

The University of Iași Between 1916 and 1917. Contributions to the War Effort¹

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Abstract:

The University of Iași participated to the World War I effort, providing to the army its own human resources and its learning spaces for the central state institutions, given that the royal family, the Parliament and the Government sought refuge in Iași. Not lastly, the University became involved – through conferences hosted in the Hall – in the effort to maintain the trust in the final victory and in the achievement of the 1918 unions. The campaign of 1916-1918 mobilized important teachers of the University, personalities of the national scientific and cultural life or young academics. The students were among the direct combatants and they took part actively in the ample health operations behind the frontline. The paper addresses a fragment of institutional history, by presenting the contribution to the war effort of the teachers and the students, by identifying, listing and systematizing the information regarding the university staff and the educational spaces involved in the war, among the battle lines or behind the frontline, in the period 1916-1918.

Keywords: University of Iași, war, teachers, students, teaching spaces

¹ The extended version of the text in Romanian was included in *Orașul Iași. "Capitala rezistenței până la capăt" (1916-1917)*, Ion Agrigoroaiei (ed.), Junimea Publishing House, Iași, 2016. The topic also made the object of an exhibition inaugurated in 2016 at the University Museum of Iași.

The 100th anniversary of the World War I and of the Great Union of Romania represents for historians an occasion to reflect on the implication of the various state institutions in the events occurring between 1916 and 1918. At least from this perspective, i.e. of the institutional history, the re-evaluation and reinterpretation are justified and necessary, but most of the times the microanalyses, local history papers, particular or even punctual studies actually become essential in order to restore a bigger picture and in order to disseminate new information and sources. The analysis of the itinerary of the Iași-based University in the period 1916-1918 makes no exception.

The books and papers published by Ion Agrigoroaiei, Gheorghe Iacob or Cătălin Botoșineanu provide a complex image of the dynamics of academia and of the relation between the academic and the political environment on the one hand and the context of the war on the other. The topic is wide-ranging, mostly given that two of the best-known and most vocal opponents of Romania's alliance with the Entente were teachers in Iași: Constantin Stere – “The Dreyfuss Case of Romania” and V. Arion. There are, of course, enough sources to explore concerning academia's involvement in the war – taking into account that the university is a space of dialogue, exchange of ideas and pacifist intellectualism *par excellence* – and one study cannot cover all possible topics. Therefore, I propose a simple and almost technical approach, but a very useful one for future analytical constructs, namely listing and outlining the participation to the war effort of the University teachers, of certain students, who later became personalities of the national and international cultural and scientific life. Another idea is to elaborate a “map” of the university space offered to the central authorities, which were hosted in 1916 in Iași. This is a first level of investigation, answering the questions, *Who? Where? and How?*. The importance of the endeavour is intrinsic. A great deal of the basic information is not known; as it is not included in the dictionaries dedicated to the Romanian personalities or it is presented only partially. Some data was perpetuated from one author to another, without assessments and additions, mostly given that the local sources were little accessed by those who depicted portraits of the cultural and political cultures and, in general, the biographies/monographs are not exactly abundant in the

Romanian historiographic space. This research explores, first of all, archive documents. The funds of the City Hall and of the University within the County Service Iași of the National Archives, the fund “DCI Memoirs. Seniors”, within the Centre of Studies and Preservation of the Historical Military Archives Pitești and the Yearbook of the University in Iași represent the documentary infrastructure.

Therefore, I propose a fragment of institutional history, a goal attained by presenting the contribution to the war effort of the teachers and the students, by identifying, listing and systematizing the information of the university staff and the educational spaces involved in the war, among the battle lines or behind the front, in the period 1916-1918.

On 14th -15th August 1916, the Romanian army launched the offensive against Austria-Hungary, pursuant to its political and military commitments. This was the beginning of a brief but intense chapter in recent history, which made the Romanian society go from the satisfaction of the first victories, through the agony of territorial limitation and of the refuge, to the joy of the final victory and the achieving of successive unifications in 1918.

The University of Iași as both a witness and an actor involved in this tumult was included through its teachers and students in the debate related to the orientation of foreign policy and to the opportunity of engaging Romania alongside the Entente.² This institution then participated to the war effort, thus making available its own human resources to the army and its learning spaces to the central institutions, given that the royal family, the Parliament and the Government sought refuge in Iași. Not lastly, the University became involved – through conferences hosted in the Hall – in the effort to maintain the trust in the final victory and in the achievement of the 1918 unions.

Most teachers and students of the University argued in favour of Romania’s entry into war on the side of the Entente and they responded

²See the disputes of 1914-1915 between the pro-Entente students and teachers and the small group of the Central Powers supporters, represented by C. Stere, standing rector of the University, Ilie Bărbulescu and Virgil Arion, in (Agrigoroaiei, 2010, p. 269-273), (Botoșineanu, 2006, p. 273-289), (Botoșineanu, 2007, p. 139-145).

immediately to the mobilization operation launched on 15th August 1916. The first ones included teachers of the Faculty of Medicine who joined the health services on the front or behind the front: Constantin Bacaloglu – major and physician, Gheorghe Bogdan – lieutenant colonel, Gheorghe Demetriade – major and physician, Mihail Manicatide – major and physician, Constantin Thiron – lieutenant colonel and M. Ștefănescu – lieutenant colonel (ANR, file 255/1918, p. 324). All of them were mobilized in the 4th Army Corps, Division VII, 4th Health Company, from the first day of the military operations.

Alongside them, the campaign of 1916-1918 mobilized important teachers of the University, personalities of the national scientific and cultural life or young assistant lecturers. In this respect, I mention:

- Neculai Balan (assistant lecturer at the Department of Pathological Anatomy), major and physician;
- Gheorghe Bontea (assistant lecturer at the Department of Agricultural Chemistry), fusilier in the 12th infantry Regiment;
- Ioan Borcea (director of the Descriptive Zoology Laboratory within the Faculty of Sciences), lieutenant – head of the mobilization office in the 13th Regiment “Stephen the Great” – characterized by the superiors as “hard-working, energetic and devoted” (ANR, file 255/1918, p. 344);
- Traian Bratu (the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters), lieutenant at the 14th Division, the General Staff Service, the 53rd Infantry Regiment³, who “fulfilled his duty aptly and skilfully as head of the Intelligence Bureau” (ANR, file 255/1918, p. 340);
- Neculai Costăchescu⁴ (the Faculty of Sciences), lieutenant (then captain), Company commander in the 13th Regiment “Stephen the Great”, characterized by the superiors as “very energetic and dutiful” (ANR, file 255/1918, p. 344);
- Mihai David (the Faculty of Sciences), sublieutenant (then lieutenant), platoon commander in the 13th Regiment “Stephen

³The 53rd Infantry Regiment left the city of Iași on the evening of 21 August 1916 – see (Agrigoroaiei, 2004, p. 35).

⁴Professor Neculai Costăchescu left us highly valuable pages of journal during his participation to the military operations – see (Costăchescu, 2007, p.194).

the Great”, “a devoted element, with a lot of energy” (ANR, file 255/1918, p. 344);

- Petru Dragomirescu (the Faculty of Law), lieutenant at the Martial Court of the second Cavalry Division and then immediately mobilized at the Faculty of Law, in January 1918;
- Constantin Fedeleş (substitute Associate Professor at the Conference of Psychology), captain;
- Vasile Gr. Iamandi (the Faculty of Law), lieutenant at the General Commandment of the Stages, then immediately mobilized at the Faculty of Law, in January 1918;
- Constantin Motaş (the Faculty of Sciences), sublieutenant, flight observer at the third Aviation Group (ANR, file 255/1918, p. 420);
- Alexandru Myller (the Faculty of Sciences), sublieutenant in the 13th Infantry Regiment;
- Ioan Nubert (assistant lecturer at the Department of Topographic Anatomy), physician – captain;
- Plăcinţeanu (assistant lecturer at the Department of Astronomy), lieutenant, employed at the Calculation Office of the Geodesics Section, of whom the superiors stated that “fulfilled his duty with all his capability and dutifully, thus having beautiful results” (ANR, file 255/1918, p. 304);
- Grigore T. Popa (assistant lecturer at the Department of Descriptive Anatomy), physician – lieutenant;
- Albert Taşcă Popovici (the Faculty of Law), lieutenant, attached to the French Mission, then immediately mobilized at the Faculty of Law, in January 1918;
- Constantin Popovici (the Faculty of Sciences), captain, mobilized at the Calculation Office of the Geodesics Section, within the Army Geographic Service, who “fulfilled his duty with all his capability and dutifully” (ANR, file 255/1918, p. 304);
- Ioan Tănăsescu (Department of Descriptive Anatomy), physician – colonel;
- Ernest Triandafil (the Faculty of Law), reserve lieutenant at the third Army Corps, immediately mobilized at the Faculty of Law, in January 1918;
- Victor Vâlcovici (the Faculty of Sciences);

- Gheorghe Vâlsan (the Faculty of Sciences), sublieutenant, mobilized at the Topographic Section within the Army Geographic Service, “he accomplished all the assigned tasks very dutifully and he had very good results” (ANR, file 255/1918, p. 304);
- Aurel P. Zăuleanu (the Faculty of Law), captain at the 1st Infantry Regiment, immediately mobilized at the Faculty of Law, in January 1918.

The students participated to the war effort alongside the teachers of the University. They were among the direct combatants and they took part actively in the ample health operations behind the front. The students of the Faculty of Medicine, concentrated even starting with October 1915⁵, provided medical assistance to the wounded and to typhus patients in hospitals of Iași and in campaign hospitals. The exact number of students who participated to the operations of 1916-1918 is harder to determine.

The situations drafted up in the fall of the year 1918 include in the category of the mobilized a number of approximately 600 students, some of whom had been mobilized twice (Agrigoroaiei, 2010, p. 278). Some of them became teachers of the same institution several years later. I mention here Petre Andrei, the future professor and political leader, who was exempted from military service because his father had died, but who enrolled voluntarily in March 1915. Upon graduating from the School of Officers in Târgoviște, he was sent, on 1st October 1916, to the 13th Infantry Regiment “Stephen the Great”. On the day of his departure, he wrote to his professor Ion Petrovici:

“Today I’m leaving to the front; I have been waiting for a long time for this joy and it finally came. I assure you that I will know my way with the weapon as I did with the philosophical terms and axioms. I will apply the philosophical view according to which life in itself is worth nothing, but its value comes from the ideal it serves. Our ideal is so great and so holy that you see, Sir, I am in no way disturbed by the thought of death” (Andrei, 1993, p. 8).

⁵The students of the Faculty of Medicine sent a petition to the rector, asking him to postpone the exams scheduled in November, because many of them were concentrated – see (ANR, file 3293/1915, p. 12).

Among the significant personalities of Romanian science and culture who participated in the campaign of 1916-1918 as students of the University in Iași, I also mention:

- Ștefan Bârsănescu (with a bachelor's degree in Law, in 1919), sergeant;
- Gheorghe I. Brătianu (with a bachelor's degree in Law, in 1919), who served in the army in 1916, as a volunteer at the School of reserve officers and wounded in August 1917;
- Traian Ionașcu (with a bachelor's degree in Law, in 1918), who served in the army in 1916 at the School of Artillery Officers, sublieutenant in the campaign of 1917-1918;
- Cicerone Iordăchescu (with a bachelor's degree in Letters and Philosophy, in 1915), military confessor at Division 15;
- Octav Mayer (with a bachelor's degree in Mathematical Sciences, in 1919), lieutenant;
- Gheorghe Zane (with a bachelor's degree in Law, in 1919), a volunteer in the campaign 1916-1918, lieutenant at Regiment 11.

While they studied in Iași, the future professors served in the Romanian army:

- Gheorghe Alexa (with a bachelor's degree in Technological Chemistry, in 1916), as soldier immediately mobilized at the Laboratory of Technological Chemistry;
- Dan Bădăreu (with a bachelor's degree in Law, in 1917), aviator-captain;
- Leon Ballif (doctor in Medicine, in 1919), physician-captain;
- Gh. Ion Botez (with a bachelor's degree in Natural Sciences, in 1918), lieutenant at the 12th Infantry Regiment;
- Valeriu Bulgaru (with a bachelor's degree in Law, in 1918), who served in the army in 1916 at the School of Artillery Officers, captain in the campaign of 1916-1918;
- Gheorghe A. Cuza (with a bachelor's degree in Law, in 1918), enrolled as a volunteer and combatant in the 24th Infantry Regiment of Tecuci;

- Constantin V. Gheorghiu (with a bachelor's degree in Physical-Chemical Sciences, in 1920), captain at the 24th Infantry Regiment of Tecuci;
- Ion Gheorghiu (doctor in Medicine, in 1917), physician-captain; Ilie Popescu-Spineni (with a bachelor's degree in Law, in 1919), as soldier.

Through their contribution, the teachers and the students of the University in Iași represented an important chapter of the war effort, whether in the direct battles or behind the front. However, the involvement of the Iași-based institution was more comprehensive. The institution made sure to be available to the central bodies starting with November 1916, given that the administration withdrew to Iași. The teaching and research spaces became headquarters of the central leading body, but the city of Iași did not have an urban civil infrastructure to meet the specific demands. The memories of Queen Maria are suggestive for the general atmosphere in late fall 1916, as she herself had to find a place to stay.⁶ "I am pressured by all sorts of problems, from all parts; I am trying to help find solutions, but it is very hard; our means are weak because the government failed to actually plan for the future and they counted on a victory, not on a disaster." (Maria, 2014, p. 247). On another occasion, she summarised: "The city is overcrowded, with a population ten times more numerous than the usual one; epidemics burst from all corners; food is scarce, it is almost impossible to get supplies..." (Maria, 2014, p. 353).

The University Palace in Copou opened its gates, under these extreme circumstances, for the central authorities to function there. The University Hall hosted the proceedings of the Romanian Senate, in the period December 1916 – December 1917. The Senate, then presided by the liberal Emanoil Porumbaru, modified in that period the Constitution: they adopted the agricultural reform that made villagers landowners and they introduced the universal vote.

The Ministry of War with its various structures functioned in several rooms of the University. All the halls of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy were given to this Ministry (ANR, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza"

⁶"What an odd situation – a queen looking for a roof over her head", Maria wrote in her diary, on 14/27 November 1916, in the wagon stationed for several days in the station of Grajduri – see (Maria, 2014, p. 237).

University Iași, file 87/1917, p. 22-23), along with the amphitheatres and laboratories of the Faculty of Sciences (ANR, “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University Iași, file 87/1917, p. 25). The same Ministry used the lecture halls of the Faculty of Law, while the Faculty Secretariat was the headquarters of the Post Office and the Telegraph (ANR, “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University Iași, file 877/1917, vol.1, p. 31).

The University also hosted structures belonging to the Ministry of Public Instructions and of the Cults. The University Palace offered a room of the Physiology Laboratory for the Red Cross, a room of the Laboratory of Zoology for Scouts, of the Laboratory of Medical Chemistry within the Faculty of Medicine was destined for Post Censorship (ANR, “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University Iași, file 882/1918, p. 46), while in 1917, the Copou Palace harboured “The warehouse of clothes and books for disadvantaged youth”, administered by the “Commandment of the scouts and the refugee students.”

The exceptional state generated by the war, the insecurity and the unpredictability led – among others – to the solidarity of the university staff and to the outlining of alternatives for this institution to function under the circumstances of a possible military defeat in the winter of 1916-1917. Reunited within a Council meeting, on 30 December 1916, the teachers of the Faculty of Sciences adopted two decisions, which they subsequently sent to the Ministry of Instruction. They asked, in the context of the war, “upon discussing the situations of teachers at all levels”, for solidarity among all the members of the teaching personnel “in terms of both duty and rights.” They asked for the minister to have the same availability and for the “personnel assisting teachers in different laboratories, all the more as some personnel members are mobilized, while some others keep working in laboratories.” (ANR, file 19/1917, p. 8) . In the same meeting, taking into account the possibility of evacuating the city of Iași, the Council decided that: “The Dean along with the minister of Instruction should decide on the measures of surveillance and preservation of the assets of various laboratories, by assigning this mission to certain teachers or to persons working in the laboratories.” (ANR, file 19/1917, p. 8) .

The city of Iași was not evacuated, and the buildings of the University continued to host, until November 1918, a part of the central state institutions. The change of purpose for most teaching and research spaces, as well as the mobilization of the students and of a part of the

teachers led to interruptions and delays of the learning process. Whereas certain courses were still held (even in the houses of certain older teachers who were not mobilized, such as Alexandru Philippide, Garabet Ibrăileanu and Dimitrie Gusti) and some exams were organized, the interruption practically lasted for two years (Agrigoroaiei, 2010, p. 279). Furthermore, the lecture halls and the laboratories suffered important destructions, which made them inadequate for use. In 1918, the Rector Nicolae Leon addressed several letters to the Ministry of Instruction asking for funds for repairing the facilities of the University and for their reintroduction in the natural circuit (teaching and scientific).

On 6th March, the Rector wrote to the Ministry that for over 16 months, within the University Palace functioned numerous directorates of the Ministry of War, and the building, the furniture, the installations “were severely damaged” (ANR, “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University Iași, file 80/1918, p. 25). He asked for the Ministry of War to intervene and to make all efforts “to give us back the University Palace as we gave it.” (ANR, “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University Iași, file 80/1918, p. 31-32). In September 1918, the Ministry of Public Instructions and Cults allocated 130,000 lei for the University to repair the interiors and 30,000 lei for the exteriors, the roof and the installations (Agrigoroaiei, 2010, p. 283).

The campaign of the fall of 1916, the withdrawal to Iași, the relocation of the central institutions in the new political capital and the social crises in the winter of 1916-1917 had deep consequences for the activity of the Iași-based University, which was a volunteer in the war effort. As early as 15th August 1916, the teachers of the Faculty of Medicine were mobilized in the health units of the army, and on 21st August, the 53rd Infantry Regiment – comprising teachers and students of the University – went to the front. Young assistant lecturers or consecrated professors made their knowledge available to the Romanian army, being mobilized in services that used their expertise. Not lastly, the spaces of the University were transformed into headquarters of the central institutions; the Hall became both a political decision forum, by hosting the Senate of Romania, and a platform of memorable speeches in terms of contents and effect.

The analysis dedicated to the participation of the University in Iași to the First World War can go beyond the primary level of

reconstruction, which I chose for this paper. Subsequent investigations may demonstrate the implications of the evacuation of persons and assets, the way this process was organized at central and local level. It may also explain and exemplify the global dimension of the conflict, which included civilian actors and educational spaces. It may also clarify the role of university members within the conflict, through the knowledge used not only for research purposes, but also for military needs, such as the case of historians, geographers, medical doctors, etc.

Predestined to co-operation, to exchanges and communication, to the transfer of knowledge and values between cultural spaces and nations through its nature, the University through its nature is antinomic to any kind of violent action. Academic competition, no matter how harsh, is oriented towards the general progress and it excludes, in itself, all forms of physical aggressiveness. Despite this fact, mostly starting with the modern world, it became inevitable for universities to avoid the proximity of the war, the crises it entailed, the ravages of extreme violence and the military commitment. This conjunction occurred either by ensuring the intellectual and technological support, or by the participation of its members directly in battles, or by the direct or indirect effects that often drove the university to the limit of survival. Universities became involved one way or another in the destructing conflicts that marked mostly the past century. Furthermore, the war – with its political and ideological charge – unleashed older personal or opinion-based disputes within the academic space and it provided an occasion for radical “solutions” in “collegial” files, which troubled the university life.

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