

DOCTORAL THESIS SUMMARY

ISTORIA TEATRULUI NAȚIONAL ROMÂNESC DIN CHIȘINĂU (memoriile teatrului românesc – locuri, reprezentări, actori)

English title: HISTORY OF THE ROMANIAN NATIONAL THEATRE IN CHIȘINĂU (memoirs of the Romanian theatre – places, performances, actors)

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The topicality of the *Istoria teatrului național românesc din Chișinău (memoriile teatrului românesc – locuri, reprezentări, actori)* – (Eng. *History of the Romanian national theatre in Chisinau (memoirs of the Romanian theatre – places, performances, actors)*) doctoral thesis paper is determined by the need to recover and update the memories of the Romanian theatre, conceived as a space of material heritage through its buildings, as a space of intangible heritage through its performances, its repertoire, its artists, and as a symbolic space through representations lingering in the collective memory. Every generation of thespians (stage-managers, actors, scenographers, choreographers, playwrights, etc.) needs the information stored by the memory and the history of the field in which they work, to have sources of inspiration and knowledge, to continue or, on the contrary, challenge a tradition, to innovate and to generate new theatrical productions, new works of art. This theme is an recurrent presence on theatre's agenda as an organisational entity solicitous about accumulating and consolidating its institutional memory.

The actuality of this approach to the past of the Romanian theatre is also determined by the continuous process of building a cultural identity in a space in-between the Prut and Nistru rivers, where the right to this identity is challenged and abusively instrumented by strategies and political by political strategies and manoeuvres of local and geopolitical interest.

The study' object of research is **the theatre as a place of history and a place of memory:**

- **as a material place**, which materializes in its buildings (that of the National Theatre from the interwar period located on the Boulevard Stefan cel Mare si Sfânt, number 103 and the current one, of the “Mihai Eminescu” National Theatre, located on the Boulevard Stefan cel Mare si Sfânt, number 79, which involved a thorough

investigation of archival documents, their description, analysis and commentary, as well as of the information from the press of the time;
and the theatre conceived as a

- **mental place**, configured by the constellation of its performances as they were preserved in the individual memoirs, and in the documents produced at the time: official documents and accounts, chronicles and press articles, interviews, photographs.

The chronological and geographical framework of research comprised the 1918–1953 period is limited to the territory between the Nistru and Prut rivers. However, interpretative accents have been extended beyond these borders, both to the previous and to the later period in order to make comparisons and to establish continuities.

The purpose of this paper is to recover the past of the Romanian theatre in Chisinau as **a place of multiple memories** stored and generated by a cultural milieu characterised by a reportorial offer carried out in a number of languages: Romanian, Russian, Yiddish, Ukrainian, rich and diverse in genre, artistic quality, aesthetic options, dedicated to a diverse audience and to **recover the history of the construction and reconstruction of those two buildings**, that of the National Theatre in the interwar period (located on the Boulevard Stefan cel Mare si Sfant, number 103) and the current one, of the „Mihai Eminescu” National Theatre (located on the Boulevard Stefan cel Mare si Sfant, number 79).

Objectives:

- to complete the currently existing historiography with new documentary information about the past of the Romanian National Theatre in Chisinau;
- to assess the role of the theatre by affirming the national cultural identity in the context of the official policy of Russification and discrimination of Romanian-speaking ethnic groups during the tsarist period;
- to analyse the social representations of Romanian culture and the Romanian language theatre, in particular, those about the theatre, in generally dominated in the social consciousness of the audiences in Chisinau in 1918 and in the 1918–1940 period;
- to reconstruct the imaginary museum of the audience through the prism of performances and stereotypes about the other's culture;

- to analyse, based on archival documents and materials published in the interwar press, the history of how the construction of the “Mihai Eminescu” National Theatre, initially the Cultural Palace building, (located on the Boulevard Stefan cel Mare si Sfant, number 79) took place;
- to dismantle the false history of the Soviet historiography about the construction of the “Mihai Eminescu” National Theatre building;
- to reconstruct the representations of the ideal architectural models imagined and conceived by personalities of the Chisinau public life who initiated projects to build a modern European theatre for the municipality;
- to re-enact, based on official documents and information from the press of the time, what the premises of the Romanian National Theatre in Chisinau in the interwar period and its reconstruction project (located on the Boulevard Stefan cel Mare si Sfant, number 103) looked like;
- to illustrate, based on a case study of the actor Eugeniu Ureche's creative activity, the means by which the memory of the self and the cultural imaginary work in theatrical art to ensure the continuity of a tradition and the formation of identity anchors; to argue that through his roles, their conceptual realization, the consciously assumed interpretive techniques, the option for a certain repertoire in poetry recitals, Eugeniu Ureche embodied the continuity of the Romanian theatrical art tradition on the stage of the Soviet Moldovan Theatre in Chisinau. Along with the generation of writers who, following the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, remained in the Moldova from the east of the Prut, he contributed to the preservation, development and dissemination of images and intangible assets that ensured the ethnic and cultural identification of Romanians.

Results novelty and originality: The history of the Romanian national theatre, between 1918 and 1940, was examined in parallel and in the context of a cultural environment that offered performances carried out in several languages: Romanian, Russian, Yiddish, Ukrainian, diverse in genre, artistic quality, aesthetic options, intended for a heterogeneous audience. The theme was approached in terms of cultural representations generated by theatre performances and the activity of actors and directors, preserved in the newspaper articles of the time. Unpublished documents from the National Archives of Romania were researched and analysed and, for the first time, official documents and reconstruction projects of the National Theatre building (currently located on the Boulevard Stefan cel Mare si Sfant, number 103) developed by architect Ernest Doneaud, as well as the first versions of the Cultural Palace construction project, later adapted as a theatre, which became the headquarters of the “Mihai Eminescu” National Theatre (currently located on the Boulevard Stefan

cel Mare si Sfânt, number 79) were placed into the public and academic circuit. The results of this research have found proved a practical applicability in the development of the plans to restore and repair the “Mihai Eminescu” National Theatre headquarters, a national heritage building. We have analysed the activity and the artistic techniques practiced by actor Eugeniu Ureche and we have argued on the continuity of the Romanian theatrical art tradition, in the space east of the Prut river, during the Soviet period.

The material is structured in three chapters.

In the first chapter, *Teatrul românesc din Chişinău – loc al confruntărilor politice, sociale, estetice* (Eng. *Romanian Theatre in Chisinau –place of political, social, aesthetic confrontations*), the concept of a **place of memories** is applied to the theatrical phenomenon and processes taking place in-between the Nistru and Prut space, interpreted through the notions of **individual memory, collective memories, social representations, stereotypes**. The theoretical apparatus was crystalised based on works by Alexandru Zub, Bogdan Mugescu, Maurice Halbwachs, Paul Ricœur, Pierre Nora, complemented by theatre studies with strong landmarks signed by George Banu and Eugenio Barba.

Dominating stereotypes of the 1918 Chisinau’s cultural milieu have been identified, and the discourse regarding the political class of the time on the issue of ensuring the right to theatre in Romanian was analysed, based on the recently published minutes of the *Sfatul Ţării* (Eng. State’s Council) meetings (1918). The last part of this chapter follows the process by which the stereotypes regarding the inferiority of Romanian culture have changed gradually, and how the audience of the Romanian theatre was attracted and maintained, in a cultural market modest in terms of quantity, but still generous by cultural offer in terms of language and genre formats. Twenty years after the act of the Union, for the ethnically heterogeneous Chisinau audience, the Romanian theatre is associated in the collective consciousness with images generated by performances presented by Romanian actors, as well as members of the Romanian National Theatre, simultaneously with performances of the Russian theatre in Chisinau, the Russian and Ukrainian theatrical crews on tour, including the Prague Group of the Moscow Art Theatre and the Vilno Theatre.

The second chapter, *Edificii teatrale din Chişinău – memorii si istorii* (Eng. *Theatre buildings in Chisinau - memories and histories*), approaches the evolution of the Chisinau theatre **as a material place**, a physical space dedicated to performance arts. The places in Chisinau, which hosted theatrical performances throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, are presented in a historical perspective. We focused on the idea of a theatre as an object of architecture, in the visions of the local public authority representative, Carol Schmidt, and the architect Alexandru Bernardazzi. In the year of the

Great Union, Chisinau had a theatre audience, but the concept of theatre was not related to a material place, to a specific building, but rather to the names of entrepreneurs and the names of actors who came touring regularly. None of the few rented halls for theatrical performances, including the Pushkin Auditorium (built in 1900, intended for all audience categories), which had the best dramatic performance hall, had succeeded to establish itself with a tradition of a repertoire-based theatre. Even if the city had no material theatrical space as transmitted and preserved by the European tradition, a hall *à l'italienne*, a hall based on those of the French Revolution's century imposed as a matrix of the theatrical phenomenon, the audiences and the thespians had always imagined one, while spaces simulating the European ones were arranged as material spaces. During Tsarism period, Chisinau's Mayor, Carol Schmidt, the intellectuals who contributed to the achievement of the Great Union in 1918, the thespians, the creators of the Greater Romania who dreamed, wrote, made official requests and efforts, took specific persuasive measures regarding the reconstruction of an edifice and even initiated the construction of a real theatre, which, however, was not finalised.

Paragraphs 3 and 4 depict the main aspects of the research regarding the construction and reconstruction of the two buildings: the one in which the Romanian National Theatre carried out its activity between 1918-1935 (located on the Boulevard Stefan cel Mare si Sfant, number 103) and the one in which the Soviet Theatre in Romanian-language as well as the current "Mihai Eminescu" National Theatre (located on the Boulevard Stefan cel Mare si Sfant, number 79).

The virtual image of the premises of the Romanian National Theatre from the interwar period is reconstructed based on descriptions in the press, memories left by witnesses, official documents (letters and estimates with budget proposals for repairs and arrangements), and four unique photos with the image of this theatre which were placed back into the public circuit. Based on these unique documents identified in the Romania's National Archives, the history of its reconstruction projects elaborated by the architect Marcel Iancu in cooperation with the innovative stage manager Aurel Ioan Maican and those made by Ernest Doneaud in 1936-1937 has been recovered. Although in April 1935 the government decided to abolish the National Theatre in Chisinau, the activity of the Romanian municipal theatre during the season between 1936-1937. At the same time, the new construction site of the theatre continued to be called the National Theatre, which is the syntagm used to mention it in the official documents of the 1937-1944 period.

The last part of this chapter analyses the fake narratives of Soviet historiography about "a new building, built especially for the Moldovan Musical-Dramatic Theatre" and about the achievement of "Russian architects V. Aleksandrov and V. Smirnov, following the Second World War", which were

deconstructed through the critical presentation of documents regarding the history of the construction and reconstruction of the Cultural Palace building, currently the “Mihai Eminescu” National Theatre (located on the Boulevard Stefan cel Mare si Sfânt, number 79). Video and photographic evidence shows that the building built in the interwar period was not destroyed by bombing during the war. The official archive documents and some articles from the press of the time allowed for the reconstitution of this construction's history.

The edifice was built in 1931–1932, having the cultural purpose of a Cultural Palace - a multifunctional institution, comprising spaces designed for conferences and concerts, a museum, a library and an art gallery, where the People's University—an organization founded in 1918 and chaired by Pantelimon Halippa would have operated. The initial project of the Cultural Palace was developed by Nicolae Stănescu, chief architect of the Ministry of Public Instruction and Cults Technical Service. It was modified, and the final version used in the construction of the building remains subject of a future investigation. The works were carried out by the architect-builder Constantin Ursescu-Galați, contractor for the construction of the Cultural Palace in Chisinau and the University Palace in Iasi. In November 1932, the Ministry of Finance revised the public budget, reducing it by 300 million lei. This construction has not been finished. In 1934, the building was already in the custody of the Chisinau Court of Appeal. In 1938, the idea of resuming the construction of the Cultural Palace, under royal patronage, circulated in the public space. The documents confirm that the king supported the initiative of some intellectuals to direct the money accumulated for the erection of a Monument of the Great Union towards the completion of the Palace and renaming it the Palace of the Union. These projects, however, remained on paper.

In 1940, Soviet authorities decided to finalize the construction. The fact that the building was unfinished and of no use saved it from being destroyed by the retreating Soviet command, which mined, blew up and set fire to most of the city's public buildings. In 1942, the town hall decided to initiate the completion of the construction works of the Cultural Palace, planning for it to host the cultural institutions left shelter-less after the withdrawal of the Soviet Army. The halls for the Municipal Library, the Conservatory, an 800-seat theatre and a gallery were to be prepared. In 1943, oak doors and windows were installed. At the beginning of 1944, two of the decorative panels executed by the sculptor Claudia Cobizeva were installed in the main hall. In 1945, Soviet authorities ordered the beginning of the reconstruction works on the Cultural Palace building, which were completed in 1953, as a theatre building. During this period, some changes occurred due to the change of the building's purpose, from the multifunctional room to the space for the theatre, the name ~~having~~

respectively also being changed. Thus, over time the building was called: Cultural Palace, Administrative Palace, Palace of Justice, Palace of the Union, Dvoreţ kulturî (Eng. Palace of Culture), Dvoreţ iskusstv (Eng. Palace of the arts), Dram-teatr (Eng. Drama theatre).

The third part of the thesis, *Revanşa memoriei interzise: teatrul românesc din Chişinău prin prisma destinului actorului Eugeniu Ureche* (Eng. *Revenge of a forbidden memory: the Romanian theatre in Chisinau through the prism of the actor Eugeniu Ureche's destiny*) case study, proposes an analysis and interpretation of the human and artistic biography, of actor Eugeniu Ureche, the roles played by him, the testimonies and memoirs narrated at the age of 80, the testimonies of other eyewitnesses, photographs, audio and video recordings of performances or documentary footage. It was proven that through his roles, their conceptual realization, the consciously assumed interpretive techniques, the option for a certain repertoire in poetry recitals, the utterance of words in Romanian, Eugeniu Ureche embodied the continuity of the Romanian theatrical art tradition on the stage of the Soviet Moldovan theatre in Chisinau. This continuity was ensured by the linguistic factor, which is a fundamental framework in the formation and consolidation of the cultural images and memories.

At the end of this paper, one may find and conclude the following:

- A consistent share of documentary material complementing the databases of historiography about the past of the Romanian theatre in Chisinau (unpublished photographs, press articles, original official documents, etc.) which were accumulated and placed into the public circuit.
- Despite the documented ethnic and cultural discrimination policies of the tsarist period, Romanian theatre crews, although rare and with a repertoire consisting mainly of comedies, pranks and vaudeville, maintained and cultivated interest in theatre and culture among the Romanian language speaking population.
- The stereotypes about the inferiority of the dominant Romanian language and culture in the collective consciousness of the urban population (especially in Chisinau) in 1918, were a consequence of the assimilation policies of the Romanian ethnics within the Russian Empire. They were gradually fought with (during the period 1918-1940) constant theatrical and concert activity: the activity of the Romanian National Theatre in Chisinau, the tours of the Romanian dramatic theatre troupes, but also operas, classical music, stage concerts, etc.
- The population in the area between the Nistru and the Prut rivers in the 1918-1940 period, had access to a varied and diverse theatrical offer in terms of language: Romanian, Russian, Ukrainian, Yiddish, proposed by constant troupes or those who came on tour. The Romanian and Russian

language press used to publish both critical and laudatory chronicles about the performances and their artistic level. This theatre of high artistic value has contributed to the reduction of stereotypes, e.g. the performance of the great actors from the National Theatre in Bucharest and that of the Russian actors from the Art Theatre in Moscow, the Theatre Company from Prague.

- Based on documents, especially architectural projects and estimates, the history of the construction of the current building of the National Theatre "Mihai Eminescu" (located on the Boulevard Stefan cel Mare si Sfant, number 79).
- Based on the documentary evidence (photographs, official documents, architectural projects), the false Soviet historical narrative about the construction of the building located on the Boulevard Stefan cel Mare si Sfant, number 79.
- The image and representation of an Italian type theatre present in the modernization projects of the city provided by the mayor C. Schmidt and the architect A. Bernardazzi in the last two decades of the 19th century.
- The reconstruction of the National Theatre (located on the Boulevard Stefan cel Mare si Sfant, number 103) between the years 1936-1938, initially under the direction of the architect Marcel Iancu and the director Aureliu Ion Maican, later according to the plans of architect Ernest Doneaud, four original photos with the interior of the building and its reconstruction were put on the public circuit.
- Eugeniu Ureche ensured the continuity of the Romanian dramatic theatre tradition in the historical context of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic. In the interpretation of the roles of Ovidius in the homonymous drama, of Horatio from *Fântâna Blanduziei* by V. Alecsandri, as well as in *King Lear* by W. Shakespeare, Eugeniu Ureche adopted the aesthetic vision formed in the first half of the twentieth century by the National Theatre School in Bucharest. These roles were performed by Eugeniu Ureche in the tradition of the Romanian theatre school not because he did not have other tools and techniques or because he did not master those, but because they expressed his artistic belief about the purpose of the word and its role in dramatic works of classical scope. His creations fascinated and impressed the Soviet audiences, and his lyrics, acoustic effects as well as vocal virtuositities he triggered on the stage of the Soviet State Musical-Dramatic Theatre in Chisinau positioned him as the offspring of a brilliant constellation of Bucharest National Theatre actors : C. Nottara, Al. Critico, G. Ciprian, G. Calboreanu, A. Macri, G. Vraca, I. Finteşteanu and others.

Unlike ethnic minority groups (Russians, Ukrainians, Jews, Gagauzians, etc.) who went through the social, political and identity crisis generated by the Great Union of 1918, but who had the freedom to develop and cultivate their memory and ethnic-national, cultural and professional identity within the modern European unitary state of Royal Romania, the social groups that identified themselves also by belonging to the Romanian culture, to writing in Latin alphabet, remaining in the USSR after 1940, 1944, were no longer allowed to identify through the national language and culture, while the Romanian cultural identity was banned and turned into criminal offense. The majority of the Romanian-speaking population, after a hundred years of tsarist Russification, had only twenty-five years (the periods of 1918–1940 and 1941–1944) in which they were offered free access to culture in their mother tongue. However, due to language reconnection, which is the fundamental framework of collective memory, this period was sufficient for the formation and validation of cultural identity anchors. The continuity of the Romanian theatrical tradition was ensured by the presence of Eugeniu Ureche and plays from the Romanian classical repertoire, although it was called Moldovan during that period.

The results of this research will be used to prepare the exhibits for the Museum of the "Mihai Eminescu" National Theatre. Some of the archive documents, especially the variants of the construction and reconstruction projects of the Cultural Palace, later Dramatic Theatre, have already been taken into account in the process of preparing the technical documents necessary for the repair, restoration and reconstruction of parts of the "Mihai Eminescu" National Theatre. However, during the period reserved for doctoral research, among the documents researched in the Romania's National Archives, the finalized construction project of the Cultural Palace analysed in this paper, along with the initial version developed by the architect Nicolae Stănescu, was not found. The pandemic also stopped us from this activity. Consequently, the few new hypotheses on this topic remain to be verified in future research.

In the end, I would like to use this opportunity to once again thank the professors from the "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, all those who inspire the International Doctoral Research Platform in Performing Arts and Cultural Management, for the opportunities offered, for the expertise and advice on the theoretical, methodological and bibliographic resources that I had the privilege to benefit from, as a doctoral student. The academic and creative meetings at national and international conferences and workshops organized within the Platform and the International Theatre Festival in Sibiu were memorable, useful and idea catalysing. And of course we express our gratitude to the person who, beginning with the advice to engage in doctoral studies, through his presence, insistence,

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