Review Articles — Critiques Exhaustives

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Recent Rumanian Publications
in Ancient History

Four new books dealing with ancient history from the press of the Rumanian Academy illustrate the range of research in the history and culture of the ancient world that is being undertaken in that country. These are only a few of the many Rumanian titles that have appeared in this field in recent years, and only a small part of the considerable volume of scholarly work published regularly. Since Rumanian is not widely read abroad, such volume and variety must be designed primarily for home consumption — a remarkable amount of scholarly reading to be absorbed by a population of only eighteen million. It does not really change the picture to know that editions are sometimes small and that a few books and a larger number of articles are later translated into Western languages. The conclusion to be drawn is that the Rumanians are very conscious of the value of their heritage — and rightly so.

It would be difficult to find two works about the ancient world so exactly opposite in spirit and approach as Nicolae Iorga’s *Materiale pentru o istoriologie umană*¹ and D. Tudor’s *Oltenia romană*.² Iorga’s book, a modest looking volume concerned with only a part of the ancient world, is really the first fragmentary segment of what was intended to be a universal history, encompassing nothing less than the story of all mankind in a single unity. Tudor’s work, on the other hand, is a specific, detailed archaeological history of one small part of Rumania in the Roman period.

Iorga’s *Istorioiogie* is a collection of his reading notes edited by the noted Rumanian epigraphist and historian, D. M. Pippidi. The notes, assembled during the last few months of his life (before his assas-

sination by Iron Guardists in 1940), were the beginning of Iorga’s universal history. The word “materiale” was deliberately chosen by Pippidi to describe the incompleteness of the volume. There is, indeed, little continuity as the work jumps from point to point in the history of the ancient world. Beginning with prehistory, it continues with sections on Egypt, Mesopotamia, Syria, Asia Minor, Greece in the second millennium B.C., and even ancient India and China. The sources used are primarily secondary, although the footnotes show these to be numerous and varied. Had the work progressed to Iorga’s own specialty in the modern era, it would undoubtedly have reflected his considerable first hand knowledge of that period, and had it achieved anything like a completed form it would have been a connected and readable account like his well known multi-volume *Histoire des Roumains.*

In view of its fragmentary and preliminary character one may well wonder about the value of the book. That value is, I think, twofold. First, the work gives insight into the mind and method of work of a great historian. It is true that the book is primarily Iorga’s reading notes. But Iorga’s reading notes are not ordinary reading notes. He seldom merely copied anything, it seems, but assimilated and transformed what he wrote down. As Pippidi says (p. xiii), “Thought and expression are interdependent, as in any creation of art, and both spring forth in the act of examining his source or document with a spontaneity which I do not believe to have been truly equalled.”

The second value is Iorga’s idea of history as “istoriologie.” The term was devised by Iorga to describe what he hoped would be a new kind of historical work — one that would show history as an absolute unity. Because the earth and the nature of man are the same, history is the same. Names may change but the events are identical. There is nothing new, for instance, about the empires of the Near East. “Alexander the Great shows only one thing through his glory as Macedonian conqueror: that the old empires continue. Babylonians, Assyrians, Medes, Persians are no more than ephemeral forms, through other dynasts, with other soldiers, of the same old fundamental idea of an Asiatic empire of divine origin and of character to the end divine” (pp. vi-vii). Iorga stops short, however, of the systems of such as Spengler and Toynbee. He imposes no laws on history and disclaims any intention of formulating a historical methodology. He does believe that, understanding the unity of history, we may sometimes fill out our knowledge of an obscure event by appealing to a