

Culture and Globalisation

Romanian and Spanish Cultural Crossings

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Abstract: Much more appreciated and known in his time than by posterity, V.A.Urechia was a historian, politician and learned man, formed together with great personalities of the generation of the 40's, A.I.Cuza's collaborator (the first ruler of the United Principalities), and also our first hispanist. After finishing his studies in Paris, he married Françoise Josephine Dominique Plano, the daughter of Queen Isabela's of Spain personal doctor, Urechia showed a constant interest and maintained strong connections with the Spanish cultural space that he discovered to be the origin of the founding emperor of Dacia Traiana. The subject-matter of the present paper is Urechia's "capital of Spanish education" (enhanced in time), the contacts with the great personalities of the Spanish culture of his time, that can be reconstituted due to his work, his memoirs, his letters a intercultural dialogue and articles published in the Spanish and Romanian press, as well as the influence of those contacts on the personality, method, and purpose of his cultural approaches. Moreover, we are to point out the contribution that the personalities had in the intercultural dialogue in Europe, at the end of the 19th century.

Keywords: intercultural dialogue, Spanish culture, cultural approaches, the generation of the 40's,.

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At the half of the 19th century, Mihail Kogalniceanu and Vasile Alecsandri brought an important contribution to the evolution of the Romanian-Spanish cultural relations, but the one who substantially enriched their content was V.A.Urechia.

The information available to us justifies Paul Paltanea's statement (Păltănea, pp. 146-157) that we can no longer hold Ramiro Ortiz's opinion, according to which the development of the Romanian-Spanish cultural relations in the latter half of the 19th century was based only on the efforts of professor Stefan Vargolici from the University of Iasi. (Ortiz, 1934)

Stefan Vargolici (1843-1897) was one of the two stipended students of the Romanian people, together with Andrei Vizanti, sent in 1864 to the University of Madrid by V.A.Urechia himself, who was then the Minister of Cults and Public Instructions. Criticised by some fellow-countrymen, the reason for Madrid option was "a whim" based on "the cult Urechia had for this country". (Negruzzi, 1970, p. 164) Actually, it was linked to Urechia's outlook on the Romanian identity in the sense of this people existence compared to the other nations in Europe. In 1860, when he sent other five Romanian stipended students to Torino, he wrote to Cavour: "You change our Romanian young men into something more than scholars; you change them into great Latins, dignified descendents of Rome, the mother of their nation."¹ Urechia's correspondence with these stipended students proves that he is the coordinator of these actions.

Urechia's studies in Paris (1855-1857) in a period decisive for solving the crisis caused by Crimeea War, the activity as a secretary of the Romanian students "office" for promoting the Romanians' unionist interests, like in the contact with Spain, due to his marriage with Françoise Josephine Dominique Plano made him meditate at the Romanians' destiny as a nationality regarding the Panlatin movement. The idea of the Latin solidarity and of the special relations of the Romanian national movement with the panlatinism in the new European context, developed by V.A.Urechia since the Parisian period, would be clearly expressed in 1858, during his first stay in Madrid, in the article published in "La Discussion"

¹V.A.Urechia, *L'idée latine chez les Roumains*, p.10

newspaper, a body of democracy managed by N.Rivero. Then he approached the necessity of a Latin confederation, anticipating Mistral's proposal in 1862 and also the idea of the European balance based on the understanding between races. Urechia, who in 1901 was fully justified to aspire to The Nobel Prize for Peace, (Popa, 2001, pp. 223-227) had, as far as the international relations were concerned, an outlook that evolved in time, coming to conjugate the principle of nationalities, developed after the World War 1 and the principle of the European balance based on the understanding between races. "The Roman country" founded by Traianus in Dacia like a wall of chests devoted to the country, that should have crushed the barbarians' attempts who were willing to go to Rome, rediscovers the sense of its existence in the century of nationalities and realized it through the voice and action of some men as valuable as V.A Urechia. Romania, as a national unitary and independent state or as a confederal state, part of a Carpathian-Balkan confederation, of the United States of the Eastern Europe confederation or of a Latin confederation were aspects approached by the historian in his attempt to scrutinize the future of this region and of the Romanian nation and to establish the aims of the present.

His marriage with Françoise Josephine Dominique Plano contributed to the development of this outlook and to the increase of Urechia's interest in the Spanish culture. On the 27th of August 1857 he and his young wife would leave for Spain, where they would remain until November 1857 when they left for Iasi. Urechia confessed that it was under his wife's guidance that he "acquired some new knowledge which constitutes my capital of Spanish education, because my having gone to the University of Madrid cannot be taken into account, as I have only sporadically gone there and I was not one of its members either". (V.A.Urechia. Din tainele vietii, 2 iulie 1900) For studying Spanish language and literature he used the works of Eugenio de Eguilaz, Lecciones elementales de gramatica castellana, Madrid, 1842, A.Gil de Zazate, Resumen historico de la literatura espanola, Madrid, 1851, Barrantes, Baladas espannolas, Madrid, 1853 and others, which can be found at "V.A.Urechia" Library in Galati, under the note "The Library of the Bachelor V.Alexandrescu", for the buying of which he used the periodical gazette "El Bibliografo espanol y extranjero".

The intensity of the Spanish cultural life of the time impressed V. A. Urechia who established valuable connections and remarked the political and cultural institutions, thinking of modernizing his own country. He investigated the activity of the Athenaeum in Madrid, whose statute he almost fully transposed in the statute

of the Romanian Athenaeum created in Iasi on the 25th of September 1860, with the purpose of bringing together the neolatin peoples through culture.

The most significant contacts during this first stay in Spain were established through the medium of his wife's family, who owned numerous editing bookshops in Madrid, Paris, New York or London and especially through the medium of his brother-in-law, the well-known publisher Charles Bally-Bailliere.

These contacts were established at the Literary Circle from Bally-Bailliere Bookshop, at the Athenaeum, at Beso-Mana (a "kissing the hand" holiday at the royal court, where V.A.Urechia participated) or at the University of Madrid where he had gone, although he was not one of its students. (V.A.Urechia. *Din tainele vietii*, 2 iulie 1900)

In his memoirs from the beginning of the 20th century, Urechia confessed: "I was happy to be present at the Athenaeum (society attended by the learned men), at the debut of the great speaker Emilio Castelar, and since then I have not broken off my good relations with him, no matter what high positions he has had - even the presidency of Spain." He mentioned that: "Several times these relations served the cause of the Romanians across the mountains" and in his book "Oriente", Castelar "does not forget the Romanians"¹. The article about the Latin race published in "Le siecle" and reproduced in "Romanul"(that is "The Romanian") in 1875, offered Urechia the opportunity of writing "more letters connected to our ideal, the federalization of the Latin peoples in Europe and America"². Castelar, speaking to Gambeta, considered Urechia "a good propagandist of an alliance of the Latin peoples."³

At the Athenaeum, Urechia was introduced to Pi Y.Margall, partisan of the federalization of peoples speaking different languages, a future minister of the Spanish republic, Castelar's rival candidate to presidency. Y Margall "enriched the Spanish literature with numerous writings", among which "Plas nacionalidades" published in 1876, sent to Urechia, although Margall knew he did not agree to "all his opinions".

The discussions carried on then with Tamayo y Baus, the future director of The National Library of Madrid, helped the young Romanian choose some Spanish plays for being translated into Romanian and later for his research in the Spanish

¹*Ibidem*.

²*Ibidem*, I, nr.302,20 November, 1900, f. 1.

³*Ibidem*, I, nr.163, 2 July 1900, f.1.

library and archives. Urechia mentioned in his diary that, in March 1868 y Baus “was one of the first people to announce my election as a correspondent member of The Spanish Academy”¹

He met then the young Emanoil del Palacio, only three years older than Urechia, who “had already started being known as a poet” and also Campoamor, Numez de Arce, both poet and politician, N.Rivero, a journalist that Urechia collaborated with at his newspaper – “La Discussion”. He must have met Fernando de Castro, professor of History at the University of Madrid and queen Isabela’s preacher, author of numerous school manuals much appreciated at that time. (Corespondentă, Fond “V.A.Urechia”)

Being aware of the importance of the Spanish archives and libraries for Romanians’ history, Urechia would return here (in August 1862, 1867 etc) for carrying on important investigations with a view to achieving a historic bibliography of Romanians, as complete as possible. “San Isidoro” Library in Madrid , “Civica” Library in Barcelona, the archives and museums were important sources for him. His presence in Spain was pointed out with appreciation in the press in Madrid also due to his activity of Spanish literature popularization in Romania, known to some literary and political circles in the capital of Spain.² In March 1868 he was elected a correspondent member of Real Academica de la Lengua. In 1869 Urechia sent the Spanish Academy a personal study about the Iberian element in the Romanian language trying to initiate a change of publications.

In 1901 he offers his own works to “Balaquer” Library and Museum and initiates a change of books between The Romanian Academy Library, V.A. Urechia” Library in Galati and The Library in Barcelona. These relations between libraries continued even after his death (the 22 nd of November 1901), Juan Oliva y Mila, a librarian at “Balaguer”, confirming these intentions in his touching letter, dated the 5th of February 1902.³

Among the personalities of the Spanish public and cultural life that Urechia had contacts with was Albert de Quintana, the founder of the prize with the same name; Vasile Alecsandri was awarded this prize in 1878. He collaborated at the Macedo-Romanic Album created in 1880, which was a protest against the oppression and injustice caused by the Ottoman Empire against the Romanians in the Balkan

¹*Ibidem.*

²Idem, *Les Archives V.A.Urechia*, IX bis, f. 186, 272.

³Biblioteca V.A.Urechia, *Arhiva* , XXXI, f. 3-4.

Peninsula. In 1894, when the representatives of the Romanians in Transylvania who had submitted a Memorandum to the Emperor in Vienna were imprisoned, V.A. Urechia, the president of the League for the Cultural Unity of all the Romanians appealed to “the Latin world” for joining a sister nation against the measures of oppression promoted by the Hungarian government. Albert Quintana responded to the appeal stating: “ We admire doctor Lucaciu's courage and also his fellows of protest and fight. With the revendications of the oppressed race defended by them, we are uniting our call of admiration and enthusiasm from far away... The strong and distinguished races like yours will never die; they will rise, strong and regenerated, through martyrs.” (*Voci latine. De la frati la frati*, 1894, p. 106-107) V.A. Urechia's activity, much more complex than we have succeeded in presenting here, justifies our statement that he was the main animator of the Romanian-Spanish cultural relations of the latter half of the 19th century.

On the 15th of May 1894, in a letter addressed to Urechia, Alphonse Roque-Ferrier, referring to this effort stated that: “he has done as much as A. , Quintana and Castelar have done in order to make the supreme and suveran principle of Latin brotherhood penetrate the population soul.”¹

From the diversity of European and Latin cultures, Urechia kept a particular place for the Spanish culture. This was the cultural space that he approached more, than any other of his contemporaries, that he showed a special love to and which he related himself to, trying to define himself as an individual and citizen of a kindred nation solidary with the European destiny.

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¹*Ibidem*, p.20-21.