

The National Assembly of Blaj of 3/15–5/17 May 1848 in the Symbolism of the Romanian National Identity Project Until 1918

IOAN BOLOVAN, SORINA PAULA BOLOVAN

1. Introduction: Historiography, Context

IN THE modern era, putting myths or historical events in the service of national identity projects was common practice for the peoples of Central and Southeast Europe, be they Romanians, Poles, Czechs, Hungarians, etc. The latter, when celebrating their millennium at the end of the 19th century, operated a large scale integration of the past into their national project, erecting numerous public monuments, printing hundreds of books, and producing various art pieces (paintings, songs, elements of decorative art) intended to rally the masses to the cause of national integration.¹ In all the territories inhabited by Romanians, the Revolution of 1848 marked the beginning of our modern history, reviving the popular ideals and hopes and providing individual or group political and behavioral models. More recently, Mihai Chiper has published an excellent analysis of the changes experienced by the memory of the Revolution of 1848 in the historiography of the topic, highlighting, mostly with reference to Wallachia and Moldavia, the role played by the reconsideration of the past in shaping the political trends that drew on the legacy of the events occurred in 1848–1849.²

Both Romanian and foreign historians discussed the role played by the Revolution of 1848 in facilitating the transition of Transylvania from medieval socio-economic and judicial elements and features to modern ones. All of them highlighted the positive consequences of the events of 1848–1849 for the Romanians. The people of those times were themselves aware of the particular importance of the Romanian national program outlined in Blaj in 1848 for the development of the Romanian nation in Transylvania. After the Great Union of 1918, a number of historians, politicians, journalists, etc., approached

Over the past two years, many parts of this study were presented during various internal and international conferences, and certain paragraphs have been published in Romanian or in English in various periodicals or collective volumes marking the centenary of the Great Union, and therefore the text that follows is not fully a previously unpublished one.

the event 1918 from the vantage point of the fundamental mission statement formulated during the Revolution of 1848. Barely a few months after the Great National Assembly of Alba Iulia, held on 1 December 1918, in Orăștie an anonymous author published a brochure featuring the analysis of a millennium of Romanian history, from the emergence of the people, through their political affirmation in the framework of several states, and to the Great Union. One sentence in this brochure is quite relevant for our approach:

*The Transylvanian peasantry, assembled on Liberty Plain in 1848, heard the scholars explain what the Hungarians meant with their **unio** and took up the concept in their own fashion, saying, in one voice: **We want union with the country!** The country! For the Transylvanian Romanian peasants, this meant **our country**, the country they felt was **theirs** as well, and therefore they need not explicitly indicate to what particular country they were referring . . . The desire to unite with the country, even if it manifested itself among the people so late and only on such an occasion, had nevertheless been long present in their hearts, as demonstrated by the very outcry heard on Liberty Plain . . .*³

It must be said that the author of the anonymous brochure published in Orăștie was a skilled historian, associating the objective of political-national unity with the unionist message formulated by Nicolae Bălcescu in an article based on a speech he had delivered in Paris, where the Wallachian patriot was living in exile after the defeat of the revolution. The piece in question was titled “Mișcarea românilor din Ardeal la 1848” (The Transylvanian Romanian movement in 1848), published in several editions starting with 1851 and also included in the 1878 volume edited by Alexandru Odobescu, which provided a pertinent analysis of the Transylvanian Romanian Revolution of 1848–1849. Nicolae Bălcescu had nothing but praise for the second national assembly of Blaj, of 3/15–5/17 May 1848. The Wallachian historian and revolutionist was impressed by the force and the significance of the rally organized by the leaders of the Transylvanian Romanians:

*15 May 1848! Day of light, of freedom and of Romanian greatness, we fondly remember and celebrate you! In the Romanians annals there is no brighter day, save for your sister, the day of 11 June 1848, of the people of Bucharest. Day of greatness, we fondly remember and celebrate you! Then, for the first time, we heard an entire people respond to those who were speaking about the union between Transylvania and Hungary with the outcry: **“We want union with the Country.”** Wondrous revelation from God who, in such moments of great popular celebration, speaks straight into the hearts of His chosen. In 1848, only the common people and the poets, these scions of divine inspiration, could foresee the future events, only they could decipher and reveal what was written in the heart of every Romanian: **freedom from any foreign domination by way of national unity** (emphasis ours).⁴*

The note inserted by Bălcescu after the sentence “We want union with the Country” is relevant for his credo: “When they say Country, the Transylvanians mean Wallachia. Unfortunately for me, I could not be present in Blaj on 15 May 1848, but several Transylvanian Romanians who were there told me about this popular outcry.”⁵ Thus, Nicolae Bălcescu saw the Blaj assembly of 3/15 May 1848 as a sign of national matu-

rity, of the achievement of the national freedom long desired by the Romanians.⁶ Even if nowadays we favor another interpretation of what many participants in the second Blaj assembly exactly meant when they cried out “We want union with the Country,” important for the post-1848 period and for the efforts of an entire generation to outline a national ideal though the union of all Romanians is the interpretation provided by Bălcescu, namely, that in Blaj the Transylvanian Romanians stated that they wanted a union. In fact, the idea of a single Romanian polity was explicitly expressed in the memorandum drawn up by the leaders of the Transylvanian Romanians during the third national assembly of Blaj, in September 1848, and submitted to the Austrian parliament. The document in question suggested the creation of an autonomous Romanian state within Austria, following a union between Transylvania, Moldavia, and Wallachia: “We seek the free union of free peoples under the leadership of Austria, internally free and externally powerful . . . This request comes not only on our behalf, *but also on behalf of our brethren in the Danube Principalities*” (emphasis ours).⁷ The memorandum of 16/28 September 1848 was the culminating point of the cooperation between the Romanian revolutionists in Transylvania, Wallachia, Moldavia, and Bukovina. At the same time, it indicates the existence of a concerted effort meant to secure the political and legal status of the Romanian Principalities, at that time under a dual foreign occupation. The political regime set up in Wallachia after the defeat of the revolution was in clear breach of the autonomy principle, and the solution envisaged in the Transylvanian memorandum, while proposing the creation of a Romanian state under the aegis of Austria, was nevertheless a step forward as compared to the then situation of the two Romanian states located east and south of the Carpathians. The solution of uniting all Romanians became imprinted in the conscience of the nation, and the powerful model of 1848 continued to shape attitudes and behaviors on both sides of the Carpathians.

The scholar George Barițiu, historian and active participant, in the sense given to these terms by Arthur Schlesinger Jr.,⁸ who was one of the prominent leaders of the Transylvanian Romanian revolutionists, saw the Revolution of 1848–1849 as “a time that was grandiose and memorable, as well as tragic.”⁹ Barițiu, who would eventually become chairman of the Romanian Academy, understood the revolution as a fundamental moment, not only for the Transylvanian Romanians, but for the entire nation. He also underlined the educational value of history, believing that to piece together and know the past (in this case, the outstanding example of the generation of 1848) was extremely valuable for the future generation. Of course, the May assembly on the Blaj Liberty Plain is widely seen as the apogee, the symbol of this liberation: “That assembly, of eternal memory, where the Romanian people living in this principality proclaimed and asserted their identity as a nation.”¹⁰

In an analysis of the Revolution of 1848, Silviu Dragomir—the first major Romanian Transylvanian historian who was not a contemporary to those events but published many well-documented texts devoted to what happened in Transylvania in 1848–1849, and who was also the secretary of the Great National Assembly of Alba Iulia—spoke about

the emergence of the idea of the political unity of all Romanians amid the flames of the revolution. This idea, tentative at the beginning, gained increased momentum in the political

*plans and the actions taken by the revolutionists, as the true face of the policies pursued by the great empires began to be revealed. The historian understood that the union of 1918 had its origins in the political program and in the battles fought by the Romanians in 1848–1849. In other words, this aspiration was formulated by the revolutionists of 1848–1849. Then, the objective was pursued by the generation of the revolution and by those that followed, until the union of 1918.*¹¹

In the decades following the Great Union, Ioan Lupaș, a brilliant and honest historian, professor, and priest, emerged as a subtle analyst and did not hesitate to make a correlation between the Revolution of 1848 and the Great National Assembly of Alba Iulia of 1918. This unobtrusive leader of the Transylvanian Romanians in the last decades of the dual regime, who was nevertheless a staunch defender of the program of the Revolution of 1848, especially when it came to restoring the autonomy of Transylvania and to equal rights for the Romanian nation, the archpriest of Săliște was one of the leading participants in the Great National Assembly of 1 December 1918. In a speech delivered in Alba Iulia in the year 1943, during the celebrations marking 25 years since the union, Ioan Lupaș highlighted the inseparable bond between freedom and nationality, with reference to both 1848 and 1918:

*The revolutionary movements of 1848 clearly envisaged a united Romania . . . In the brilliant speech delivered by Vasile Goldiș we find the memorable words now carved deeply on his headstone, found in the Eternity Cemetery of Arad: “The right of the Romanian nation to be free is now recognized by the whole world, even by our centuries-old enemies . . . Freedom for this nation means union with Wallachia.” He directly drew on the legacy of Simion Bărnuțiu who, in 1848, had stated the principle whereby freedom without nationality will be the death of the Romanian nation, urging everybody to avoid the temptation of the so-called Hungarian freedoms, which were a poisoned fruit.*¹²

In other words, Lupaș clearly saw the revolutionary movement of 1848 as a model for the following generations, and the foundation of the great achievement of the memorable year 1918.

Another commentator of the events of 1918, Ion Clopoțel—a historian and an active participant in the completion of the union, today practically unknown to generations of historians—managed to skillfully capture the essence of the Transylvanian Romanian political struggle in the modern era. He clearly placed the Great Union in the context of the complex and lengthy process that began in the 18th century and had the revolution of 1848 as its culminating point:

*The political struggle was focused on one objective: the full implementation of the independence program of 1848, a reiteration of our old self-determination and self-governance agenda. Transylvanian politics is defined by the principles of peasant democracy. The efforts of Transylvanian scholars are aimed at a peasant democracy.*¹³

Clopoțel thus placed the events of 1918 in the wake of the Revolution of 1848, highlighting the important role of the elites in the civic-democratic and national education of the masses, where a significant contribution was also that of the church, both Orthodox and Greek Catholic.

A relatively similar approach is that of Vasile Netea, who also wrote a piece about the day of 1 December 1918. The historian repeatedly referred to the spirit of the Revolution of 1848, identifying the similarities between the organization of the Great Assembly of Alba Iulia and that of Blaj. Netea wrote about the manner in which the young Romanian Transylvanian students began to set up teams in the autumn of 1918, just like they had done in 1848, and travelled all over Transylvania in an attempt to mobilize the people.¹⁴ The same Vasile Netea also provides us with an account of the creation of the Romanian National Council of Blaj, in early November of 1918, when young militants directed the crowds towards Liberty Plain, where

*a student, Octavian Hodârnașu, the chairman of the Inocențiu Micu Clain book club, delivered a moving evocative speech, followed by a resounding “Romanians, Awaken!” sung by the grandsons of those who had sung it with similar enthusiasm in 1848 . . . The dream of the revolutionists of 1848 had been fulfilled! The symbol of victory was the flag raised on the belfry of the cathedral in which, 70 years before, Simion Bărnuțiu had delivered his speech.*¹⁵

It was no accident that Liberty Plain was chosen as the place where the regional political-national body was established, because all contemporaries systematically associated that place with the beginning of the national emancipation of the Romanians (social emancipation in a first stage and then, gradually, on a cultural and political level).

Liviu Maior, one of the leading specialists of the past few decades in the modern history of Transylvania, in a monograph devoted to the Revolution of 1848 in Transylvania, contended that during the events in question there emerged

*a number of fundamental issues regarding the development of Transylvanian society in the direction of modernity . . . This desideratum, clearly expressed in 1848, of national unity or autonomy, was the driving force behind political movements until the year 1918. For the first time, the multinational Habsburg Empire was violently challenged by the new ideological forces. The post-revolutionary period saw the attempts of the middle class, of the intellectuals, to provide a foundation to political organizations grounded in the popular consensus, expressed by way of the franchise. Just like they had done during the revolution, presently they militated for a reconstruction of the political system and of the state based upon the principle of nationalities and upon liberalism. This created a constant pressure seeking a redefinition of the political map of the continent.*¹⁶

Indeed, in 1848 the struggle for freedom and national unity of the nations of Central and Eastern Europe sought a major political and administrative rearrangement of the map of Europe, which truly came to pass only after the Great War. The same historian,

in a recent paper devoted to one of the main architects of Greater Romania, argued that in Transylvania, during the Revolution of 1848,

for the first time, new actors filled the political arena, coming from social classes and categories deemed 'unfit' to participate in the work of state institutions. Civil liberties and the modern political language became better known, even if their actual meaning was not easily grasped. It was the beginning of a slow and lengthy process of "politicization," of the integration of the general population into the identity-driven trend. The revolution, as a dramatic moment for all inhabitants of Transylvania, remained present in the memory of the local communities, providing a foundation to the political-national endeavors . . . The Romanian elites took up the political and social program of the revolutionists, seeking to quickly rally their fellow nationals, presently socially free, to the cause of national identity . . . Their main proposal involved the creation of a "Romanian national body" in the Empire, consisting of Transylvania, Banat, and Bukovina, a structure which, they hoped, would eventually also include the Romanians in Moldavia and Wallachia.¹⁷

2. The Blaj Assembly, Culminating Point of the Revolution of 1848

NOWADAYS, HISTORIANS no longer question the statement whereby the Blaj National Assembly of 3/15–5/17 May 1848 was the most important episode of 1848–1849 for the Romanians in Transylvania. Without denying the importance of the third September rally, or even of the first rally on the Sunday of St. Thomas, of other peaceful or bellicose episodes of those years, we have to acknowledge that the May assembly was the supreme manifestation of the Romanian nation in Transylvania in the days of the revolution.¹⁸ This rally was attended by approximately 40,000 people, most of them peasants from all counties of Transylvania, without forgetting the revolutionists coming from Moldavia and Wallachia. The people assembled swore allegiance to the Romanian nation, to the motherland and to the emperor in Vienna, and adopted the 16 points program of the Romanian revolution, in a document titled "Petițiunea națională" (The national petition). The principles of the program adopted in Blaj reflect the Romantic concepts of state and nation, which makes it similar to the other programs of the European democratic revolution. In its point 1, the program demanded national independence for the Romanian nation and rights equal to those of the other nations in Transylvania. Other demands included the abolition of serfdom without any compensation exacted from the peasants, economic and political freedoms, the end of censorship, education at all levels in the Romanian language, etc. Point 16 requested the summoning of a constituent assembly of the province, with all nations represented (including the Romanians), which would discuss the issue of the union between Transylvania and Hungary. A significant step forward in the organization of the Romanian revolution was the establishment in Blaj of a National Committee, which was to operate in the city of Sibiu. The national ideology, grounded in the principles of liberalism, of the social reforms that

had to be implemented, provided a common platform for the joint actions undertaken by the elites and the peasantry, not only during the three days of the National Assembly, but throughout the entire Revolution of 1848–1849.¹⁹ The program drawn up here would remain almost unchanged throughout the following period, experiencing only slight adjustments as a consequence of the various developments experienced by the empire in 1849. The joint actions undertaken by the elites and the peasant masses, the total confidence of the latter in the new generation of secular leaders who had unselfishly put themselves entirely in their service, remained a valuable asset not until the end of the revolution, but also in the decades that followed. The importance of this moment was understood both by those who were present in Blaj in 1848 and by those who analyzed the Blaj assembly from the vantage point of historical anthropology. The Romanian revolutionary program, as featured in the “National Petition” and launched at the National Assembly of Blaj,

became imperiously necessary, legitimate and messianic, because it was seen as stemming from the Romanian popular will. Consequently, the responsibility for assuming it was now incumbent upon the entire Romanian Nation, which became the collective Redeemer, symbolically tasked with ensuring the triumph of the revolutionary cause . . . Blessed with this mandate from the Nation, the National Assembly of May 1848 launched a messianic project, laying the solid foundations of the future happiness of the national community . . . General happiness, public good, redeeming principles—liberty, equality, fraternity—are offered as priority values, as new codes of conduct for the Romanian Nation. Evangelical symbols long entrenched in the religious register of the collective mentality, these values are presently endowed with the attribute of sacredness also in the political field.²⁰

Similarly, by analogy with the Revolution of 1848, the Great National Assembly of Alba Iulia held on 1 December 1918 was the culminating point of the unionist struggle of the autumn of 1918. Representative Alexandru Vaida-Voevod’s reading in the Budapest parliament on 18 October of the declaration of independence drawn up in Oradea on 12 October 1918 by the Executive Committee of the Romanian National Party, the creation of the Romanian National Council, or the negotiations with the representatives of the Hungarian government held in Arad on 13–14 November pale by comparison with the symbolic value acquired by the assembly held in Alba Iulia. The democratic manner in which the union was decided, the massive participation of the population living on the entire territory that joined Romania, the complexity of the truly democratic reform agenda of the Union Resolution, which practically foreshadowed an entirely new organization for the young unitary Romanian state, etc., all combine to bestow a distinct quality upon the event of 1918. Among specialists and in the eyes of the general public, the union between Transylvania and Romania is associated first and foremost with the familiar image of the crowds assembled on Horea’s Plain, waving tricolor flags, and with the photograph of Vasile Goldiș reading the Union Resolution in the building of the Officers’ Club. In the collective mentality, the union is almost universally associated with the Great National Assembly of Alba Iulia of 1 December 1918. In this respect, the most moving and illustrative description of this event is that provided by an eyewitness, ten years after the union:

On the nearby field the people were waiting for the representatives of the Assembly. The content of the message was not expected to surprise, as it was known beforehand. But they craved a kind word, something they had not heard in four years, and that was something they were eagerly awaiting. All past suffering, all the humiliations and the pointless sacrifices on the battlefield, all these open wounds needed a soothing balm. Four speakers, clergymen and intellectuals, took the floor letting it be known to the four corners of the world that God had welcomed our pure sacrifice and had listened to our repeated prayers. Thousands of people cheered, lifted their caps, waved flags, like an old forest stirring back to life. And the Holy Spirit was upon them. . . . Hundreds of thousands of people were present there in Alba Iulia, body and soul, but in fact the souls of all Romanians were there. The moment of revival was decided by the entire nation.²¹

It is no accident that the generations that came after the Revolution of 1848 sought to keep it as a symbol in the Romanian public conscience. Regardless of the general political context, with more gusto and aplomb, or more discreetly and in a soft-spoken manner, so as not to draw the attention of the Austrian or Hungarian authorities, after 1850 the Transylvanian Romanians kept a pious memory of the Blaj National Assembly of 3 May 1848, wrote articles and poems, sang *Romanians, Awaken!*, flew the tricolor flag, etc., using the anniversaries of this event to animate the spirit of national unity.²²

The appreciation for the role played by the youth in the revolution, so manifest in 1848–1849,²³ remained constant during the decades that came after the revolution. The periodic commemoration, especially on anniversary dates, of the events occurred in Blaj in May of 1848, always provided an opportunity to highlight the role played by the youth in the revolution. The following example is relevant in this respect, coming from a 1898 issue of the newspaper *Unirea* (The Union) which featured a front page piece titled “Rolul tinerimii” (The role of the youth):

The Romanian youth of 1848 will forever be the ideal model of future generations. During those times of national revival, these youths carried out a truly apostolic mission. . . . It was the youth who brought the peasants to the assembly. The groups of Romanians walking towards the venue of the assembly were all lead by a young man, who spoke to them about human rights, which also had to be enjoyed by Romanians. During the assembly of 3/15 May they were the honor guard, they were the captains of the Romanian groups. Their commands were gladly obeyed by the loving peasants, who were ready to follow them come what may. It would be hard to picture something more impressive than this close alliance between the youths and the assembled crowds. The names of Iancu, Moldovan, Buteanu and of others like them shall always be cherished by Romanians and our youths shall always draw inspiration and enthusiasm from the achievements of the generation of 1848.²⁴

3. The Activity of the Blaj Assembly

3.1. The Symbolism of Unity

AS UNITY is the central topic of our approach, in what follows we shall focus mainly on the manner in which the protagonists of the events of 1848 perceived, at that time or in retrospect, the issue of national unity beyond denominational differences. The national imperatives persuaded the Romanian elite in Transylvania to set unity above denominational differences and above personal or institutional pride. The Blaj assembly on the Sunday of St. Thomas (18/30 April 1848) once again highlighted the need for a concerted national effort. In his synthesis, George Barițiu wrote that one day after this first Blaj assembly

Bărnuț and Cipariu reached an agreement on the next gathering, scheduled to take place on 15 May. Their purpose was to make everybody swallow their pride, forget the past, or at least not reopen old wounds; the clergy and all decent men of Blaj were expected to come to an understanding with the members of the Sibiu consistory. The same reconciliation was envisaged when it came to the two bishops.²⁵

It would seem that the efforts of the national leaders, both Greek Catholic and Orthodox, were successful, because the second Blaj assembly, of 3/15–5/17 May 1848, was a show of unity between the ecclesiastical leaders of the two denominations, positively appreciated by those present at the gathering and also later on. Thus, on the celebration of fifty years since the Blaj assembly of May 1848, the May 1898 issue of the newspaper *Unirea* published a comprehensive text devoted to the event in question, and the last subtitle of the piece was “Momente de înălțare” (Moments of elation). The columnist of the official publication of the Greek Catholic Metropolitan See expressed his admiration for the wisdom displayed by the two bishops in the spring of 1848:

The moment of elation occurred when the two bishops, Lemenyi and Șaguna, exchanged a brotherly hug before a gathering of tens of thousands. Thus, they consecrated the eternal unity of feelings and the national brotherhood without which no people can hope for a better future. Priests bearing great crosses led this peaceful host to Liberty Plain and there they sowed the seeds of the future greatness of our people, provided that we continue to uphold our church and our nation.²⁶

A similar opinion on the need to prioritize unity of action over religious differences came from an important Orthodox political leader, long after the Revolution of 1848. In a speech delivered in Blaj on 29 August 1911, at the annual meeting of the Society for the Romanian Theater Fund, Ioan Mișu expressed his admiration for the generation of '48:

We have many great and cherished memories connected to this corner of our Transylvania . . . but one particular event must necessarily be mentioned here, for I believe it to be extremely important, extremely instructive, and extremely dear too all Romanians. I am referring to

the extraordinary example of Romanian solidarity that was witnessed here on that eternally memorable day of 3/15 May, when our forefathers, understanding the imperatives of that time, set aside all petty considerations and interests and came together, over hill and dale, under the wise guidance of the leaders of the two sister churches, the bishops Șaguna and Lemenyi. Hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder, they conferred in a spirit of brotherhood and then struggled to achieve the holy grail of our national redemption.²⁷

3.2. The “Denominational Balance” in Leadership Positions between 1848 and 1918

Despite certain personal and institutional animosities between the two Romanian denominations that had manifested themselves during the modern era, both the religious and the secular leaders usually tried to ensure a certain balance in terms of public visibility and in terms of holding leadership positions in the Romanian cultural and political movement. This type of responsible behavior could be seen from the Revolution of 1848 all the way to the Great Union. The second national assembly of Blaj, the one of May 1848, also saw the creation of a National Committee called upon to coordinate the activity of the Romanian militants and represent the nation in the relation with the local and the Viennese authorities. In Blaj, in May 1848, the elected chairman of this committee was the Orthodox Bishop Andrei Șaguna, and the deputy chairman was the Greek Catholic Simion Bărnuțiu (the committee included people like Al. Papiu Ilarian, George Barițiu, Aron Pumnul, Constantin Roman, a. o., both Orthodox and Greek Catholic).

A similar balance in the representation of the two denominations could also be seen in the structures of the Romanian civil society in Transylvania. Over the years, for tactical reasons, both Orthodox and Greek Catholics were elected to chair the ASTRA (the most important cultural institution of the Transylvanian Romanians until the union), starting with Bishop and then Metropolitan Bishop Andrei Șaguna (1861–1867), the Greek Catholic Vasile Ladislav Pop (1867–1875), the Orthodox Iacob Bologa (1875–1877), the Greek Catholic Timotei Cipariu (1877–1887), the Greek Catholic George Barițiu (1888–1893), the Greek Catholic Ioan Micu-Moldovan (1893–1901), the Orthodox Alexandru Mocsonyi (1901–1904), the Greek Catholic Iosif Sterca-Șuluțiu (1904–1911) and the Orthodox Andrei Bârseanu (1911–1922). The principle of balance was also followed in the case of the deputy chairmen, and an Orthodox chairman would have a Uniate (Greek Catholic) deputy chair. In 1905, Nicolae Iorga accurately pointed out that

from the very beginning the Association belonged to both Șaguna and Șuluțiu, to those from both Blaj and Sibiu, to both Greek Catholics and Orthodox. This is its main and most cherished feature.²⁸

This was a clear recognition of the fact that the national idea had taken precedence over denominational differences, consecrating what Simion Bărnuțiu had asked of the Romanians in his speech held on 2/14 May 1848 in the Blaj cathedral, namely, to choose

national unity over religious divisions. The leaders in Arad followed the model of the ASTRA when they gathered together to establish the Arad National Association for the Culture of the Romanian People, in the spring of 1863. Consequently, the man elected as chairman of the Arad association was the Orthodox Bishop of Arad, Procopie Ivacicovici, and the deputy chairman was the Greek Catholic canon of Lugoj, Mihail Naghy. The national character of these cultural institutions was also understood and perceived as such by the people of that time. Unable to attend the constituent assembly of the Arad National Association on 30 April 1863, a group of Romanian community leaders from the region of Zarand sent their congratulations to the association, in a letter that contained the same ideas of national and social solidarity: "The new association does not belong to the Uniates or to the Orthodox, to aristocrats or democrats, it belongs to all Romanians, from all walks of life."²⁹

An example illustrative of the efforts undertaken by the Romanian leaders to bring together the two denominations in the service of the national cause comes from 1907 and 1908. The Transylvanian Alexandru Vaida-Voevod who, alongside Aurel C. Popovici of Banat, had been accepted in the political entourage of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, insistently pleaded for the inclusion of Miron Cristea and Augustin Bunea in the Belvedere circle, a group of politicians and clergymen close to the archduke. Vaida-Voevod talked to adviser Alexander Brosch about his desire to gain the support of both Romanian denominations for his political-national project. Franz Ferdinand accepted the two clergymen and treated them equally. Furthermore, at the proposal of both Brosch and Vaida, he even suggested the possibility of them "receiving a miter" at some point in the future. In fact, shortly afterwards, in 1909, Miron Cristea was appointed bishop of Caransebeş, following diocesan elections that saw the involvement of the Hungarian authorities and of some Viennese circles close to Franz Ferdinand. Unfortunately, Augustin Bunea (whom many saw as the possible metropolitan bishop of Blaj) died that year, ending far too early a career that could have brought many benefits not only to the Greek Catholic Romanians, but to the Romanian nation as a whole.³⁰

It was therefore no accident that the same principle of denominational balance in public positions was followed in the autumn of 1918. In the current state of our knowledge, it is difficult to say whether this was deliberate or not. We tend to believe that things happened the way they did by force of habit, after decades of balanced distribution of public offices within the Romanian nation in Transylvania, as an example of maturity and responsibility provided by the Romanian political elites of this province.

3.3. The Model of the Blaj Assembly and of the Revolution of 1848 in the National Movement and in the Public Conscience Until the Union

The annual commemoration of the great events occurred in Transylvania in 1848–1849 became a constant component of the collective memory in the decades after the Revolution of 1848. The National Assembly of 3/15 May 1848 and the spirit of '48 were annually celebrated in Blaj, on the original site of the assembly. At some point, no

one knows exactly when, a stone was erected on Liberty Plain, symbolically reminding people of what had happened there. Later on, the small marble monument built in the years immediately after the revolution was replaced by a larger commemorative stone, a commanding obelisk located in front of the Blaj gymnasium, where students as well as ordinary inhabitants of Blaj would gather to celebrate the heroes of the Romanian revolution.³¹ To illustrate the attachment of the later generations to the symbol of the Revolution of 1848, we shall present an event occurred in the spring of 1883:

*The Târnava Mare River flooded the whole of Liberty Plain, and the stone was likely to be buried in silt. Informed by a classmate that “The Liberty Stone is in danger,” in the evening of 3/15 May 1883 the gymnasium students—more precisely, those in year seven—decided to drag it to a sheltered area further afield. 36 students from all years responded to the call, and at around 10 in the evening they went to Liberty Plain. Two of them later mentioned this episode in their memoirs: “We started working, with spades and shovels. We had a lot to dig, as the stone was buried deep, to half its height. We dug it up and cleared the earth around it, roots and all, and with tremendous effort we tried to lift it. Under this stone we found a smaller one, of hewn marble. All together we rolled the big stone, a real giant, for about 60 paces starting from its initial emplacement. We dug another hole, just as deep as the original one, pushed the stone inside and laid the smaller stone right next to it. The work done, we laid the flag over the stone. Two of the students hired help from the village . . . gave the man two florins to take care of the flag and guard it for the whole day of 3/15 May, and return it to us in the evening. At 2 am we began singing **Romanians, Awaken!**, and when we got to the verse about the priests holding the crosses high, the theology students, who had woken up early and heard us sing, joined us in the garden of the seminary and we all sang, at the top of our lungs, **We prefer a glorious death in battle to being once again slaves on our ancestral land.**” In the morning, the gendarmes seized the flag and sent a report to their superiors, and the authorities in Budapest started an inquiry.³²*

This monument, alongside the so-called Cross of Iancu on Vineyard Hill, located near Blaj, would become a place of pilgrimage on the anniversary of 3/15 May. This did not go unnoticed by the authorities and by some Hungarians who were bothered by the expressions of national identity coming from the Romanian inhabitants of the town, whenever they celebrated the Revolution of 1848. The two monuments, albeit modest in both size and artistry, were seen by the Romanians as symbols that “reminded the Romanians of their dreams of freedom, of national independence,” and therefore the authorities could not accept that “Romanians would celebrate their own struggle for freedom.”³³ Eventually, in the night of 16/17 November 1908, “unknown criminals” blew up both the stone on Liberty Plain and the Cross. Of course, this outrage generated much excitement among the Romanians and the press of that time provided detailed reports on what had happened in Blaj. Iuliu Maniu, a member of parliament, submitted a question to the government in this regard. Maybe prophetically, the poet and professor Andrei Bârseanu wrote a poem which somewhat anticipated the events that, just a decade later, would bring freedom to the Romanians in Transylvania:

*They crushed the commemorative stone
 Of the time when the tribunes foretold our revival
 But the vile madmen rejoice in vain:
 They broke the stone, but freedom lives!
 They also broke the cross, the holy symbol of the faith
 Of a people desirous of brighter days
 But to no avail, you ghosts with malicious hearts:
 You cannot stop the coming dawn.³⁴*

The commemoration of the Assembly of 3/15 May 1848 also went beyond the mere confines of the town of Blaj, and across the whole of Transylvania national Romanian feelings were expressed either publicly or in a more discreet fashion. In the first years after the revolution, in the wake of neo-absolutism, everything was kept relatively low key, but the memory of the revolution was still fresh in the hearts and minds of the contemporaries. Ten years after the assembly on Liberty Plain, the Romanian leaders favored caution. The same could not be said, however, for the students of Blaj, denizens of what had been in 1848 a Mecca of all Romanians, the place where their discontent was formulated and expressed. The youth had played an important role at the time of the revolution, and the same youth believed that honor demanded a celebration of those heroic days. Thus, in the evening of 2/14 May 1858, celebrations began in the courtyard of St. Basil's High School, commemorating the National Assembly of May 1848. The students and their class tutors gathered together, bearing torches, and proceeded to march through the city singing the *March of Iancu, Romanians, Awaken!* and other songs. On the way back, a rostrum was erected in front of the cathedral and several students spoke about the significance of the event they were celebrating.³⁵

The first major political action taken against the dual regime by the Transylvanian Romanians, the Pronouncement of Blaj, came exactly in May of 1868, two decades after the Great National Assembly of 3/15 May 1848.³⁶ The newspaper *Federațiunea* (The Federation) highlighted the importance of celebrating the day of 3/15 May, which it deemed "sacred to all Romanian hearts; on this day of national celebration . . . 20 years ago we broke the shackles binding our nation," and the memory of that day "would remain alive for as long as a single Romanian still lives on this Earth."³⁷ The young students played an important role in the preservation in the public awareness of the Romanians of the positive experience of the Revolution of 1848. In Transylvania or in other, more distant parts of the empire, the students found various ways to celebrate the day of 3 May 1848. A relevant example for the frame of mind and for the mobilization of the youth with a view to properly celebrating the Blaj assembly comes from an account published in 1878 in the periodical *Familia* (The Family):

Just like in previous years, the day of 3/15 May stirred much enthusiasm in the hearts of the Romanian students in Vienna.

Far from their country and among strangers, they nevertheless followed the Romanian custom of celebrating their anniversary days.

At eight o'clock in the morning several youths, wearing their finest clothes, went to the church of the garrison, where the elderly Father Popovici held a requiem for the martyrs of the Revolution of 1848 . . . Then the youths headed for the railway station and took a train to the village of Hinterbrüll³⁸ where other celebrations were scheduled to take place, joined at the last minute by the elderly priest, in full dress uniform, sporting the two medals he had gained in battle during 30 years of military service. Upon seeing this Nestor, we all began to sing about "the priests holding the cross high, leading a Christian host." Then, on the new liberty plain, we sang traditional songs, "Romanians, Awaken!," we heard speeches and eulogies devoted to Bărnuțiu, Iancu, Buteanu, etc.³⁹

Between 1849 and the First World War, the staunchest promoters of the memory of the revolution were the students attending the schools of Transylvania or other schools and universities in the empire. A good example in this respect is the manuscript publication *Steaua mării* (The starfish), issued over several decades by the Alexi-Șincai Literary Religious Association of the Romanian students of the Greek Catholic Theological Seminary of Gherla. Every year, the Gherla students celebrated the events of 3/15 May, usually singing *Romanians, Awaken!*, *La Marseillaise* and other songs, reciting poems and delivering moving speeches about the heroes of 1848–1849 or about the political-national program of the generation of 1848. Mircea Popa described very well the role played by the students of the Gherla Seminary, and by other Romanian students in Transylvania:

The young members of the Association saw it as their duty to carry on the ideals of this struggle. Many of the poems published in the magazine are calls to arms, seeking to mobilize the nation against the oppressors.⁴⁰

As over the years this periodical featured many poems and articles devoted to the Revolution of 1848, it helped preserve a genuine cult of this fundamental moment in the revival of the Romanian nation. From a historical point of view, beyond the literary quality of these poems, not always of the highest caliber, what matters was their message, their formative role. For instance, the poem "La 3/15 Mai 1848" (On 3/15 May 1848) written by clergyman L. B. Gheție, which had a quote from Andrei Mureșanu as its motto, celebrated the struggle for freedom of the Transylvanian Romanians in 1848, mentioned some of the legendary figures of the revolution and, first and foremost, praised the spirit of brotherhood:

*Today, holding hands like brothers on Liberty Plain
Bărnuțiu, Buteanu and Iancu, the heroes of truth
Alongside many others, driven by lofty feelings
Rush to end the enslavement of their brethren
To you, mighty shadows, martyrs of freedom
We wish happiness in the afterworld
And pledge our eternal gratitude
Your song we shall keep in our Romanian hearts!⁴¹*

The author openly admires the spirit of brotherhood displayed by the Romanians gathered on the Blaj Liberty Plain on 3/15 May 1848, when the two bishops, Orthodox and Greek Catholic, exchanged a hug in sight of the crowd, providing a model of national unity to be followed by the Transylvanian Romanians, irrespective of denomination.

In Transylvania, the ceremonies dedicated to the day of 3 May were seen as an attempt to outshine the events organized by the Hungarian authorities to celebrate 15 March. Quite often, the Hungarian authorities and even the general public perceived the events held by the Romanian youth as hostile actions. For instance, such tensions were manifest in Cluj in the year 1884, when the Iulia Student Association celebrated 3 May and the Hungarian students resorted to violence against their Romanian counterparts, and the homes of some local leaders (Iuliu Coroianu, Aurel Isac, a. o.) were vandalized.⁴² This was hardly an isolated case, and in many Transylvanian towns the frequency of such incidents increased as the turn of the century drew near, proving that the Hungarian authorities and a significant part of the Hungarian general public were not willing to accept the assertions of identity coming from the other nations living in Dual Austria-Hungary, which were demographically in the majority in their home territories but were politically dominated by Budapest. Furthermore, on the semi-centennial of the Revolution of 1848, fearing that huge rallies could foster anti-government messages or actions among the Romanians, the authorities banned any celebration of the revolution, in Blaj and in other towns, in the early days of May. However, this restriction did not prevent the leaders of the Transylvanian Romanians from expressing their opinions and from celebrating the Revolution of 1848 in the press, in defiance of the censorship and at the risk of being prosecuted for their press pieces. Furthermore, an article titled “După cincizeci de ani” (Fifty years on), featured in the 2/14 May 1898 issue of *Tri-buna*, ended on a prophetic note:

*On this day of celebration for our nation, no power in the world could prevent us from determinedly refreshing our thoughts and firmly directing them towards a struggle and a labor intended to strengthen our national conscience and to bring about the victory of the Romanian nation.*⁴³

The measure taken by the Hungarian government backfired. As the celebrations could not be properly held in Blaj or in the other towns of Transylvania, “by way of compensation, the festivities were transferred across the Carpathians, where they became a national celebration.”⁴⁴ The success and the magnitude of the solidarity displayed by the Romanians living in the Old Kingdom towards their Transylvanian brethren were the result of the dedicated and thorough preparatory work done by the Cultural League, and also had a lot to do with the enthusiasm showed by the students, who thus foiled the plans of the Liberal government to reduce the profile of the rallies held in support of the Transylvanian Romanians (in that academic year, the government in Bucharest sought to tone down the celebrations dedicated to 3 May 1848 for diplomatic reasons, as Romania had joined the Triple Alliance and was very carefully handling the diplomatic relations with Austria-Hungary). At the two rallies held in Bucharest in support

of the Transylvanian Romanians, the keynote speakers were leading personalities from the Old Kingdom (Barbu Ștefănescu Delavrancea, Ionel Grădișteanu), while in Iași the floor was given to a Transylvanian, Aron Densușianu, a reputed literary historian, poet and folklorist who was teaching literature at Iași University (he also led a group of students to the consulate of Austria-Hungary, where they protested against the Romanian government's ban on 3 May celebrations). Smaller towns like Galați, Brăila, Ploiești, Craiova, Bârlad, Pitești, Caracal, Buzău, etc. also hosted similar rallies, fostering national solidarity.⁴⁵

Considering the passion with which the Romanian students celebrated the memory of the Revolution of 1848, the press pieces, the documents and the memoirs published in the second half of the 19th century in *Transilvania*, a magazine of the ASTRA, as well as in other periodicals, it is not surprising that the Transylvanian generation of the Great Union was “contaminated” by the model of the generation of 1848, and the revolutionary program of Blaj was a recurrent presence in the approaches adopted by the Romanian political leaders. Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, a leading Transylvanian Romanian politician at the turn of the century and during the Great War, became a member of the România Jună (Young Romania) student association in Vienna, which he eventually came to chair. Together with other Romanian colleagues studying in the imperial capital—natives of Transylvania, Bukovina, or the Old Kingdom—he became involved in the political-cultural struggle of his native community, standing out for his intelligence and for his diplomatic and organizational skills. The testimonies of many of his colleagues present Vaida as an “organizer of the students, of the Romanian colony in Vienna, taking care every year of the celebrations devoted to the Revolution of 1848 and always held on 15 May.” Also, these generations of students later became opinion leaders for their original communities, organizing local events that celebrated the events of 1848 and transposed in other contexts the political program outlined in 1848.

It is little surprising that Aurel C. Popovici, an outstanding leader and ideologist of the Transylvanian Romanians at the turn of the century, as well as a close collaborator of Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, in the memorandum drawn up in Berlin in 1914 at the request of the state secretary of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, followed closely the guidelines set by the Blaj political program of 1848. It has been accurately pointed out that

*the memorandum drawn up by Popovici is strikingly similar to the famous speech delivered by Simion Bărnuțiu in the Blaj cathedral on 2 May 1848. The structure is similar, taking the form of an imagined dialogue, this time with Hungarian Prime Minister István Tisza.*⁴⁶

Aurel C. Popovici makes a brief incursion into history and outlines the permanence of the political and national objectives embraced by the Romanians, from the Revolution of 1848 to the actions and the struggle that the Romanians had to wage after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, which unfortunately failed to bring any positive change to their status:

as you can see, in 1914 we say the same things and request the same rights, being in the same unfortunate situation we experienced in 1848 and in 1867, defending ourselves, for the passing of time cannot erase our right to a national life.⁴⁷

The case of Vaida-Voevod and of his colleagues in the Romanian National Party in the autumn of 1914 is fully illustrative of the endurance over decades of the program of 1848. Both the “Declaration” drawn up in Oradea on 12 October 1918 and the speech delivered by Vaida in the Budapest Parliament on 18 October 1918 show

the evolution of the fundamental concepts underpinning the Romanian national-political actions, starting with the year 1848, when Simion Bărnuțiu’s idea of a “National Assembly” bestowed a democratic character upon the decisions made on the basis of popular involvement, of genuine plebiscite. In fact, the annual celebrations dedicated to the Blaj Assembly managed to pass on, from one generation to the next, this manner of expressing the will of the Romanian people. These two fundamental documents decisively set in motion the construction of a united Romania.⁴⁸

Those who participated in the Great Union were keenly aware of this continuity. Thus, on 12/25 October 1918, impressed by Vaida-Voevod’s reading of the Declaration of Independence, the Greek Catholic vicar Jacob Popa, who had sought refuge in the Old Kingdom in the autumn of 1916, wrote in his memoirs:

the ideal behind our political struggle has always been the unification of the entire Romanian nation into a single realm. It would be totally absurd to have two Romanian countries, capable of being one but failing to do so. Thus, Mr. Vaida’s declaration marks the beginning of the achievement of our political program and aspirations which, since 1848, have been actually driven by the pursuit of unification. From this point of view, the declaration of the Romanian National Party read by Vaida is a political document just as important as Romania’s declaration of war.

Equally important in this context is the fact that during the negotiations held in Arad on 13–14 November 1918 by the Romanian Central National Council and the representatives of the Hungarian government, Iuliu Maniu, who had arrived after the beginning of the meeting, told the Hungarian representatives led by Oszkár Jászi:

The Romanians request that their rights be recognized on the factual basis of their existence as a geographically compact nation, with clearly distinct common traditions and aspirations, and they also request this recognition on the basis of the historical rights of the Romanian nation, which we cannot elaborate upon right now for reasons of time, but whose existence is manifest in all the political declarations made since 1848. Our legitimacy as true representatives of genuine aspirations comes from the wide democratic basis of our party organization, presently strengthened by the participation of the socialist party, and also from the fact that since 1848, when the pragmatic political program of the Romanian nation

*was proclaimed, this party has been a staunch promoter of this political program, recognized by the entire Romanian people and by all politicians as the political credo of the Romanian nation.*⁴⁹

Conclusions

THESE ARE but a few examples of the endurance of the model of 1848 with the Transylvanian Romanian political elites until 1918. The constant references to the founding moment represented by the Revolution of 1848, made by the leaders but also by a general public educated in the spirit of the national struggle, had dual significance for the contemporaries. The autonomist political agenda was constantly reiterated in response to the Hungarian attempts to annex Transylvania, which met with success in 1867. Also, the political and national objective of equal rights for the Romanians remained a desideratum until the Great Union. Finally, the preservation of the model of 1848 led to the general belief among the Transylvanian Romanians that only an insurrection, an armed struggle or at least a mobilization in force could ensure the complete success of the national program. Steeped in this combative spirit and in the memory of the glorious, heroic struggle of Avram Iancu against a Hungarian revolutionary army unable to subdue the “fortress” of the Western Carpathians,⁵⁰ in November 1918 the Transylvanian Romanians quickly mobilized and were able to set up an institutional framework (the Romanian Central National Council of Arad and the county and local national councils), assuming administrative control of the province and creating their own military (the national guard) which defended the lives and the property of all inhabitants of Transylvania.

In order to illustrate once more the deep symbolic association of the Blaj assembly of May 1848 with the cult of the nation and its symbolism, we shall present here the episode of the landing in Blaj, on 10/23 November 1918, of a Romanian airplane coming from Bacău, flown by Lieutenant Vasile Nicolescu. His passenger was Transylvanian-born Captain Vasile Precup, who carried a message from the Romanian Army Chiefs of Staff notifying the Romanian National Council about the imminent crossing of the Carpathians by the Romanian army. Given the importance of the message and of the moment itself, Blaj lawyer Ionel Pop (a nephew of Iuliu Maniu) handed Lieutenant Vasile Nicolescu a stone fragment from the monument erected on the Blaj Liberty Plain in memory of the Revolution of 1848, which had been blown up by Hungarian chauvinists.⁵¹ The fact that the Transylvanian Romanians had collected the fragments produced by the explosion of 1908 and kept them as holy relics clearly demonstrates their profound veneration for the Revolution of 1848 and for the monument dedicated to the National Assembly of Blaj.

The fact that the May 1848 Blaj assembly and the December 1918 assembly of Alba Iulia acquired mythical-symbolic dimensions in the Romanian collective mentality, as demonstrated with irrefutable arguments by many historians of the past hundred years, highlights them as unique moments in the modern history of the Transylvanian Romanians. For the contemporaries, both events were surrounded by a mythical aura, as

seminal moments of the Romanian revival. A significant component of the comparative approach to the national assemblies of Blaj and Alba Iulia is the analysis of the historical framework, of the attitudes displayed by the authorities (Austrian and Hungarian in 1848, and Hungarian only in 1918), of the forces involved in the popular mobilization and of their role in social and political communication in 1848 and 1918, of the immediate antecedents, etc.



Notes

1. Bálint Varga, *The Monumental Nation: Magyar Nationalism and Symbolic Politics in Fin-de-siècle Hungary* (New York–Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2016), 3–4, 12 sqq. See also Maria Bucur and Nancy M. Wingfield, eds., *Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2001).
2. Mihai Chiper, *1848: Memorie și uitare în România celei de-a doua jumătăți a secolului al XIX-lea* (Iași: Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza,” 2015), 9.
3. *Unirea desăvârșită: Ce am înțeles noi în trecut și ce trebuie să înțelegem acuma prin Unire/L’Union accomplie: Ce que nous avons compris du passé et se qu’il faut comprendre à present de l’Union*, foreword by Ovidiu Pecican, trans. Roxana Bauduin (Bistrița–Paris: Asociația Bibliopolis, 2018), 53.
4. Nicolae Bălcescu, *Opere II: Scrieri istorice, politice și economice 1848–1852*, edited by G. Zane and Elena G. Zane (Bucharest: Ed. Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1982), 115.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Câmpia Libertății în literatură*, anthology and preface by Ion Buzași (Cluj-Napoca: Clusium, 1998), 5.
7. Cornelia Bodea, *1848 la români: O istorie în date și mărturii*, vol. 2 (Bucharest: Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1982), 911.
8. See Arthur Schlesinger Jr., “The Historian as Participant,” *Daedalus* 100, 2 (1971): 339–358.
9. George Bariț, *Părți alese din istoria Transilvaniei: Pe două sute de ani din urmă*, vol. 2, 2nd edition, edited by Ștefan Pascu and Florin Salvan (Brașov: Inspectoratul pentru Cultură al Județului Brașov, 1994), 580.
10. *Ibid.*, 2: 183.
11. Sorin Șipoș, *Silviu Dragomir—istoric*, 3rd edition, foreword by Ioan-Aurel Pop (Deva: Ed. Episcopiei Devei și Hunedoarei, 2018), 410.
12. Ioan Lupaș, *Prăbușirea monarhiei austro-ungare și Importanța istorică a zilei de 1 Decembrie 1918*, edited with an introduction, notes and index by Mircea-Gheorghe Abrudan (Cluj-Napoca: Academia Română, Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2018), 93, 117.
13. Ion Clopoțel, *Revoluția din 1918 și Unirea Ardealului cu România* (Cluj: Ed. revistei Societatea de Măine, 1926), 169–170.
14. Vasile Netea, *O zi din istoria Transilvaniei: 1 Decembrie 1918*, edited by Valentin Borda (Bucharest: Țara Noastră, 1990), 97.
15. *Ibid.*, 101–102.

16. Liviu Maior, *1848–1849: Români și unguri în revoluție* (Bucharest: Ed. Enciclopedică, 1998), 407–408.
17. Liviu Maior, *Un părinte fondator al României Mari: Alexandru Vaida Voevod* (Cluj-Napoca: Școala Ardeleană, 2018), 34–36.
18. Silviu Dragomir, Victor Chereșteșiu, Ștefan Pascu, Liviu Maior, Gelu Neamțu, Nicolae Bocșan, Simona Nicoară, a. o. wrote unequivocally about the greatness of the Blaj National Assembly of May 1848.
19. Ioan-Aurel Pop and Ioan Bolovan, *Istoria Transilvaniei*, 2nd edition (Cluj-Napoca: Școala Ardeleană, 2017), 214–215.
20. Simona Nicoară, *Mitologiile revoluției pașoptiste românești: Istorie și imaginar* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 1999), 151, 152, 179.
21. *Națiunea Română la Alba-Iulia: Adunarea națională a Unirii 1 Decembrie 1918*, foreword by Silviu Dragomir (n.p.: n.p., n.d.), 30, 39.
22. See Gelu Neamțu, “3/15 Mai 1848 văzut prin perspectiva fiecărui deceniu de până la Unire (1848–1918),” in “*Noi și maghiarii*”: *Câteva aspecte importante privind Revoluția românilor de la 1848–1849 din Transilvania, intenționat ignorate până acum*, edited by Ela Cosma and Vasile Lechințan (Cluj-Napoca: Ecou Transilvan, 2017), 79–84.
23. Bogdan Alin Florea, “Rolul tinerilor în revoluția de la 1848 în Transilvania,” *Buletinul Cercurilor Științifice Studențești: Arheologie-Istorie-Muzeologie* (Alba Iulia) 9 (2003): 137–140.
24. *Unirea* (Blaj) 8, 19 (1898): 147.
25. Bariț, 179.
26. *Unirea* 8, 19 (1898): 147.
27. Dr. Ioan Mișu, *Spicuri din gândurile mele politice, culturale, economice*, published with a biographic study by Silviu Dragomir (Sibiu: Tiparul Tipografiei Arhidiecezane, 1938), 389.
28. Ioan Lupaș, “Înființarea ‘Asociațiunii’ și conducătorii ei,” *Transilvania* (Sibiu), anniversary issue, 4 (July–August 1911): 332–333.
29. Arad County Division of the Romanian National Archives, Fond ASTRA—despărțământul cultural al județului Arad, file 6/1863, fols. 28 sqq. The same idea was expressed by Vasile Goldiș, at the general assembly of the Arad National Association, in the year 1910: “Here [at the Arad Association, our note] all Romanians . . . who care deeply about Romanian culture can therefore get together. The association is not a denominational institution. Romanians from any walk of life, from princes to paupers, can become members.” *Tribuna* (Arad) 14, 1 (1910): 1.
30. Maior, *Un părinte fondator al României Mari*, 95–96.
31. See *Câmpia Libertății în literatură*, especially the piece by Ștefan Manciuța, 68–74.
32. Marinela Brumar, “Poveștile Pietrei Libertății și Crucii lui Iancu de la Blaj, monumente simbol pentru istoria românilor,” accessed 10 March 2019, <https://www1.agerpres.ro/cultura/2017/05/03/reportaj-povestile-pietrei-libertatii-si-crucii-lui-iancu-de-la-blaj-monumente-simbol-pentru-istoria-romanilor-14-48-21>.
33. Gelu Neamțu, “Simboluri naționale românești în Ungaria la 1908: *Piatra Libertății și Crucea lui Avram Iancu din Blaj*,” in Gelu Neamțu, *Avram Iancu: Mit, realitate, simbol* (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2012), 154.
34. *Ibid.*, 159.
35. *Câmpia Libertății în literatură*, 82.

36. See Ștefan Pascu, ed., *Românii din Transilvania împotriva dualismului austro-ungar (1865–1900): Studii* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1978).
37. Neamțu, “3/15 Mai 1848,” 81.
38. Hinterbrühl, now a suburb of Vienna.
39. Silviu, “3/5 Maiu în Viena,” *Familia* (Budapest) 14, 36 (1878): 227–228.
40. Mircea Popa, *O revistă tezaur: “Steaua mării”* (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2019), 105.
41. *Ibid.*, 98–99.
42. Chiper, 156.
43. Neamțu, “3/15 Mai 1848,” 82–83.
44. Chiper, 157.
45. *Unirea* 8, 21 (1898): 163.
46. Maior, *Un părinte fondator al României Mari*, 124.
47. *Ibid.*, 125.
48. *Ibid.*, 184.
49. Clopoșel, 91–92.
50. Of the many available titles, see Silviu Dragomir, *Avram Iancu* (Bucharest: Ed. Științifică, 1965); Nicolae Bocșan and Rudolf Gräf, *Revoluția de la 1848 în Munții Apuseni: Memorialistică* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2003); Pompiliu Teodor, *Avram Iancu în memorialistică* (Cluj: Dacia, 1972); Ștefan Pascu, *Avram Iancu: Viața și faptele unui erou și martir* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1972); Neamțu, *Avram Iancu: Mît, realitate, simbol*.
51. Netea, 102; Ionel Pop, *Un martor al Marii Uniri*, edited by Alexandru Bârsan, foreword by Ioan Bolovan (Bucharest: Corint, 2018), 305.

Abstract

The National Assembly of Blaj of 3/15–5/17 May 1848
in the Symbolism of the Romanian National Identity Project Until 1918

The annual commemoration of the great events occurred in Transylvania in 1848–1849 became a constant component of the collective memory in the decades after the Revolution of 1848. The National Assembly of 3/15 May 1848 and the spirit of '48 were annually celebrated in Blaj, on the original site of the assembly. The fact that the May 1848 Blaj assembly and the December 1918 assembly of Alba Iulia acquired mythical-symbolic dimensions in the Romanian collective mentality, as demonstrated with irrefutable arguments by many historians of the past hundred years, highlights them as unique moments in the modern history of the Transylvanian Romanians. For the contemporaries, both events were surrounded by a mythical aura, as seminal moments of the Romanian revival.

Keywords

Revolution of 1848, Union of 1918, Transylvania, Blaj, Alba Iulia

