside the other regional culture journals and enjoy the same importance.

Keywords: media; cultural regionalism; history of Braila; the Lower Danube

In March 1929, in Braila it was released the first issue of regional culture journal the “*Annals of Braila*” periodically, which we appreciate as being the most important one of the Lower Danube in the interwar period for several reasons: it had a long period of occurrence, 12 years although it did not always appear regularly, the topics did not strictly regarded the Braila area, but areas addressed in the immediate vicinity, Galati and Tulcea, and, thirdly, in its pages we find important signatures such as Nicolae Iorga, Simion Mehedinți or Panait Istrati.

At the beginning of the interwar period in Great Romania the cultural phenomenon of regionalism was treated very seriously in the intellectual circles who assumed

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that if the major European countries in the province were great things and they were the basis for capital development, the same thing must happen in Romania, that we should not limit ourselves to an imitation of the West. (Enescu, 1938, no. 3-4, p. 55) The thing is that the province, until before World War I, did not trigger any cultural revolution, no cultural phenomenon, nothing to attract attention, while in Bucharest those who essentially contributed to the development of Romanian culture came from the province.

This is how it came the idea that the province has not actually highlighted strengths because they did not know them. Little was known about the history of the places and the articles and documents that had such communicated information was scattered. In postwar Romania there was crystallized the concept of regionalism in cultural, creative idea of localism, which would actually be the substance of the cultural effervescence of capital. One of Romania's cultural figures of that time, Simon Mehedinți, wrote an article entitled *Regionalism cultural / Cultural Regionalism*.

The profound issue in his view was importing the Western forms without the necessary background in Romania, leading to worthless imitation of the West. Simon Mehedinți was convinced that it was important that the Romanians would find their own forms full of substance and they would perpetuate them. He explained that he did not want regional isolation, but to reach a progressive differentiation that would ultimately lead to a higher unity of all regions; it did not happen and each region's originality helped at the state's progress. Analyzing this phenomenon in France he found that although there is a danger of state authority dissolution in the regions, this has not happened and the originality of each region has helped for the progress of the state.

In Romania, Simon Mehedinți points out that, we, as a unitary state, the beforehand danger becomes that of uniformity, especially under the influence of internationalization. As a result, the regionalism is seen as a factor of progress. "If political regionalism is an attempt against the life of the state, the culture one is, by contrast, a win, being a proof of the Romanian consciousness more and more alive." (Mehedinți, 1922, no. 1, apud Firan, 1976, p. 305).

In this context there are increasing the discussions of Braila's intellectual circles on cultural regionalism and on the need to know the local history in all areas in order to discover the elements of originality, creating the premises of a journal's issue.

The idea of an organized research on the life and history of Braila occurred since 1912 within *Braila's Student Circle*, an organization reactivated immediately after First World War in September 1918, out of the initiative and under the lead of the members of *Upsurge Society*, a cultural society of Braila's pupils founded in 1896 by: Panait Cerna, Petre Armencea, Alex Perianu or Petre Jecu. (Semilian, 1927, p. 161) Part of this society were Braila's famous intellectuals when they were

teenagers: Nae Ionescu, Vasile Băncilă or Basil Munteanu. Due to this organization there was built the first student hostel in Bucharest, of Braila's people, considering that this is how it is created a cultural environment with more openness and forms of expression. Braila was the first student hostel in the country and was involved in many cultural activities both in Bucharest and Braila. Gh. T. Marinescu was the president of the *Students Circle of Braila*, future engineer. He manages to hold, since 1918, the work of gathering information relevant to three areas of interest: history - geography, local economy - folklore and cultural life of Braila. The results of these investigations will result in conferences, press articles and shows. The first cycle of conferences was held in 1921 and made in public discussions of issues such as cultural regionalism, the Lower Danube region, Braila's economy, social aspects of the life in Braila (Marinescu, 1931, no. 3 -4, p. 127). In 1926 Gheorghe T. Marinescu is elected for the head board of Petre Armencea Library and from this position he initiates a new cycle of conferences on Braila, its past, its local culture. An objective of Student Circle of Braila regarded the establishment of a Circle of local research studies of the town and of the county that would carry out the works in the fields of: culture, economics, sociology, politics, from the scientific point of view, in order to be signed by important names of local intellectuals as they would be discussed in a most original way about cultural regionalism. Initially, Gh. T. Marinescu pursued the accomplishment of a monograph of the city or the publishing the studies in a Circle of Studies Bulletin of local research of the city and the Braila county. The project of the Bulletin was prepared and submitted to the Circle of Braila studies Committee in April 1926 (Lica, 2003, p. 85). For unknown reasons, the activity of the Circle has been suspended for one year. Only in 1928 Gheorghe T. Marinescu manages to form a new committee that draws Nae Ionescu, the mayor Radu Portocală and the engineer Paul Demetriad, director of Braila's docks. They work and when Braila celebrates 100 years since the liberation from Turkish authority they publish the first issue of *The Annals of Braila*.

In the *Schița de program /Schedule Draft*, Gh. T. Marinescu states that the new journal will explore the city and the county life of Braila in all aspects, so as to form a "scientific concept of local life, one that can support a high and objective policy of guidance of a city and a county" (Marinescu, 1929, no. 1, p. 8). The initiator of the journal announces that it will publish local history studies, because the historical perspective is firstly necessary in order to define the characteristics and personality of a county, (Marinescu, *The Annals of Braila I*, 1929, no. 1, p. 1), but they will not miss the cultural ones. He also stated the major themes to be discussed: the Romanian life under the Turkish authority, the role of Braila Pond in preserving the Romanian feature of Dobrogea, other ethnographic, anthropogeographic, biological aspects, related to this region, not to mention the many economic problems, navigation on the Danube, grain trade, the issue of agrarian life (Marinescu, 1929, pp. 6-8).

In the first issue of the journal, along with *Schița de program /Schedule Draft* it publishes also the papers: *Viața portului Brăila față de activitatea din trecut/The life of Braila port compared to its past activity* – Paul Demetriad, *Monografia lipovenilor din orașul și județul Brăila/ The Monograph of the Lippovans from Braila city and county*– Andrei Antipov, *Emigranții și revoluționarii bulgari în Brăila/ Bulgarian emigrants and revolutionaries in Braila* – S. Semilian, *În jurul marii serbări a Brăilei – 1829 – 1929 / Around the Great Celebration of Braila - 1829 – 1929* – Gh. T. Marinescu, *Tâlcul Bibliotecii „Petre Armencea” din Brăila/The significance of „Petre Armencea” Library from Brăila* – Vasile Băncilă, *Considerațiuni asupra Industriei Brăilei / Considerations on Braila’s Industry* – Mihail Trufașu. The journal also includes a chapter with documents, information, notes. And here, Gh. T. Marinescu provides an explanation for its initiative to publish these documents: “We will gather all the documents concerning Braila. Some of these documents are published in collections of documents of our historiography from where we will extract them; some are unpublished. (...) The most important documents, we will publish in facsimile. The other, we will publish them in a copy of all details required for scientific uses. For later we plan to gather them in a special collection.” (Marinescu, 1929, no. 1, p. 40).

The journal announced that it will occur at every two months, but the next number will be released in the next four months, March-June, no. 2-3. The Management Committee comprises still Nae Ionescu, Radu Portocală, Paul Demetriad and Gh. T. Marinescu. It is also mentioned that it is a festive issues for the centenary commemoration of the Braila’s liberation from Turkish domination.

The first article belongs to the famous Nicolae Iorga, *Unde e istoria Brăilei/Where is the history of Braila*, there are published also other articles by Professor Mihai Popescu, Șerban Ciuntu, Colonel C. G. Demetriade, Emil Vârtosu, Ion Vârtosu, Radu Portocală, Coriolan Stănulescu, I. C. Filitti, Perpessicius, Gh. T. Marinescu. In this issue there are published documents and information about Braila. The following issues appear 4-5-6 at the end of 1929 for the period July-December, also mentioning that the journal appears at every two months. In these issues we should mention: Gh. T. Marinescu, Professor M. Popescu – Submanager of State Archives in 1938, Ion Vârtosu, Paul Demetriad, N.N. Mateescu, Professor G. Banea and Vintilă. Voiculescu, the Manager of the Scientific Association for Romania Encyclopedia in 1938. For the period January-March 1930, second year, it is published no. 1, the same Board Committee but noting that the magazine appears quarterly. The second issue is released on time for the period April - June 1930, the issue where Nicolae Iorga publishes again an article: *Notes from the books of the old church of St. Archangels (Proilavia Metropolitan) of Braila*. Issue 3, for the months July - September has a new collaborator I. Bilețchi Albescu, who publishes

Braila's Origin. Very interesting is the article by I. Vârtosu about the teacher Ioan Penescu, seen as Braila's cultural animator in the early years after 1829.

Last issue in 1930, no. 4, for the months October-December, has the same structure. What it is interesting in this issue is the article under the heading "*Braila seen by our people of culture*", in which the Professor Nicolae Iorga's impressions are published in 1904. Also in this issue there are published reviews of books signed by Nicolae C. Istrati. At the end of the second year, engineer Gh. T. Marinescu is satisfied that he had managed to overcome the difficulties and he has the sense of fulfilled duty. He also makes an appeal to the few subscribers (Marinescu, 1930, no. 4, p. 56) to financially support them as generously as before, an appeal directed also to the Braila's intellectuals, all those who feel tied to the these lands. But it was hard with the authorities and he does not forgive the indifference towards his approach.

And towards the official authorities of Braila, that as any officialdom cannot see a cultural initiative other than with dry bureaucratic attitude, and most times we look upon them even teasing and interested, therefore, we address not a call, but a proud cold and right word by the citizens aware of their selfless work that they give to the cultural life of Braila, they take to right to highlight that the authorities who manage a city, a land, have a duty to not only confine to formal relations between citizens or only to care for the material life of the region. (...) But they have an elementary duty to actual care for spiritual and cultural life, understood in the highest sense, of the land that they lead. And therefore, they must promote any cultural initiative that turns to be solid. (Marinescu, 1930, no. 4, p. 56)

The first issue of 1931 is released in time for the first three months of the year. There were included articles signed by Athanasie Popescu and Captain I. M. Mihăilescu, and under the heading "*Braila seen by our people of culture*" there are published the impressions of Al. Vlahuță. There are also the bibliographic notes, information, reports and reviews, signed by Nicolae. C. Istrati, librarian at the Romanian Academy. There are reviewed in this issue the journals "*Oltenia Archives*", "*The Annals of Banat*" and "*Life in Săcele*".

Number 2 in the third year (1931) also appear in time. This date is announced by Mih. Trufașu as Editorial Secretary, the Committee and Directorate remaining the same. There are very interesting the articles that speak of the characteristics of Braila, written by Nicolae Iorga and Nae Ionescu.

There is published new information on cultural activities dedicated to Braila of Ioan Penescu, Ioan C. Lerescu, written by Gh. T. Marinescu, respectively S. Semilian. An article about the population and cities of Braila is achieved by G. Mihăilescu. At the section presenting documents and information there are announced new cycles of conferences of "*The Annals of Braila*", a commemoration of C. S. Aldea and of Panait Cerna. The reviews are signed by

Mihail Trufașu. The lack of financial support is shown again in mid 1931, when issue no 3, was not released although the material was there. A joint issue no 3-4 for the months July – December was released. It is a comprehensive issue, double compared to the others. Engineer Gh. T. Marinescu. writes about the three years of the journal's activity, I. Bogoiu makes a *Monographic sketch of the village Gropeni*, Semilian wrote about what happened with the Braila's press enemy under the enemy's domination, and G. Buznea-Moldoveanu writes about Public Library of Braila City. Șt. M. Enescu wrote about the Circle and Student Hostel of Braila, Semilian spoke about poet George Baronzi and Paul Demetriad analyzed the port of Braila in 1931 compared to other years. There are also published public documents, information, reports and reviews, announcing the third cycle of conferences of *The Annals of Braila*. The analysis of the three years of historical movement contains also an historic of the Upsurge movement, of cultural regionalism, published in 1920 and from where it was developed the Scientific Circle which subsequently developed "*The Annals of Braila*". Finally, it mentions again the financial difficulties, calling to subscribers to pay and accusing the administration of indifference to the cultural act and bureaucracy.

The next issue, 1 of the fourth year (1932) occurs in time, for January-March. An interesting issue, having highlighted the article of Vasile Băncilă, *The Village of Insane*, describing a gathering of houses appeared on the outskirts of the city and of which Vasile Băncilă says that it is not even the slum, but it is interesting because it provides the Romanian specific, when it wants to raise a village by all means a new county in American tempo (Băncilă, 1932, no. 1, p. 42).

The financial difficulties make the 2-3 issues to appear in September. This issue includes especially geographical, social articles, on Braila's population, and it has the same headings as usual, it is very wide, and it has 168 pages. Next issue is on time, in December 1932, for the last three months of the year.

Gh. T. Marinescu analyzes the fourth year of its existence, he reaffirms the financial difficulties that they were facing in achieving the publication and he mentions the fact that Braila, by its regional-cultural movement of "The Annals" has acquired a cultural prestige rank, which places it next to the other seven cities of the country that could found a journal of regional studies and a cultural movement with its own ideas and ideology. (Marinescu, 1932, p. 4) The issue also contains an article on the habits, beliefs, superstitions and old cures from Braila County empirically related to medicine, Mih. Popescu made the census of population and their income from Braila City in 1828, with the year before the liberation from the Turks. There are of course the documents and information relating to Braila.

Year 1933 indicates to be still a difficult one in financial terms. The first issue is on time corresponding to the first quarter, no. 1, since V (1933), January-March, only

to appear in June. There are published two articles signed by Nicolae Iorga, *When, how and why was Braila taken by the Turks?* And *From Braila to Mecin on frozen Danube*. There are other articles signed by Nicolae C. Istrati - *Old foreign books about Braila*, I. M. Gane - *C. Sandu-Aldea*, I. Vasilescu-Valjean - *The Schoolboy Panait Cerna*, as well as the usual documents and information about Braila. At the end it is mentioned the radical improved of the technical conditions of the journal: the number of pages increased from 56 to 80, the paper was replaced with half-groundwood paper and began publishing photos. It announces that starting with the next issue the section of reviews that would become permanent. Nevertheless they remain in draft as for that year it was not released any issue. The next issue is just over a year, in June 1934, corresponding to the first three months of the year. Also, Gh. T. Marinescu promises to publish the back issues from 1933. In this issue there are articles published by Nicolae Iorga, M. Popescu, priest Diancov and Semilian, the engineers C. Chiriță, P. Demetriad and Gh. T. Marinescu. Of course there are published other documents, information and reports concerning Braila.

With all the promises at the end of issue no 1 of the year VI (1934), the following issue appears only in September 1935, year VII, for the months January - March. From that issue the editorial secretary is G. Mihailescu, as Professor Mihail Trufașu went to Bucharest. Note in this issue the article of Mihail Sebastian, *Braila, a meridian of the New Romania*, that of Emanoil Bucuța about the little-known journalist Bartu Cecropide. Again, on the last page of the magazine there are announced the forthcoming dates for the back issues of the journal. Unfortunately, these promises have failed to be kept, because of the financial difficulties, as many subscribers did not pay. Next issue, VIII (1936) appears in August of that year for the first trimester. In this issue Nicolae Iorga writes again, *Braila in the Mihai Viteazu/Michael the Brave's battles with the Turks*, and Ilie Mirea (December 30, 1930 - 10 March 2011) he wrote an article about Panait Istrati's correspondence, with regular entries of documents, information, reports and reviews conducted by famous names: Nicolae C. Istrati, Ioan C. Flilitti, professor I. M. Ganea. Finally Gheorghe T. Marinescu recognizes to be defeated by the precarious financial conditions in which they operate and said that the issues announced in the journal are ready for publication, but they are waiting for better times, when all subscribers will pay. The second issue is announced in September 1936, but it does not appear.

The disorder in the political life of Romania in the period 1928 - 1938, when 25 governments have changed, in only ten years, puts its mark on the journal "*The Annals of Braila*". The next known issue is no 1 of year X (1938), when Radu Portocală withdraws from the leading board. The journal has 56 pages. Next issue, no. 2 of 1938, year X, is on time for the second trimester. Radu Portocală returns in the Leading Board with the title of ex-minister, given that he previously was mayor and deputy of Braila.

There are interesting article of Panait Istrati, *Why did I retire in Braila*, and the one signed by Gala Galaction about Professor Gh. Murgoci. The documents, information, reviews, reports no longer appear in its pages. Under the “editorial and administrative” section they announced a new series of conferences organized by the “*Annals of Braila*”. Issues no 3-4 in the “*The Annals of Braila*”, year X (1938) appear in December. Here Nicolae Iorga wrote an article about an unknown writer from Braila, Iuliu Cezar-Săvescu, urging the management team to reproduce a part of a short story of the writer and he believes that the journal is very useful (Iorga, “*The Annals of Braila*”, X, 1938, no. 3-4, p. 4). The box reappears with reproductions of documents containing information and notes about Braila. In 1939 the first number appears only in April. From the editorial board, Nae Ionescu disappears in January, he was arrested and taken to camp from Miercurea-Ciuc. He is released in June, but his health was irreparably destroyed. On March 15, 1940 he dies, the circumstances of that happening have not yet been elucidated. Again, the section of documents and information is missing. Next issue no. 2-3 appears in September. Here is an article by D. V. Ţoni, Sub-Secretary of State for National Education, and an article by Vasile Băncilă, *Danubian Cities*, along with others signed by Const. I. Untaru, I. Vârtosu, D. Karnabatt and dr. C. Paizis. Again there are missing the various documents and information about Braila. The last issue of the journal appears in July 1940, for the first six months of the year. The delay was due to the start of the war.

“The journal’s appearance was delayed, in this year of all our national arms, as its director and some of its collaborators had to leave the inkpot and pens to take up the arms to defend the country’s boundaries. Even these words are written from “somewhere in the area” where, as an engineer, we are classified among those called to pour concrete pillboxes in the defense of the Moldova. (...) Until then, our Romanian dignity strain must be affirmed, today more strongly than ever, in all areas of work. The real cultural work needs not to be weak, not even for a moment. Thus we persevere in these difficult times to release a journal. We do it, with faith that we serve as before, the most devoted cultural interests of our city and province of Braila.” (Marinescu, 1940, No 1-2, pp. 3-4)

The journal has published various studies: history - 38, geographical - 7, economic - 20, social - 8, cultural - 24, on cultural figures - 19, demographic - 1, ethnographic - 3, toponymy - 1, the history of the press - 3, literary - 7, bibliography - 4, literature - 12, economic statistics - 3, of cultural statistics - 1, various documents - 74. Also there were used 58 books of which there were extracted information on Braila, 43 information on the Lower Danube area, 20 informative notes, 3 notes, 14 book reviews of books and journals, and other 22 editorial articles. Moreover, all these articles were illustrated with 30 photographs, 11 maps and 3 plans. Under the auspices of *the Annals of Braila* there were published 10 books.

Undoubtedly, the journal “*The Annals of Braila*” is the most important of the Lower Danube region and deserves to stand alongside other journals that promote the same concept of cultural regionalism, which have been published in Craiova - “*The Archives of Oltenia*” or in Constanta - “*The Annals of Dobrogea*”. However, the periodical was inexplicably ignored by Romanian press researchers, even by the most prolific and acclaimed man, Ion Hangiu. This publication of Braila does not appear in any of editions of the *Dictionary of the Romanian Literary Press*, although similar periodicals are carefully analyzed. The *Dictionary of Romanian Literary Press* of Professor Ion Hangiu “*The Archives of Oltenia*” is defined as an encyclopedic journal dealing with culture and spiritual history of Oltenia (Hangiu, 2004, p. 77). The journal has its origin in the activity of the “Friends of Science” Society established by Gh. Țițeica and Victor Anestin. Here we find some names of the authors who have published in the journal of Braila such as Nicolae Iorga or Emanoil Vîrtosu. In the “*Annals of Dobrogea*” appeared in Constanta, for example we find the same concern for getting into the light elements of Panait Cerna's biography, and “*The Annals of Banat*”, a newsletter of the Timisoara's Museum, which appeared between 1928 and 1931, is also in the dictionary of the Professor Hangiu. The same unit of ideas may be observed to other cultural regional journals such as “*Milcovia*” from Focsani or “*Țara Bârsei*” from Brasov. In addition, the names that have signed articles over the 12 years of existence we find in other journals, known names in the national culture: Nicolae Iorga, Nae Ionescu, Simion Mehedinți, Emanoil Bucuța, Mihail Sebastian, Vasile Băncilă, Panait Istrati.

Therefore, we believe that this journal deserves to stand among the best regional culture periodicals of Romania and should be known as such.

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