

**CURATING COMMUNISM. A COMPARATIVE HISTORY OF
MUSEOLOGICAL PRACTICES IN POST-WAR (1946-1958)
AND POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIA**

Simina Bădică

A DISSERTATION

In

History

**Presented to the Faculties of the Central European University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor in Philosophy**

Budapest, Hungary

2013

Supervisor of Dissertation: Professor István Rév

Copyright Notice and Statement of Responsibility

Copyright in the text of this dissertation rests with the Author. Copies by any process, either in full or part, may be made only in accordance with the instructions given by the Author and lodged in the Central European Library. Details may be obtained from the librarian. This page must form a part of any such copies made. Further copies made in accordance with such instructions may not be made without the written permission of the Author.

I hereby declare that this dissertation contains no materials accepted for any other degrees in any other institutions and no materials previously written and/or published by another person unless otherwise noted.

Abstract

This dissertation is an attempt to look at history museums historically, to establish genealogies of their discourses and curatorial practice in times of social change. The thesis proposes a genealogy of exhibiting communism, crucial for understanding current attempts at building museums of communism. The Romanian communist regime's self-representation in museums is both model and anti-model for current exhibitions on the recent past. The thesis also highlights the transnational network of museums that shaped the form and content of Romanian museums in the 1950s and 1990s.

The thesis argues that museums of communism of the 1950s are linked with the post-1989 (anti)communist museums not only by subject, inherited buildings and artifacts but also by curatorial practice. My second argument is that curatorial practice, in general, is historically determined and the museum does not function if the content of the museum and the museology that exhibits it stand in contrast.

The most important museums established in 1950s and 1990s Romania are the focus of my research: Doftana prison-museum, the Romanian-Russian museum, the museum of party history and the Lenin-Stalin museum, for the 1950s and the Sighet Memorial-Museum and the Romanian Peasant Museum for the 1990s. Soviet museology is analyzed for its impact on Romanian museums. In order to document the survival of Soviet museology in post-communist museum practice, the thesis looks at the new relationship between object and text, original and replica, visitor and exhibit as explained in the manuals and museums of Soviet museology.

These early 1950s museums of communism, largely forgotten, and only mentioned, if at all, as an anti-model are interesting as part of, probably the first,

organized network of museums in East-Central Europe, incorporating both Soviet and European tradition in museology and equally working toward the emergence of a new genre. I argue that, even though their narrative has been refuted, the museum genre they created successfully survived the demise of communist regimes. An important argument for the success of this “museum of communism genre” is its apparently unproblematic contemporary use in establishing museum of (anti)communism ever since the 1990s.

The communist past as a traumatic event is currently exhibited in museums of (anti)communism mainly established in former prisons and heavily drawing on Holocaust museography. The fact that this specific museography of the Holocaust emerged in the 1950s from museums exhibiting antifascism (in its communist variant in Soviet occupied countries) implies that current attempts to commemorate victims of communism actually use the memorialisation means and techniques pioneered by communist museums themselves.

To Mihai, who believed I could conclude this when I had lost hope

Acknowledgments

Eight years have passed since I started doctoral work and it is time for me to say thank you to all the wonderful people who joined me in this journey.

Thank you, Mihai, Vlad and Toma for being part of my life. I did not have a family of my own when I started thinking about this dissertation. In the eight years that followed I met and fell in love with my husband and we gave birth and fell in love with our two sons. Family life made PhD research both impossible and bearable. Impossible because of shrinking (to disappearing) working hours and bearable for the never-ending amount of positive energy that a family has to provide. Motherhood made my PhD project sometimes feel like a child's play; as much as I would like to say that this dissertation is the hardest thing I had to do in my life, it is not: mothering is.

Thank you, Professor István Rév for inspiration and for never tiring of asking questions. Thank you, Professor Sorin Antohi for being the first to believe I could write a dissertation.

There is one person who was not beside me when pursuing doctoral work yet whose influence was tremendous; she actually became a character in this dissertation. Thank you, Irina Nicolau for being my first mentor and for teaching me to forget Rembrandt and the cat and save the little mouse instead!

Thank you for friendship and stimulating conversations, Viviana Iacob, Ioana Macrea-Toma, Simona Niculae, Gabriela Cristea-Nicolescu, Maria Falina, Bogdan Iacob, Vladimir Petrovic. Thank you, fellow researchers for sharing your knowledge, ideas and sometimes even archival data, Cristian Vasile, Valentin Săndulescu, Oana and Constantin Ilie, Mihai Burcea. Thank you, colleagues at the Romanian Peasant Museum for introducing me to the amazing world of museums. Thank you, Ioana Popescu for assigning me curatorial tasks that have enriched my understanding of how exhibitions actually function.

Thank you for pure friendship and support at times when academic work and family life was overwhelming, Livia Otal, Dragoș Bucurenci, Ioana Hodoiu, mother and father.

I was lucky to be recipient of several grants which made this journey financially possible. Central European University awarded me full doctoral stipend for three years. I afterwards received the *Europa* Fellowship at New Europe College, Bucharest and a doctoral fellowship from Volkswagen Stiftung. I was a Visegrad Fellow at the Open Society Archives and a recipient of a write-up grant from Central European University.

They say the journey is better than reaching the destination and this is certainly true for this particular journey. I have grown together with this thesis and I feel so much richer now than I was eight years ago. As much as I enjoyed the journey, I actually truly like the place where it has taken me.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
List of Illustrations	4
List of common abbreviations in the dissertation	7
Introduction: Historicizing Museums	9
Main arguments of dissertation	11
Methodologies: archival research, museum studies, networks	13
Sources. Current situation of museum archives in Romania	18
Structure of dissertation	21
Chapter 1. Prisons, museums, ruins: Doftana and Târgu Jiu.	25
1.1. Prehistory of the Doftana museum. From model prison to ruins.	28
1.1.1. A visit to Doftana prison in 1930	34
1.1.2. The seeds of the story: Hitlerism in Doftana in 1933.....	39
1.1.3 The earthquake on November 10, 1944 as premeditated murder.....	42
1.2. Exhibiting walls. Turning ruins into museums	47
1.3. Inventing artifacts – dealing with the dearth of objects	58
1.4. Doftana on the European map.....	65
1.4.1. A memory institution: The National Federation of Former Antifascist Political Prisoners and Inmates (FIAP).....	67
1.4.2. Was Doftana a part of a network of Holocaust memorials?.....	76
1.5. Prisons, museums, memorials: the contact zones	89
1.6. Failed musealisation: the Târgu Jiu Camp Museum	100
1.6.1. Camp days in Târgu Jiu for political inmates.....	104
1.6.2. Concentration, hard labor and transit camp in Târgu Jiu and Bumbesti - Livezeni.....	114
1.6.3. Ruins of the camp or ruins of the museum? The Târgu Jiu camp after the war: destruction, reconstruction and failed musealisation.....	120
Chapter 2. The First Museums of Communism in Romania and Soviet museology. 1946-1958.	129
2.1. New laws for old museums. 1946.	131

2.2. Soviet museology and its impact on Romanian museums	137
2.2.1. Bullets against museum walls? Reinventing museums after the Bolshevik Revolution.....	138
2.2.2. Talking museums: text as museum artifact	144
2.2.3 The textbooks of Soviet museology in Romania.....	148
2.3. The Party Museum. 1948-1958.....	153
2.3.1. Moments of history. From Revolutionary Museum to Party Museum.....	155
2.3.1.1. Darkness. A visit to the Moments of the People’s Struggle [for Freedom] Museum in 1948	159
2.3.1.2. A counter-visit to the Revolutionary Museum in Bucharest	163
2.3.2. The Socialist Pilgrim	165
2.3.2.1. “When you get inside the gates you are part of the show.” The visitor as exhibit.	166
2.3.2.2. The collective visit.....	169
2.3.2.3. The Socialist visitor: witness and a pilgrim.....	173
2.3.3. “The museum is my estate.” Institutional developments and internal struggles at the Party Museum (1948 – 1958)	178
2.3.4. The museum as history book. The new permanent exhibition of the Party Museum. 1958.....	183
2.4. Ephemeral Museums: the Romanian-Russian Museum and the Lenin-Stalin Museum.....	192
2.4.1. The Romanian-Russian Museum. 1947-1963.	193
2.4.2. The Lenin – Stalin Museum in Bucharest	199
2.5. Failed musealisation: the Museum of the Illegal Printing House	207
2.5.1 Post scriptum. Living in the museum	213
Chapter 3. Communism in museums after 1989.....	217
3.1. Memorial context of the 1990s: the black hole paradigm.....	217
3.1.1. Welcome back, history!	218
3.1.2. Museological silence of the 1990s.....	223
3.2. Exorcising Communism. The Romanian Peasant Museum.....	226
3.2.1 The National Art Museum 1906-1952.....	228
3.2.2. Fake walls and fake objects. 1990.	232
3.2.3. The healing museum: a victory over communism.....	236
3.2.4. The Red Plague: a discourse on ugliness.....	242

3.2.5. The antidote museum. Irina Nicolau.	247
3.2.6. Experimenting with communist objects 20 years after	251
3.3. Prison-museums after 1989: Sighet and Râmnicu Sărat	257
3.3.1. Memory in the museum: a contested relationship	259
3.3.2. Functioning prisons and early musealisation attempts: Doftana, Sighet, Râmnicu Sărat.....	263
3.3.3 Râmnicu Sărat, prison of silence	272
3.3.4. Sighet Memorial Museum	275
3.3.5. Residual power of museology: reconstructed prison cells	285
Conclusions.....	295
Bibliography	308

List of Illustrations

Fig. 1.1. Plan of the Doftana penitentiary.

Fig. 1.2. Longitudinal section of the Doftana penitentiary.

Fig. 1.3. Doftana prison before 1940. Postcard.

Fig. 1.4. Illustration to the reportage by Tik, Ion. “La Închisoarea Doftana (At the Doftana Prison).”

Fig. 1.5. ”A group of dangerous criminals and bandits are being searched before entering the cells.”

Fig. 1.6. Doftana, November 1940. Burial of a Communist inmate killed by the earthquake.

Fig. 1.7. Doftana, November 9th, 1952. Commemoration of those killed during the 1940 earthquake.

Fig. 1.8. Back cover of the album *Muzeul Doftana*.

Fig. 1.9. “Comrade Gheorghiu Dej’s cell in section B of Doftana”

Fig. 1.10 The former Doftana museum in October 2012.

Fig. 1.11. Section B of the former Doftana museum in October 2012.

Fig. 1.12. Hamburg Memorial to the Victims of Fascism (Ohlsdorf cemetery) photographed in the 1950s.

Fig. 1.13 Museum of the Camp for Political Detainees in Târgu Jiu. Section of the Museum of History of the Communist Party, of the Revolutionary and Democratic Movement of Romania.

Fig. 1.14. Pencil drawing of Târgu Jiu camp by Károlyi F.J. in 1942

Fig. 1.15. Communist inmates in the Târgu Jiu camp in 1943.

Fig. 1.16. The wooden cross (*troița*) in Târgu Jiu camp

Fig. 1.17. “A group out of the 411 transferred to Transnistria. Karoly F.J. Tg. Jiu 942, September 8.”

Fig. 1.17. The remains of the sundial built by the Poles in Târgu Jiu camp in 1940, one of the few genuine traces of the camp.

Fig. 1.18. “The escape of com. Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej from the Târgu Jiu camp on the night of August 12, 1944”

Fig. 1.19. Section 7 of the Târgu Jiu camp. Pencil drawing by Károlyi F.J. in 1942

Fig. 1.20. The reconstructed barracks of Târgu Jiu in the 1970s.

Fig. 1.21. Contemporary Târgu Jiu camp diorama inside the Regional Museum in Târgu Jiu.

Fig. 2.1. The Party Museum after 1958 in the neo-Romanian palace on no.3 Kiseleff Boulevard.

Fig. 2.2. The former Bălcescu Establishment, former Brătianu palace, in 2013 an abandoned branch of the National Library.

Fig. 2.3. Ana Pauker's cell reproduced in the Revolutionary Museum.

Fig. 2.4. "Working people visit Doftana".

Fig. 2.5. Guided visit to the Museum of Party History in the early 1970s.

Fig. 2.6. Framed texts, images and maps as exhibits at the Party Museum in 1958.

Fig. 2.7. From tridimensional to bi-dimensional exhibit, the Doftana cell as displayed in the Party Museum.

Fig. 2.8. The Romanian-Russian Museum in Bucharest in the 1950s.

Fig. 2.9. Scarlat Callimachi in 1937.

Fig. 2.10. "Room of horrors" at the Romanian Peasant Museum in 1990.

Fig. 2.11. Dismantling the Central Lenin Museum in Moscow. 1994.

Fig. 2.12. First exhibition hall in the Lenin-Stalin Museum.

Fig. 2.13 Visiting the Lenin-Stalin Museum, 1960.

Fig. 2.14 The house on 34 Școala Floreasca Street, Bucharest, location of the Museum of the Illegal Printing House, in the 1950s or 1960s.

Fig. 2.15. The wooden shelter in the backyard of 34 Școala Floreasca Street, reconstructed for the projected Museum of the Illegal Printing House.

Fig. 3.1. Priests are sprinkling holy water inside the former History Museum of the Communist Party (1991). © Visual Archive of the Romanian Peasant Museum (cTz 886)

Fig. 3.2. Entrance to the hall Holy Relics (*Moaște*) © Romanian Peasant Museum.

Fig. 3.3. *Splendor* hall from the *Christian Law* thematic ground floor. © Romanian Peasant Museum.

Fig. 3.4. Entrance to the exhibition hall *Time* at the Romanian Peasant Museum.

Fig. 3.5. Lenin facing himself. The Plague (1997) exhibition hall at the Romanian Peasant Museum.

Fig. 3.6. The Plague (1997) exhibition hall. © Romanian Peasant Museum

Fig. 3.7. Irina Nicolau in her office at the Peasant Museum in 2000.

Fig. 3.8. Communist pottery (Long live the Romanian Popular Republic) inserted among peasant pottery. *In between Reconstructions* at the Romanian Peasant Museum, February 2010.

Fig. 3.9. A photocopied postcard with Rosa Luxemburg inserted among photocopied portraits of Virgin Mary. *In between Reconstructions* at the Romanian Peasant Museum, February 2010.

Fig. 3.10. The individual cells sections in Sighet prison, Doftana, and Râmnicu Sărat.

Fig. 3.11. Entrance to the Sighet Memorial in 2011.

Fig. 3.12. “The cell where Iulia Maniu died” (room 9) at the Sighet Memorial.

Fig. 3.13. The cell where Gheorghe Brătianu died (room 73).

Fig. 3.14. “Do you want to understand nowadays Romania? Visit the Sighet Memorial-Museum to the Victims of Communism and to the Resistance.”

Fig. 3.15. Recreation of a Sighet prison cell in the 2007 exhibition *Communism in Romania* organized at the National History Museum.

Fig. 3.16. Recreated prison cell in the 2013 exhibition “The destruction of Romanian peasantry” organized at the Romanian Peasant Museum.

Fig. 3.17. “Map of prisons in which the communists have been imprisoned in the years of the bourgeois regime”

Fig. 3.18. The room of maps (fifth hall) in the Sighet Memorial-Museum representing detention centers in communist Romania.

Fig. 3.19. Prison clothes and handcuffs exhibited in the Sighet museum. © Dinu Lazăr and Liternet.

Fig. 3.20. Prison clothes exhibited in the Doftana museum.

List of common abbreviations in the dissertation

AMNIR, Archives of the Romanian National History Museum

ANR, Romanian National Archives

AP, Patriotic Defense (Apărarea Patriotică)

FIAP, National Federation of Former Antifascist Political Prisoners and Inmates, Romania

FIAPP, Fédération Internationale des Anciens Prisonniers Politiques

IICCMER, Institute for Investigating Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Exile (Institutul pentru Investigarea Crimelor Comunismului si Memoria Exilului Romanesc)

ISISP, Institute for Historical and Socio-Political Studies of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party (Institutul de Studii Istorice și Social-Politice de pe lângă C.C. al P.C.R)

RCP, Romanian Communist Party (1921-1989) except for the 1948-1965 period when it was officially named Romanian Workers Party

RPR, Romanian People's Republic (Republica Populară Română) 1947-1965

RWP, Romanian Workers Party (official name of the Romanian Communist Party 1948 – 1965)

Introduction: Historicizing Museums

This dissertation is an attempt to look at history museums historically, to establish genealogies of their discourses and of their curatorial practice in times of social change. History and museology are distinct scholarly fields and their practice and analyzes rarely converge in the same scholarly text. Yet I believe, with Didier Maleuvre that “one must look at museums historically not because method dictates it, but because they are essentially historical.”¹ I am basically looking comparatively at the process of building museums in Romania in two periods of societal and political transformation, the establishment of communism in the late 1940s and 1950s and the post-communist transition, in the hope that a better understanding can be reached of how museums function, their current appeal and their current re-branding as negotiators, even healers of traumatic memories.

Curating is an activity currently assigned to museums, archives, all sorts of collections and the artistic realm. History has come to be a subject of curating as it became a concern of museums. The word is coming from the Latin *curo / curare* and it meant to care for, pay attention to, trouble about or even to cure, to heal in a medical sense. I believe the presence of communism in museums is very well defined by such a polysemic word. Communism in contemporary museums is not only a scientific concern it is also a troubling presence, one that needs special attention and sometimes even healing procedures. This dissertation understands curatorial work in

¹ Didier Maleuvre, *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1999), 9.

its broadest sense and is concerned with the presence of communism in museums in a variety of forms beyond the traditional collections / archives / exhibitions division.

The most important post-war museums established by the new socialist regime in order to museologically represent itself in Romania are analyzed in this dissertation (inauguration year in parenthesis): the Romanian-Russian Museum (1947), The Party Museum (1948), the Doftana prison museum (1949) and the Lenin-Stalin Museum (1955). The post-1989 museums analyzed in this dissertation are the Sighet Memorial Museum, established in 1993 and the Romanian Peasant Museum, established in 1990, virtually the only Romanian museums that had the determination and courage to exhibit communism in the 1990s and, surprisingly enough, to this day.

Narrating the early history of communist museums is important for several fields of historiography. On the one hand, the museums of communism that appeared in important numbers in the former Socialist camp in the last two decades seem to have been constructed in total disregard of the fact that museums of communism existed all over Eastern Europe even before 1989. These pre and post-1989 institutions tell the history of the second half of the 20th century, sometimes with the same artifacts but with radically different narratives. The wide-spread popular belief that almost everything exhibited in the pre-1989 museums was faked is unfortunately shared not only by the general public but also by professionals in the region. A lack of proper historical investigation makes it impossible to assess which of the stories and objects exhibited in communist museums were forged and which were not. In Doftana's case, as this dissertation argues, it was the building itself that was completely reconstructed and then presented as the genuine prison.

This study also argues that the Soviet influence in the region was not present in all fields, or at least not at once. If a museum such as the Romanian-Russian

Museum or the Lenin-Stalin Museum inaugurated in 1947 and respectively 1955 in Bucharest are of clear Soviet inspiration, a longer lasting museum such as the Doftana prison-museum is interestingly shown to have been born out of an interaction that was more European than Soviet. As part of a European network of associations of former political prisoners (FIAPP), the creators of Doftana were more influenced by emerging memorials of concentration camps in Germany, Austria and Poland than by a possible Soviet model.

This early history of the “Holocaust memorial genre”² is seminal today because of the intense use of this genre in commemorating traumatic events all over the world. In East-Central Europe, the communist past as a traumatic event is exhibited in museums of (anti)communism mainly established in former prisons and heavily drawing on Holocaust museography. The fact that this specific museography of the Holocaust emerged in the 1950s from museums exhibiting antifascism (in its communist variant in Soviet occupied countries) implies that current attempts to commemorate victims of communism actually use the memorialisation means and techniques pioneered by communist museums themselves.

Main arguments of dissertation

There are two main arguments that form the red thread of this dissertation. One is that museums of communism of the 1950s are linked with the post-1989 (anti)communist museums not only by subject, inherited buildings and artifacts but also by curatorial practice. My second argument is that curatorial practice, in general, is historically determined and the museum does not function if the content of the

² Harold Marcuse, “Holocaust Memorials: The Emergence of a Genre,” *The American Historical Review* 115, no. 1 (February 1, 2010): 53–89.

museum and the museology that exhibits it stand in contrast. I believe this is what Michael Fehr meant when he urged us “to conceptualize museums as second-order systems, within which visitors can become observers of the rise and decay of orders – to conceptualize the museum as a space whose inner organization matches what it organizes and thereby enables us to shift to a new, structural perception.”³

Museums of communism have been a fashionable scholarly topic for already more than a decade. This dissertation however is not concerned with what is usually included in the “museum of communism” category which is post-1989 museums built either to condemn or nostalgically memorialize state socialism. This research stems from the realization that museums of communism existed all over Central-Eastern Europe even before 1989, actually in a much larger degree than during post-communism. The purpose of this study is to analyze the connection, if any, between these pre-1989 and post-1989 museums and the implications thus arising if connections are documented.

Despite the common subject, communism as ideology, political movement and political regime, or maybe precisely because of a common subject curated so radically different, these museums would most likely be expected to have nothing in common. While researching the Romanian context, this dissertation finds that not only connections and points of contact can be found but actual genealogies can be built that link the museums of the 1950s with the anti-communist museums of the 1990s. Sometimes buildings are shared, or collections are passed from one institution to the other. Sometimes, the people are also inherited from museums of communist propaganda to overtly anti-communist museums. In other situations, where the

³ Michael Fehr, “A Museum and Its Memory. The Art of Recovering History,” in *Susan Crane (ed.), Museums and Memory* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000), 59.

distance is geographically and ideologically very well established, like in the case of the Sighet Memorial situated in northern Romania in a former political prison, it is the curatorial practice itself, the museology that most resembles communist museums of the 1950s.

The situation is not without precedent. In early 1930s USSR, Stalin's "talking museums," educating the largely illiterate public to despise avant-garde art and to renounce religion, were curating anti-avant-garde exhibitions with avant-garde forms and denouncing religious faith in exhibitions, organized in former churches with anti-clerical but still fundamentally religious discourse.⁴

The reasons for the constancy of some museum practices over regime changes and over country borders is also one of the issues tackled in this dissertation. I argue that curatorial practices are historically determined and the museum does not function, i.e. it is not effective if the content of the museum and the museology deployed stand in contract. This dissertation researches museum practice in the late 1940s and 1950s in order to understand current museological practice in those museums that overtly claim to be anti-communist. It finds that the overall narrative has dramatically changed (the communist regime is no longer the future of mankind but a criminal regime) while the manner in which this new story is exhibited is structurally similar to the practice defined and established during state socialism.

Methodologies: archival research, museum studies, networks

The methodologies used in this dissertation are a mixture of what is considered traditional historical research and methods and inquiries stemming from

⁴ Adam Jolles, "Stalin's Talking Museums," *Oxford Art Journal* 28, no. 3 (2005): 429–455.

related disciplines like museum studies, memory studies, and even transnational history. I have started my research by trying to gather as much data as possible about the new museums that the socialist regime was building in post-war Romania. I have afterwards narrativised this information in a chronological form that sought to pinpoint the major events, characters and changes that made these institutions. This is what I consider traditional historical work. Before I could formulate more sophisticated questions, I needed to know what the characters of my story were.

The level to which the history of museums during communism is unknown in Romanian scholarship (except to those who have worked in the field during the socialist regime) may be perplexing to the foreign reader. During my research not only did I fill in blank spots on dates of inauguration, names of directors and staff, changes of premises, names and permanent exhibitions but I also discovered entire museums I never knew existed, like the Romanian-Russian Museum or the Lenin-Stalin Museum which later became the focus of my research. I have always had my doubts about searching for the hard facts (probably also because this seems to be the definition of historian in my country), but I have found myself, at numerous moments, desperate for an answer to very basic, factual questions: Did this museum actually exist? If so, where and when? When and how did that museum disappear? Is this the same museum but with a different name? Sometimes I was really unsure what the object of my research was and if it had ever really existed (the chapter on Târgu Jiu museum is highly relevant in this context). My level of respect for this first level of historical research, establishing the facts through archival research, grew together with my ability to perform it myself. Especially in Eastern Europe, where more archives are literally entering the scholarly field every day, this capacity should still be highly regarded and performed at highest possible level.

It is my belief though that the historian's work cannot stop here and much of the local academic literature on state socialism is especially disappointing, despite access to previously unknown archives, because it does stop at the level of assembling facts in a more or less coherent narrative.⁵ I have added to what could have remained a factual narrative questions and methodologies from adjacent fields. I have tried to uncover, as much as it was possible, not only the administrative data of these museums and the textual decisions taken on their mission, collections and exhibits but also the material and visual aspects of these museums: how did the exhibitions look like and why and who has decided on the many steps that are taken from concept to real exhibition? What can we learn about the museum culture of the 1950s by looking at the images taken in the exhibition halls and the objects and documents in their collections? Where did the objects come from, how did they become museum artifacts and what has happened to them after the museums that housed them were suddenly closed down?

These types of questions mainly belong to the field of museum studies, but as museum studies have expanded by exporting their concerns to other fields,⁶ these questions can now be profitably tackled in historical studies. The difference between the content that a museum communicates and the form in which it communicates this content is precisely what defines museology and curatorship. A museum curator not only defines what an exhibition is to tell the visitor but also how the story will be told in order to reach the visitor and to do justice to the subject itself. Unlike standard

⁵ See, for example, the recent very informative yet lacking theoretical perspective, Cristian Vasile, *Literatura Si Artele in Romania Comunistă 1948-1953 (Literature and the Arts in Communist Romania 1948-1953)* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2010); Cristian Vasile, *Politicile culturale comuniste în timpul regimului Gheorghiu-Dej (Communist cultural politics during Gheorghiu-Dej's regime)* (Bucuresti: Humanitas, 2011); Stefan Bosomitu and Mihai Burcea, eds., *Spectrele lui Dej: incursiuni în biografia si regimul unui dictator (Specters of Dej: incursions into the biography and regime of a dictator)* (Iasi: Polirom, 2012).

⁶ Sharon Macdonald, ed., "Expanding Museum Studies: An Introduction," in *A Companion to Museum Studies* (Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 2.

museum histories which analyze and narrate museums as institutions, mainly from the point of view of the written documents produced by and about the museum, this dissertation is highly interested in the curatorial practice of the museums discussed, the history of the objects exhibited or not exhibited, the collections acquired and then discharged, the changing labels, the replacement of certain objects in specific times and the display of the same objects with totally different meaning constructed through museal techniques. It is my belief that only such thick descriptions of the museum reveal its true potential and involvement as an actor in the events rather than a mere reflection of higher politics and ideological constraints. The museum is not to be analyzed only as a representation of history but as a historical actor fully involved in contemporary reality. The Sighet Memorial-Museum is one interesting case in which the museum shaped public and political discourse and not the other way around.

I have included in my methodology a lot of attention to the terms and concepts I use as compared to the terms and concepts my sources use. This is certainly not a conceptual history (Begriffsgeschichte), however it is conceptual history that has made many historians direct their attention to the words and concepts they use. More recently, Carlo Ginzburg has written about the crucial importance of being able to define and discern between “our words and theirs.”⁷ Even more, it becomes historically relevant the way in which concepts from the museological field, such as memorial-museum and even museum itself have changed their meaning over decades and this dissertation is particularly attentive to such subtle changes in vocabulary. I thus felt the need to research and construct a genealogy of such concepts, as advised

⁷ Carlo Ginzburg, “Our Words, and Theirs: A Reflection on the Historian’s Craft, Today,” Susanna Fellman and M. Rahikainen, eds., *Historical Knowledge: In Quest of Theory, Method and Evidence* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 97–119.

by Michel Foucault,⁸ such as the prison-museum, memorial-museum or even political prisoner in order to understand how their meaning and content has changed throughout decades and centuries.

The concept of network as defined by Bruno Latour has been brought to my attention during the seminars of Professor István Rév at Central European University. As Latour explains it, “I take the word network not simply to designate things in the world that have the shape of a net (in contrast, let’s say, to juxtaposed domains, to surfaces delineated by borders, to impenetrable volumes), but mainly to designate a mode of inquiry that learns to list, at the occasion of a trial, the unexpected beings necessary for any entity to exist.”⁹ I have tried to use the network as a mode of inquiry into museums of communism and the artifacts they used and produced. By researching “the unexpected beings necessary for any entity to exist,” I have written intricate histories of the museums I am focusing on. Perhaps the narrative of Doftana prison and museum best exemplifies this model as it can be read in the first chapter.

Although museums are without question a transnational phenomenon, the history of communist museums has rarely been written transnationally. With notable exceptions in the case of post-communist museums,¹⁰ the museum networks built in Socialist states lack this perspective in the few academic articles dedicated to them.¹¹

⁸ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in D.F. Bouchard (ed.) *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977).

⁹ Bruno Latour, “Networks, Societies, Spheres: Reflections of an Actor-Network Theorist,” *International Journal of Communication* no. 5 (2011): 799.

¹⁰ James Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution: Making Sense of the Communist Past in Central-Eastern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2007).

¹¹ A. Ignatova and I. Gancheva, “The Attitude of Museums to Socialism in the Period of Bulgarian Transition to Democracy,” *Bulletin of the Transylvania University of Brasov* 4(53), no. 2 (2011): 25–32; Gabriela Petkova-Campbell, “Uses and Exploitation of History: Official History, Propaganda and Mythmaking in Bulgarian Museums,” in Dominique Poulot, Felicity Bodenstein, José María Lanzarote Guiral (eds.) *Great Narratives of the Past. Traditions and Revisions in National Museums Conference Proceedings from EuNaMus, European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, Paris 29 June – 1 July & 25-26 November 2011*. (Linköping University Electronic Press: http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=078, 2011), 69–77; Gabriela

It was not my intention, when starting research for this dissertation to write transnational histories. I knew that I was sure to devote some attention to Soviet museology as the heavy influence of Soviet culture in 1950s Romania is common knowledge. What surprised me is that these early museums of communism are part of probably the first organized network of museums in East-Central Europe, incorporating both Soviet and European traditions in museology and equally working toward the emergence of a new genre. The European dimension of building museums of communism is due to the specific context of the post-war period and will be explained in the body of the dissertation.

Sources. Current situation of museum archives in Romania

The sources for a history of museums during Romanian communism should normally rest in national or museum archives. The situation of archives in Eastern Europe is generally known to be problematic and the Romanian situation is no different. I consider it important, for future research, to make available my findings, not only as research findings extracted from the archives but as information on the archives themselves.

My initial research plan was focused on the former Museum of Communist Party History, an important and well known institution in the center of Bucharest up to 1989. Despite my repeated and lengthy efforts, spanning over eight years, to access the archives of this important institution, this was not possible. As with many

Petkova-Campbell, *A Place in Europe: Bulgaria and Its Museums in "New" Europe* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2009); Radostina Sharenkova, "Forget-me(-not): Visitors and Museum Presentations About Communism Before 1989," *History of Communism in Europe* no. 1 (2010): 63–80; Heike Karge, "Mediated Remembrance: Local Practices of Remembering the Second World War in Tito's Yugoslavia," *European Review of History* 16, no. 1 (February 2009): 49–62; Beverly A James, *Imagining Postcommunism Visual Narratives of Hungary's 1956 Revolution* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2005).

institutions belonging to the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) the regime change in 1989 meant dismantling these institutions often according to the free will and best judgment of the people locally in charge. In the case of the Party Museum, these were the new employees of the Romanian Peasant Museum re-established in February 1990 in the building still housing the Party Museum. The documentary archive was given over the years, in several transports, to the National Archives (ANR) where it is still not available for research because still not processed. Although in the last decade the processing of documents from the communist era has been speeded up as a new generation of archivists and historians (sometimes both) has reached the managerial positions from which they can make these decisions, the archive of the former Party Museum is considered of secondary importance as compared to archives pertaining to the political history of state socialism which are processed and made available for research with an impressive rhythm in the last years.

There are however available fonds at the ANR which can be used for valuable and relevant information for the development of Romanian museums in the first decades of communism. These are the fond CC al PCR (Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party) – Propaganda si Agitatie (Propaganda and Agitation) and the fond CC al PCR– Cancelarie (Office). For biographical information on the people involved in the museum field I consulted Collection 53 (Party dossiers of deceased Party members). The archive of the former Institute for Historical and Socio-Political Studies of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party (ISISP, Institutul de Studii Istorice și Social-Politice de pe lângă C.C. al P.C.R) is also being processed; for the moment especially useful was the photographic collection, fond ISISP- Fototeca.¹²

¹² Partially available online as Fototeca online a comunismului românesc, <http://fototeca.iiccr.ro/>.

A part of the collections of the Party Museum were transferred in the 1990s to the National History Museum. My research revealed that, together with the collections some important documents were transferred: seminal for my research, two ample dossiers documenting the creation of the Doftana museum in 1948-1949.¹³ Besides the important information in the dossiers, which developed in a whole chapter on Doftana museum in this dissertation, the documents also revealed the crucial agency of one institution, whose involvement in the creation on museums in the late 1940s I had previously ignored: this was the National Federation of Former Antifascist Political Prisoners and Inmates (FIAP). With the best of luck that makes these quests reach a successful outcome, the archive of the FIAP was miraculously available for research at the National Archives. In the FIAP fond at the ANR I discovered additional files related to the creation of the Doftana museum which added flesh to my Doftana narrative. The fact that FIAP was part of a European network, the *Fédération Internationale des Anciens Prisonniers Politiques*, transformed my local, almost microhistorical research on the Doftana prison-museum into a transnational history of building museums of Nazi atrocities in the immediate post-war years.

Another consistent subchapter was born out of a similar archival coincidence. I was searching for photographic documents in the sub-fond Prisons and Camps of the above-mentioned Fototeca fond of the ISISP at the National Archives. My gaze was seized by what appeared to be yet another museum I had never heard about, the Museum of the Camp for Political Detainees in Târgu Jiu. The outcomes of the struggle to discover if such a museum ever existed are detailed in the first chapter of this dissertation.

¹³ Access to these documents was made possible due to the kind assistance of fellow researcher at the National History Museum, Oana Ilie to which my gratitude goes.

I am not detailing my research trajectory because I find it unique. On the contrary, I think that most research on 20th century east-Central Europe follows similar paths. I have heard similar stories from fellow historians,¹⁴ stories of discovering unexpected archives and of failing to find archives where one might expect them to be, stories of being denied access only to find open back-doors to even more interesting places, that I believe these stories about the archives to be as relevant as the stories found in the archives. Even more, I believe the intricate nature of Romanian archives to have greatly influenced the way history is written based on these archives. The chapters I have written with information retrieved in this detective way would have been written in a totally different manner had the information been delivered to me in a complete package, all at once. The “facts” may have been the same, Doftana would still have been reconstructed in 1948 and inaugurated as a former place of martyrdom, but my narrative would have been different because the questions that appeared during the months when I was tracing documents would have probably never bothered me had I unrestricted and immediate access to the same documents.

Structure of dissertation

The dissertation is divided into three research chapters. The first two are devoted to the museums of communism established concomitantly with the Romanian communist regime (late 1940s and 1950s) while the third and last chapter deals with post-communist museums while highlighting the connections with the museums presented in the first two chapters.

¹⁴ The same is certainly true even outside Eastern Europe. See Antoinette M Burton, ed., *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005).

The first research chapter analyzes two Romanian museums that would have certainly fit the current memorial-museum genre: the Doftana prison-museum inaugurated in 1949 and the failed musealisation of the former concentration camp in Târgu-Jiu in the early 1970s. To my knowledge, there is no scholarly literature written on these museums, except for the museum guides written about Doftana before 1989. The theoretical dilemma that spurred the writing of this chapter was the apparent smoothness of turning prisons into museums, the importance of the ruin as transitional (and sometimes final) phase, and the need to establish a longer history of this apparently post-modern transformation. Historical, architectural and functional arguments are brought to argue for a multitude of contact zones between prisons, museums and ruins. Even more, transforming prisons into museums seems to be a practice transcending political regimes. Even though this research started out as an enquiry into communist museological practices, the story of prison-museums goes beyond the traditional 1945-1989 time borders of Romanian state socialism as if to stress, for those still in doubt, that the story of Romanian communism cannot be written starting in 1945.

The original research on the Romanian Doftana museum, inaugurated in 1949, is contextualized in this chapter in the European framework of museologically interpreting the Second World War just after its closure. The Doftana Museum was inaugurated in 1949 Romania, by the newly established communist administration, in a former prison for political inmates, torn down by an earthquake in 1940 and a ruin since. The museum derived its appeal and claim to authenticity from exhibiting the pain and suffering, and even death, perpetrated within the walls of the prison turned into museum. Although Doftana had never been a Holocaust site, its creators, made

conscious efforts to place the Doftana museum within the emerging network of Holocaust memorials.

In the early 1970s, musealisation works began at a proper Holocaust site, the former Târgu Jiu camp for political inmates. Although the camp had served largely as a concentration, transit and hard labor camp for Jews, the rebuilding of two barracks in the 1970s curatorial plan was meant to speak only of the political prisoners. The chapter discusses the reasons why this particular project was terminated while Doftana continued to be a symbolic place for the regime.

The second chapter deals with those museums that were built as part of a network of Soviet museums. The Romanian-Russian Museum (1947 - 1963), the Party Museum (1948 - 1990) and the Lenin-Stalin Museum (1955 - 1965) all had their homologues in the neighboring countries and seemed to have been built according to a “Soviet recipe.” Alongside the institutional history of these museums, the chapter details the ingredients of Soviet museology as imported in 1950s Romania. After a short presentation of the historical transformations of Soviet museology before the 1950s, it becomes clear that the Socialist satellites were the recipients of a specific, quite rigid form of Soviet museology which was nonetheless successful beyond the limits of Stalinism and even beyond the limits of the communist regime as such. In order to document the survival of Soviet museology in post-communist museum practice, this chapter looks at the new relationship between object and text, original and replica as explained in the manuals of Soviet museology. It also defines an ideal-type of visitor, which I call “the Socialist pilgrim,” whose visiting experience and interaction with the museum is, for the first time, monitored in Soviet museology.

The third and final chapter tells the story of museums of communism in post-communism. Besides being a research chapter on its own it also functions as an

epilogue to the stories unfolded in the first two chapters. The fate of the Museum of Party History becomes complete only with its after-life as a ghost haunting the newly established Museum of the Romanian Peasant. Doftana, the symbolic prison-museum of the communist regime, is a ruin but the Sighet Memorial-Museum continues its museology with a reversed narrative. The chapter contextualizes the emergence of these new museums by discussing the memory culture of 1990s Romania defined by what I call “the black hole” perspective on the recent past. The chapter and the dissertation conclude with a discussion on the museal use of reconstructed prison cells building an argument on the residual power of museology.

Chapter 1. Prisons, museums, ruins: Doftana and Târgu Jiu.

Transforming prisons into museums has intensified over the last decades as it became a wide-spread museological and memorial practice. The reasons behind this transformations range from a need to emphasize and memorialize the events perpetrated inside the prison walls (this is usually the case with former Nazi/Fascist or Soviet/Communist prisons and concentration camps) to a need to overcome and change the symbolic meaning of the place (this is the case of turning former prisons into cultural or community centers/museums). This chapter will analyze two such Romanian transformations that precede the current boom: the Doftana prison-museum inaugurated in 1949 and the failed musealisation of the former concentration camp in Târgu-Jiu in the early 1970s. The theoretical dilemma that spurred the writing of this chapter was the apparent smoothness of turning prisons into museums (how does this enrich our knowledge about how museum function?), the importance of the ruin as transitional (and sometimes final) phase, and the need to establish a longer history of this apparently post-modern transformation. Historical, architectural and functional arguments are brought to argue for a multitude of contact zones between prisons, museums and ruins. Even more, transforming prisons into museums seems to be a practice transcending political regimes. Even though this research started out as an enquiry into communist museological practices, the story of prison-museums goes beyond the traditional 1945-1989 time borders of Romanian state socialism as if to

stress, for those still in doubt, that the story of Romanian communism cannot be written starting in 1945.

Although closed and abandoned for more than two decades, the Doftana museum and former prison is probably one of the most visited ruins in Romania and certainly the only museum ruin to still hold some fascination on potential visitors. The name itself resonates for any Romanian who was once a pioneer, a fact which might account for the current fascination with its ruins, yet Doftana remains a historiographical puzzle both as a prison and as a museum. What happened between the Doftana prison walls and how was the prison transformed into a museum? Is it the former prison that is visited nowadays or the former museum? How much of the former prison remained in the museum of the 1950s and how much was lost? Who created the Doftana memorial-museum and why? Why was Doftana chosen as a symbol of the antifascist fight led by the underground Romanian communists and how did Doftana become the Romanian homologue of the Auschwitz concentration camp and museum? Finally, what is the afterlife of the museum in Doftana, one of the most successful Romanian museums during the communist regime?

This chapter aims at answering all these questions in what might be considered an ethnography of this former prison-museum. Information was retrieved from a great variety of sources, as there is no institution that might claim to inherit the archive of this former museum. Some archival fonds were found by sheer chance at the National History Museum while others were retrieved at the National Archives under unlikely archival descriptions.¹ Newspapers, journals, literary memoirs, even propaganda

¹ This subchapter is based on previously un-researched documents found in the archive of the National History Museum, part of the fond *Muzeul Partidului* (Party Museum). Two solid dossiers, i2500 and i2501 contain around 700 pages created in 1948-1949, transferred to the History Museum of the Romanian Workers' Party (probably when Doftana museum became its branch) and from there transferred in 1990 to the National History Museum. My gratitude goes to Oana Ilie for facilitating access to these important documents. Complementary information on establishing the Doftana museum

productions such as children's books and as many images as I could retrieve were used to decipher not only the narrative Doftana was supposed to tell but also the means through which this story was told and the necessary adjustments that were made to the narrative, the building, the objects and the characters, real or imagined of Doftana. From prison to museum, from ruins to museum and then back to ruins, from proper noun to common noun, from "communist university" to concentration camp, Doftana was shaped according to the needs of the day not only discursively but also physically: the walls of Doftana were its most powerful argument and yet its most malleable material.

The Doftana Museum was inaugurated by the newly established communist administration in a former prison, 100 kilometers north of Bucharest, in 1949. It was, in a retrospective analysis, a typical memorial-museum whose main exhibit was the building itself. However, since there was no "typical memorial-museum" in the 1940s, as the genre was born much later in the 70s and 80s,² this intuition of a successful genre that only came into being decades later only adds to the intriguing story of Doftana.

The museum derived its appeal and claim to authenticity from exhibiting the pain and suffering, and ultimately death, perpetrated within the walls of the prison turned into museum. The international context while building the Doftana museum is analyzed in order to understand the puzzling discovery that, although abandoned in 1940, Doftana was memorialized alongside the famous concentration camps of Europe, like Auschwitz, Dachau, Mauthausen, in an attempt to put Romania on the map of antifascist resistance. The European network of former inmates of

can also be found at the National Archives (ANR) in the fond *CC al PCR – Cancelarie, CC al PCR – Propaganda si Agitatie* and fond *Asociația Foștilor Deținuți Politici Antifasciști din România (FIAP)*.

² Williams, *Memorial Museums*.

concentration camps was an important factor in shaping Doftana not merely in its national context but also on a wider European scale.

1.1. Prehistory of the Doftana museum. From model prison to ruins.

As the Doftana museum has not until now attracted the attention of historians, and no recent scholarly literature is available either on the museum or the Doftana prison, my analysis is bound to start with a *thick description*³ of the object of my research, as detailed as I could recreate it from archival and published material. The former museum and prison is nowadays, in 2013, but a ruin behind a closed gate, no visitors officially allowed as the danger of the building falling down is imminent.⁴

The prison was built between 1894 and 1897 in a beautiful natural setting, among the hills, on the valley of the river Telega, 100 kilometers away from Bucharest. It was meant to be a model-prison for hard labor convicts, a new type of prison built around the modern concept of the penitentiary system adopted by the Romanian state at the end of the 19th century as another important piece in the larger modernization process.

The brain behind the modern Romanian penitentiary system was Ferdinand Dodun de Perrier, a Frenchman who was invited to Moldova in 1855, before the creation of the Romanian state, but continued to be the advisor of prince Alexandru

³ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (Basic Books, 1973), chap. Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture.

⁴ Registered as a historical monument, it cannot be torn down, yet no one can assume the cost of its restoration. As for the unofficial and most probably illegal visits to the site, they seem to be quite numerous, as my participant observation in October 2012 showed and the images posted on the internet by tourists at the site also reveal.

Ioan Cuza and King Carol I on penitentiary matters until 1876.⁵ He designed the penitentiary system, both in matters of laws, regulations and the network of necessary prisons. According to sociologist Bruno Stefan, one of the rare Romanian researchers concerned with the penitentiary culture in Romania,⁶ Dodun de Perrier's system was a perfect example of what Michel Foucault described⁷ as the modern, delinquency creating penitentiary system. At the end of the 19th century, Doftana prison was the newest and brightest star of this modernizing project, a new building, both in form and content, fostering hopes and expectations of reform not only of the body but mainly of the soul of those who threatened "the moral health of the nation".⁸

The general director of penitentiaries in turn of the century Romania Gr.I. Dianu, responsible for building the Doftana prison, was an enthusiastic supporter of this modernizing project. In the history of Romanian prisons he published in 1900, Dianu insists that the new *penitentiary science*, concerned not only with the punishment of prisoners but also with their "moral amendment,"⁹ must be based on the principle of solitary confinement (at least during the night, the *auburnian* system) and thus requires a prison architecture that provides individual cells. He considers architecture to be a subfield of the penitentiary science and provides the example of the recently built Doftana prison as a model for the successful implementation of the solitary confinement principle established by the 1874 new law of the penitentiary

⁵ Ovid Stănciulescu, *Cercetări Asupra Regimului Penitenciar Român Din Veacul Al XIX-lea (Considerations on the Romanian Penitentiary Regime in the 19th Century)* (Cluj: Tip. Fondul Cărților Funduare, 1933), 58–63.

⁶ Bruno Stefan, *Mediul Penitenciar Romanesc. Cultura Si Civilizatie Carcerala (Romanian Penitentiary Realm. Prison Culture and Civilisation)* (Iasi: Institutul European, 2006), 221; For a brief overview of the history of the Romanian penitentiary system see also Radu Ciuceanu, *Regimul penitenciar din România: 1940-1962 (Penitentiary regime in Romania: 1940-1962)* (Bucuresti: Institutul National pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2001), 7–15.

⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1st ed. 1975 (London: Penguin Books, 1991).

⁸ Gr.I. Dianu, *Istoria Închisorilor Din România. Studiu Comparativ. Legi Și Obiceiuri (History of Prisons in Romania. Laws and Customs)* (Bucharest: Tipografia Curtii Regale, 1900), XXIII.

⁹ *Ibid.*, IV.

regime. Dianu shares the conviction that the penitentiary science will finally bring about a moral up-grade of the “dangerous classes,” mainly poor peasants, and thus lead to a decrease in criminality.¹⁰

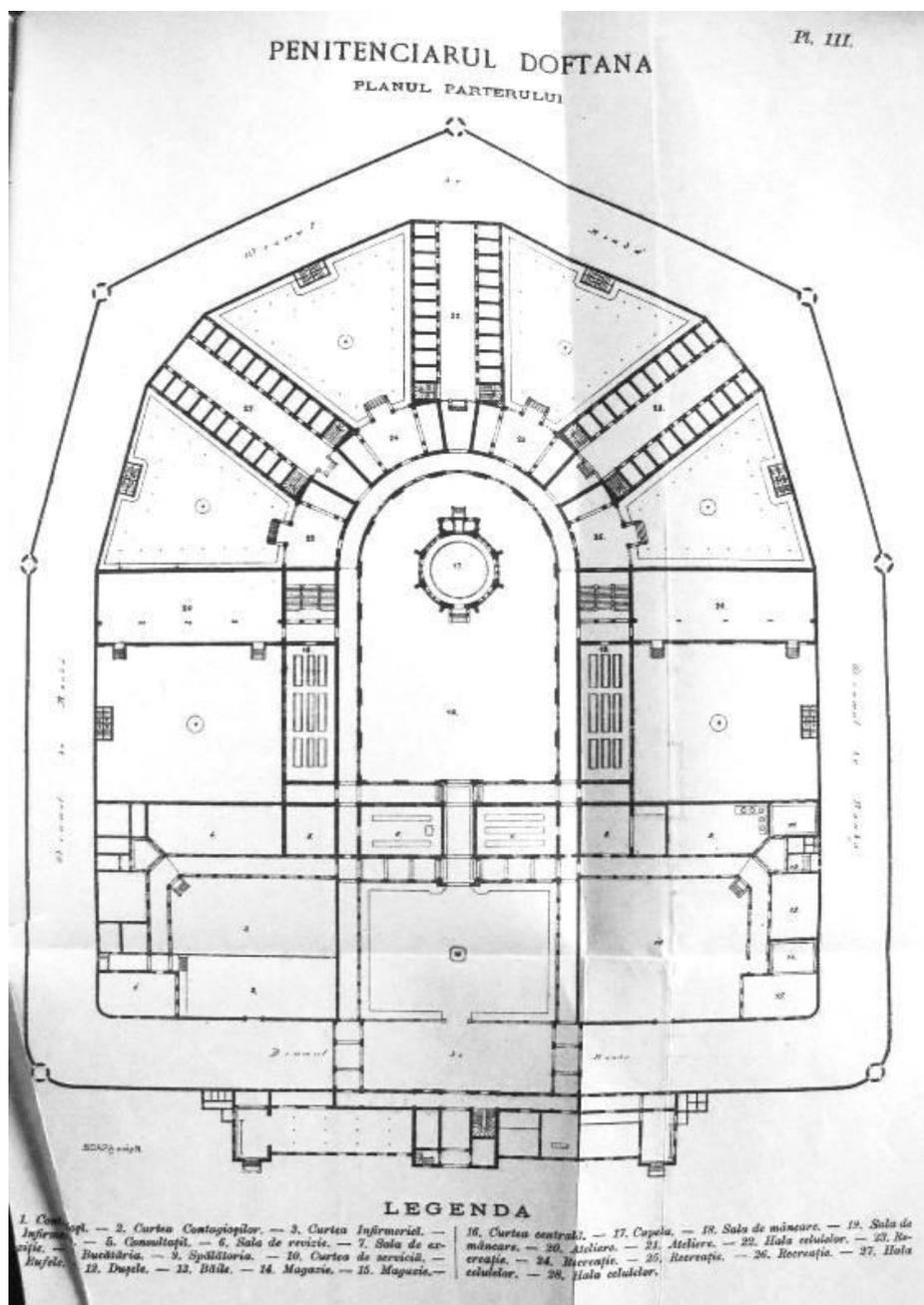


Fig. 1.1. Plan of the Doftana penitentiary. Source: Dianu, Gr.I. *Istoria Închisorilor Din România. Studiu Comparativ. Legi Și Obiceiuri (History of Prisons in Romania. Laws and Customs)*. Bucharest: Tipografia Curtii Regale, 1900. Note the round chapel in the center courtyard (its tower is visible in the longitudinal section, fig. 1.2) that will disappear when the museum is established.

¹⁰ Ibid., XXIII.

The architectural plans belong to architect Al. Săvulescu who also supervised the construction of the building. The old hard labor prison in nearby Telega was on the verge of falling down, thus giving the opportunity to director Gr. I. Dianu to build a new prison, on totally new principles. The building, completed in 1897, provided 397 cells thus being a “completely cellular prison.”¹¹ The architectural model was the Saint-Gilles prison in Belgium.¹² A maximum of 20 guardians were able to guard all prisoners, and the building had central heating and electric light. Dianu was convinced of the power of the new architecture and the solitary confinement system to bring about the moral rehabilitation of prisoners. At the end of the 19th century, the Doftana prison was the only prison where the legal system, established by the 1874 penitentiary law, could actually be applied.¹³



Fig. 1.2. Longitudinal section of the Doftana penitentiary. Source: Dianu, Gr.I. *Istoria Închisorilor Din România*.

¹¹ Ibid., 124.

¹² Saint-Gilles prison was built between 1878 and 1884 as a star-shaped “castle.” Unlike Doftana, it is still a functioning prison, the largest one in Brussels.

¹³ Stănciulescu, *Cercetări Asupra Regimului Penitenciar Român Din Veacul Al XIX-lea (Considerations on the Romanian Penitentiary Regime in the 19th Century)*, 5.

The glory years of the Doftana prison seem to be around the 1906 jubilee of Romanian royalty when the Doftana prison was visited and presented as one of the achievements of the 40 years of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen dynasty ruling Romania.¹⁴ Doftana began to lose its main appeal a few years afterwards when the salt mine (*ocna*) had to be abandoned, thus making the hard labor of prisoners practically unsustainable and decreasing the economic importance of the prison. The prison was abandoned during the First World War, as that part of the country was under German occupation, meanwhile being looted of items like furniture, iron-works, tools and even windows. After the war, the penitentiary was reorganized but only sixty to seventy prisoners were brought to the former model-prison Doftana.¹⁵

In the interwar period, Doftana ceased to be a hard labor prison and received inmates of different categories, including political prisoners, among which an important group was formed by members of the Communist party, an illegal party in Romania as of 1924. Actually, since 1929, a part of Doftana prison is established as the Doftana *special institute* for male political inmates, which were to be completely separated from common law detainees.¹⁶ The new 1929 penitentiary law also created in Doftana a “special institute for delinquents out of habit,” which it defined as those criminals who, “by number and genre of common law crimes committed, prove an insistent criminal leaning, coming thus from their constitutional structure.”¹⁷ The special institute for “delinquents out of habit” is part of the wider category of “safety institutes,” created by the 1929 law in order to “assure social safety.” To be sure, most of these safety institutes were created within the walls of functioning prisons.

¹⁴ M.Gh. Bujor, *Doftana* (Bucuresti: Tipografia Finante si Industrie, 1934), 1–17.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17–18.

¹⁶ Dr.N. Iorgulescu, “Regimul Penitenciar,” *Enciclopedia Romaniei* (Bucuresti: Imprimeria Nationala, 1938) Women political inmates were to serve their time in Dumbrăveni prison.

¹⁷ Iorgulescu, *idem*, p. 365.

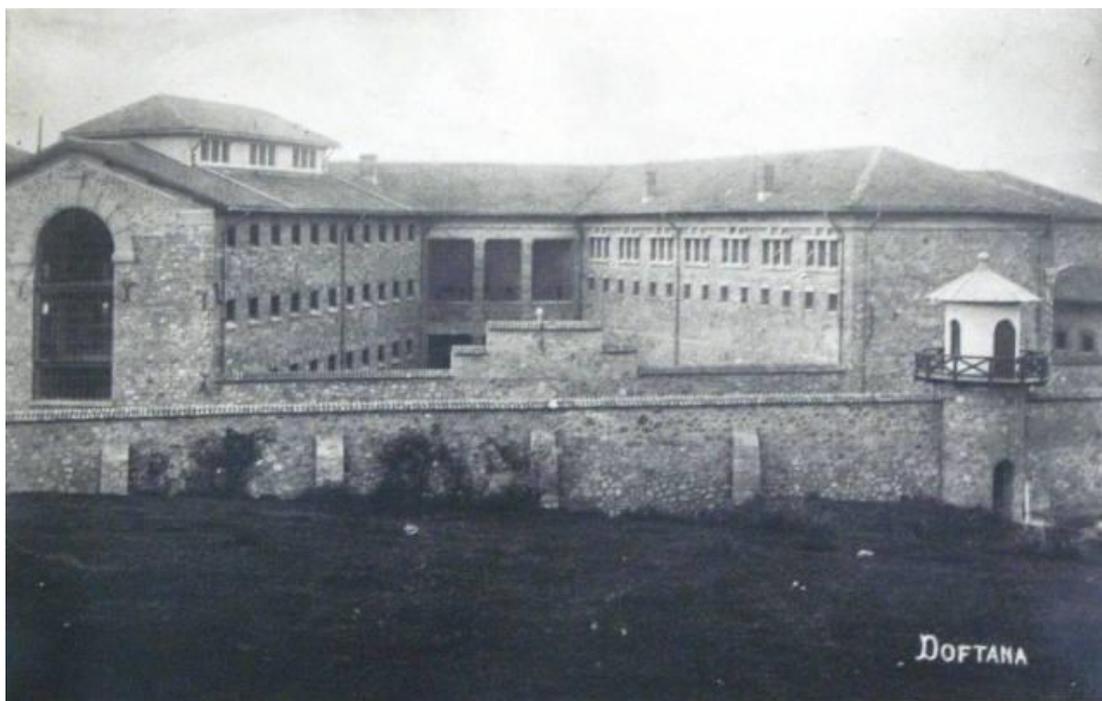


Fig. 1.3. Doftana prison before 1940. Postcard. Source: Dossier *Comemorare Doftana 1948 si 1949*, ARNHM, Fond Muzeul Partidului, nr. inv. i2501

The life of the Communist inmates inside Doftana prison/institute became such a major subject of Communist propaganda that it is extremely difficult today to establish a narrative of their prison life there that would do justice to the actual events.¹⁸ Vladimir Tismăneanu, in his political history of Romanian communism, writes that “numerous reports of various international human and civil rights organizations show that the Doftana prison where many of the communists were held was one of the most atrocious in Europe,” however he does not quote these reports.

¹⁸ Literary memoirs of former Doftana inmates and historical-literary narratives on Doftana as a political prison published during the Communist regime include Ion Puțuri, *Prima Noapte La Doftana (First Night in Doftana)* (Scînteia, 1946); Federația Națională a Foștilor Deținuți și Internați Politici Antifasciști, *Doftana Dupa Luptele Ceferiștilor Și Petroliștilor Din 1933 (Doftana after the Fights of Railway and Oil Workers in 1933)* (Bucharest: FIAP, 1948); T. Rudenco, *Sfârșitul Doftanei: Memoriei Lui Ilie Pintilie (The End of Doftana: To the Memory of Ilie Pintilie)* (Bucharest: Scînteia, 1945); Mihai Novicov, *Povestiri Despre Doftana (Stories About Doftana)* (Bucharest: Editura Tineretului, 1957); Olimpiu Matichescu, *Doftana Simbol Al Eroismului Revoluționar (Doftana Symbol of Revolutionary Heroism)* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1979); and the children’s book Maia Radovan, *Împărăția Balaurului (Kingdom of the Dragon)* (FIAP, 1948).

”But after the mid 1930s,” he continues ”when communists received the status of political prisoners,¹⁹ their conditions started to improve: they had access to books, political indoctrination could be organized in jail, and a genuine political life continued behind the prison walls of Doftana, Mislea, Dumbrăveni, Braşov, and Jilava.”²⁰

1.1.1. A visit to Doftana prison in 1930

In the summer of 1930, the illustrated weekly journal *Ilustrațiunea Română* (Romanian Illustration) published a lengthy reportage, in five subsequent issues of the journal, on the Doftana prison and the life of its inmates. The journalist, Ion Tik, narrates a quite conventional view of the prison life which is meant to both terrify and amuse the readers. His purpose is clearly not a criticism or journalistic exposure of the problematic penitentiary system. Even when Tik points to some gruesome aspect of prison life it is only to highlight that inmates and the prison form a continuum in which darkness, evilness and cruelty are equally shared. Doftana is, in his view “a grey stone citadel, with locked gates, huge walls and grated windows somber and dark as the sin of the detainees.”²¹

The prison is displayed for the readers of the illustrated journal as a space of ultimate alterity, outside the rules of society, a place which, together with its inmates is all the better to remain outside of society. The events and characters described by

¹⁹ For a historical overview of the emergence of the special status of political prisoner, read Padraic Kenney, “‘I Felt a Kind of Pleasure in Seeing Them Treat Us Brutally.’ The Emergence of the Political Prisoner, 1865–1910,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 04 (September 20, 2012): 863–889, doi:10.1017/S0010417512000448.

²⁰ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: a Political History of Romanian Communism, Societies and Culture in East-Central Europe* 11 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 58.

²¹ Ion Tik, “La Închisoarea Doftana (At the Doftana Prison),” *Ilustrațiunea Românească* 31, no. II (July 1930): 6.

Ion Tik provide however an interesting counter-narrative to the post-war communist narrative of Doftana which has ever since suffocated any other possible alternative discourse. “Day and night, the stone prison seems asleep, yet inside the walls that guard this place of harsh penitence, lives, as if in inferno, a world of killers, robbers, bandits, criminals, spies and common criminals and those condemned for crimes against the safety of the state.”²²



Fig. 1.4. Illustration to the reportage by Tik, Ion. “La Închisoarea Doftana (At the Doftana Prison).” *Ilustrațiunea Românească* 31, no. II (July 1930). The caption reads: “Behind bars, the convict, eager of life and light, looks with envy upon the freedom of men. In the darkness of the prison, he expiates the sin of his crime.” Retrieved here from Getty Images²³ where it is described as: “An inmate of Doftana Prison in Romania, circa 1935. Many of the prisoners are political.” (Photo by FPG/Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

²² Ibid., 7.

²³ Two of the images that have illustrated Tik’s reportage in Doftana are accessible today through the Getty Images database, although neither the photographer of the magazine, Ștefan Ignat nor the *Ilustrațiunea Română* itself are acknowledged by Getty Images.

The director of the prison is an old friend of the journalist, so the first part of the reportage dwells on the number of detainees, around three hundred, among which fifty-nine communists, twelve spies and a count, and the “progresses of the penitentiary science.” Consistent with the post-war narrative of Doftana, the cells in section H are introduced as the most dreaded cells, the punishment cells “where the prisoner is put in chains and stands day and night on bare cement.”²⁴ In one of the H cells he finds Tatoroff, “the king of Bessarabian bandits,” with a “dark, hateful look” on his face. He asks him whether he regrets his crimes. “Instead of an answer, the bandit smiles, possessed by the pride of these primitives that make a merit out of their crimes.”²⁵

Max Goldstein, the Jewish anarchist who bombed the Senate,²⁶ the narration unfolds, was imprisoned in the H cells, “this little tombs in which recalcitrant detainees are buried alive.”²⁷ Even the journalist Tik acknowledges that the H section gives him the chills. The H cells will indeed become the main attraction of the future Doftana museum, exhibited as the main locus of victimization of communist martyrs.

Another inmate, count de Belmont, convicted for attempted murder on the royal family, has his own garden where he plants exotic plants, his own study table filled with manuscripts, two violins and apparently all the advantages of being considered still a human being and not a “hateful primitive” like the unfortunate Tatoroff. “I do gardening, I read and I write. I obey all the prison rules and I cannot

²⁴ Tik, “La Închisoarea Doftana (At the Doftana Prison),” 9.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Max Goldstein organized a bomb attack at the Romanian Senate in 1920, was imprisoned and died of pneumonia in Doftana in 1924. See also in this chapter the discussion when establishing the Doftana museum on whether Goldstein could be included among the martyrs of the Communist cause. Although he would have been one of the rare detainees to have died in Doftana because of the poor living conditions, because of his unclear political affiliation, he disappeared as a character of the post-1945 Doftana story.

²⁷ Tik, “La Închisoarea Doftana (At the Doftana Prison),” 9.

complain I am not treated humanely...,”²⁸ count de Belmont confesses to the journalist.



Fig. 1.5. "A group of dangerous criminals and bandits are being searched before entering the cells." Photograph illustrating Tik, Ion. "Inchisoarea Doftana. De Vorbă Cu M.Gh. Bujor (Doftana Prison, Talking to M.Gh. Bujor)." *Ilustrațiunea Românească* II, no. 34 (August 1930): 6–7. Retrieved here from Getty Images where it is described as "Prisoners returning from work are searched by their guards before entering Doftana Prison in Romania, circa 1935. Many of the prisoners are political." (Photo by FPG/Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

Count de Belmont was not the only one allowed to grow and enjoy his own garden. The renowned communist Mihail Gheorghiu Bujor ("there is no need to remind one who is M. Gh. Bujor or to sketch his activity and role – inside the communist idea – in our country and abroad"²⁹ the journalist opens his reportage) is the main character of the third episode of Ion Tik's Doftana feuilleton.

²⁸ Ion Tik, "Doftana II," *Ilustrațiunea Românească* II, no. 32 (July 1930): 6.

²⁹ Ion Tik, "Inchisoarea Doftana. De Vorbă Cu M.Gh. Bujor (Doftana Prison, Talking to M.Gh. Bujor)," *Ilustrațiunea Românească* II, no. 34 (August 1930): 6.

Mihail Gheorghiu Bujor (1881 – 1964) was a socialist militant from Iași, who became a communist during the First World War, met Lenin in 1918 and organized Communist army battalions in Odessa with the supposed aim of extending the Bolshevik revolution to Romania. When he was caught in Romania in 1920 he was sentenced to death for treason, which was commuted to hard labor for life.³⁰

“Under a regime that has nothing to do with the somber character of the dark cell and chains that the public involuntarily assigns to the notion of forced labor, Bujor spends the entire day in a sunny garden, dressed in city clothes, brought from the outside. In a white shirt and an English cap, he takes care of the flowers and vegetables he himself planted, raises some hens and cocks, plus a few pairs of rabbits received from the famous conspirator, <<the count>> de Belmont.”³¹

Supposedly unaware that he is talking to a journalist, Bujor engages in an apparently open conversation with Tik, explaining his belief in a future ideal State, that will end social transformation and install the rule of the last social class, the proletariat. There is a whole communist section in Doftana, which Tik briefly mentions in passage, and only because Bujor joins them in the celebration of the “Red Day” on August 1st with a red flower on his jacket.³² Among them, only Bujor seems to have had the kind of notoriety that drew the journalist’s attention, so nothing more is to be learned about the life of the political prisoners in Doftana from Tik’s 1930 reportage.

³⁰ He was amnestied in 1933 but then imprisoned again until 1944. While he basically spent the bulk of the interwar years as a Communist political prisoner, his positions after the establishment of the Communist regime were never preeminent. He was elected in the Great National Assembly and held the rather marginal position of president of the National Federation of Former Antifascist Political Prisoners and Inmates, which curated Doftana as a museum but was disbanded in 1958.

³¹ Tik, “Inchisoarea Doftana. De Vorbă Cu M.Gh. Bujor (Doftana Prison, Talking to M.Gh. Bujor),” 6.

³² Ibid., 7.

1.1.2. The seeds of the story: Hitlerism in Doftana in 1933

The differences between Tik's account of prison life in Doftana and the communist master narrative to be constructed in the late 1940s are poignant. The 1930 journalist is in no way tempted to present in brighter colors prison life, quite the contrary, he makes elaborate, literary efforts to convey to its readers the cemetery-like nature of the prison. His aim, congruent to the official "penitentiary science" and the new 1929 penitentiary law is to show both the horrifying realities of incarceration and the rightfulness of this punishment for those who sinned before or even against the state.

However, in 1933 when M. Gh. Bujor, the notorious main character of Tik's reportage, left Doftana as a free man, the story he had to tell was very different. In the memoirs he published only one year later, in 1934 under the simple title, *Doftana*, there is no mentioning of the garden. In Tik's narrative Bujor had been taking care of his garden ever since he arrived in Doftana, in 1921. "Ever since I came here, nine years ago, I did not separate from it. It was a walking courtyard for inmates and then a place for garbage. I made it the way you see it,"³³ the journalist quotes Bujor's words in 1930. In Bujor's 1934 recollection he was only taken out of his cell "for one hour in the first year, then two or three hours, but in the courtyard where I stood alone the great noise of chains, shouting and yelling, hammers and cutting wood made the hours into the contrary of a refreshing and recreational <<walk>>."³⁴ He claims he was purposefully secluded from the other inmates, as in 1921 he was the first political prisoner to inhabit Doftana so he was alone in an entire empty section; he was constantly "terrorized" by the guards who would not let him sleep by making noises,

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Bujor, *Doftana*, 21.

opening doors so it would get cold, not giving him water or wood for the fire, threatening his visitors with arrest and delaying his mail. Although he admits he was never sworn to his face, he claims there was a lot of swearing around his cell, that he thought was meant to break down his moral.

Bujor describes the regime of the other political inmates as more or less a free regime. “In that time, while I was enduring the savage and killing regime of confinement and torture, the political inmates, as all the others, enjoyed a regime of full freedom in the prison and relative welfare. They were free from morning to evening (I only got this freedom in 1929), they had a separate section which they took care of themselves [...]”³⁵ Bujor mentions the 1929 penitentiary law as an improvement in the life of the political inmates “institutionalizing some of the improvement we had won and clarifying, to some extent, the nature and situation of the political inmate.”³⁶

Tik’s journalistic reportage seems to have caught Doftana at its best, immediately after the 1929 law, when even the harshest critics had to admit that the life of a political inmate in Doftana was bearable. Bujor considers 1933 to be a turning point for life in Doftana, as it was a turning point in international politics with the accession of Hitler to power. He argues that the effects of the events in Germany were immediately noticeable in the life of the Doftana inmates: “And then, our reactionaries thought that if they cannot extend Hitlerism throughout the country against free citizens, they can at least introduce it in prisons against the captives.”³⁷ Thus, the communist political prisoners become the first victims of Hitlerism in Romania: “bread was replaced with polenta, usage of heating devices in the cells was

³⁵ Ibid., 22.

³⁶ Ibid., 23.

³⁷ Ibid., 24.

forbidden, no more opening of the cells in the afternoon [...]”³⁸ Bujor continues to describe the transformation of the life of the political inmates from privileged detainees to less than common law prisoners: their right to work was taken away, punishments were more often and more severe (long detention in the infamous H section), medical care was denied. Written in 1934, Bujor’s verdict was clear: “As of May 1933, Hitlerism, introduced by the government of Mr. Vaida, raised furors in Doftana. The oligarchic and pharaonic beast has apparently become an annex and a branch of the outlaw firm Hitler-Goebbels-Goering.”³⁹ This harsh verdict yet fails to explain why Bujor himself, condemned to hard labor for life, was amnestied as soon as what he calls Hitlerism was introduced in Romania.

Without knowing what was about to come and what a victim of Hitlerism would come to mean, not only in the near future but also throughout the decades, Bujor was the first to put Doftana, narratively, on a map of victims of Nazism. Even though his 1934 story would not be reprinted after the war (probably his account of the “regime of full freedom and relative well being” could not be integrated in the victimizing horror-story of the Doftana constructed in the late 1940s) it contains, *in nuce*, the seeds of the great Doftana Story.

Describing the post-First World War era as mainly a struggle of Communism versus Fascism is one of the common topics of Communist historiography all over Soviet-occupied Europe. For Hungary, this has been convincingly described in István Rév’s *Retroactive Justice*: “according to the court’s judgment, the anti-Communist had to be, by definition, a Fascist. [...] Fascists, before all things, were – in this

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 28.

reading – anti-Communists,”⁴⁰ as he traces the survival of this dichotomized view of history even after the collapse of the communist regimes. Antifascism was a powerful interwar ideology that both united and divided people and political parties. It was surely not restricted to the adherents of the communist worldview, yet it was confiscated after the Second World War by the emerging socialist states under Soviet control.⁴¹ Thus, another plausible cause for not reprinting Bujor’s account on Doftana after 1945 is the fact that even communist antifascism changed radically from its interwar to its postwar understanding. Doftana would be narrated as a site of antifascist resistance after 1945 but not in the manner Bujor understood antifascism in 1934.

1.1.3 The earthquake on November 10, 1944 as premeditated murder

Communist propaganda claimed they turned Doftana into a real “Communist university” where the communist ideology was studied and debated, despite the inhuman treatment to which the political inmates were subject to: beatings, humiliations, cold, humid and dark cells, hunger: “The regime applied to political prisoners was unbearable. Hunger, lack of air, lack of any medical assistance, miserable food – these were the living conditions in the cells [...]. But the fiercest torture was the beating. In Doftana the political prisoners were beaten constantly, beaten systematically – without any fault on their part – in the morning, at noon and in the evening, sometimes even at night.”⁴²

⁴⁰ István Rév, *Retroactive Justice: Prehistory of Post-communism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 222.

⁴¹ Anson Rabinbach, “Introduction: Legacies of Antifascism,” *New German Critique* no. 67 (January 1, 1996): 3–17.

⁴² Muzeul de Istorie a Partidului Muncitoresc Român, *Muzeul Doftana* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1960), 3–5.

The Communist discourse on Doftana had all the ingredients of turning Doftana into a “Romanian Bastille.”⁴³ Attempts have actually also been made to turn Doftana into a common noun, a synonym of suffering combined with bravery and sacrifice, as such constructions can be found in contemporary press: “the Doftanas in Tito’s Yugoslavia,”⁴⁴ or “From fascist Doftanas to the Doftanas of Anglo-American imperialism.”⁴⁵ Every non-Communist country had its own Doftana.

However, Communist inmates populated other prisons in the interwar period, like Râmnicu Sărat, Târgu Jiu,⁴⁶ Caransebeș, Mislea and Dumbrăveni for women, prisons where the living conditions were not necessarily any better. What made Doftana the symbol of Communist suffering, the first and most important of all prisons? One event provided the necessary climax that every good story needs: during the night of 9th to 10th of November 1940, an earthquake hit the Southern part of Romania, turning the model-prison into ruins and killing some of the inmates (the numbers are still debated, but range somewhere around seven to fifteen victims). Communist propaganda turned this unfortunate event into an iconic moment of the communists’ fight during their illegality years. The earthquake provided all the ingredients of a proper narrative high point: it created heroes, those who were killed in the earthquake, like the communist leader Ilie Pintilie, a railway worker from Iași, and those who risked their lives to rescue them, like Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej; it also created villains, the bourgeois politicians and the penitentiary administration who

⁴³ The metaphor of the “Romanian Bastille” is intensely used in the late 1940s and 1950s when arguing for the need to transform Doftana into a museum. The original Bastille however, was never transformed into a museum, but demolished quite quickly after its storming on July 14, 1789. Stones from its walls were transformed into revolutionary relics, but Bastille itself never became a museum.

⁴⁴ “For the comrade who will speak about Doftana on November 10th 1947 in the Filimon Sârbu hall”, AMNIR, fond Muzeul Partidului, file i2501 (*Comemorare Doftana 1948 si 1949*), no page numbers.

⁴⁵ “De La Doftanele Fasciste La Doftanele Imperialismului Anglo-american (From Fascist Doftanas to the Doftanas of Anglo-American Imperialism),” *Buletinul Federației Naționale a Foștilor Deținuți Și Internați Politici Antifasciști* no. 9–10 (Doftana 10 noiembrie 1940–10 noiembrie 1950) (November 1950): 32–35.

⁴⁶ See next sub-chapters on the failed attempts to musealize the Târgu-Jiu camp during communism and the final chapter on post-communist attempts to musealize Râmnicu Sărat prison.

allowed for this to happen. Although a natural calamity, the earthquake is narratively transformed into a carefully planned criminal plot of the “fascist” bourgeois politicians against communists:

”During the night of November 10th, 1940, devoted fighters for the people’s cause, among which the beloved leader of the workers Ilie Pintilie, fell prey to the criminal plans of the historical-fascist reaction in our country, buried alive under the ruins of the torn-down prison”⁴⁷

“The fall of Doftana was not an <<unfortunate event>> caused by the earthquake, it was a mass murder, for they knew too well the walls were weak and threatened to fall down.”⁴⁸

Or, even more dramatically:

“A misfortune? Back away, you executioners and liars! There was no simple <<misfortune>> in Doftana. A crime was committed in Doftana! A new and shameless crime, adding to the long row of crimes and murders upon which the bourgeois dictatorship built its bloody domination!”⁴⁹ The fact that the earthquake incidentally took place during the short-lived Iron Guard rule in Romania, the National-Legionnaire State of September 1940 to January 1941, was one more proof of its murderous, fascist character.

The earthquake itself was a major trauma for interwar Romania. With an estimated 1000 dead and 4000 wounded, the earthquake tore down important buildings in Bucharest (the Carlton bloc) and literally razed to the ground some Moldavian small towns. The contemporary press does mention the fall of Doftana, in

⁴⁷ FIAP, November 1947, “Doftana Commemoration”, AMNIR, fond Muzeul Partidului, file i2501 (*Comemorare Doftana 1948 si 1949*), no page numbers.

⁴⁸ Ștefan Voicu, “Doftana,” *Scânteia*, November 11, 1948.

⁴⁹ Mihai Novicov, “Cu Pumnii Strânși, Lângă Ruinele Doftanei (With Clenched Fists, Near the Doftana Ruins),” *Buletinul Federației Naționale a Foștilor Deținuți Și Internați Politici Antifasciști* no. 1 (November 1948): 15.

some longer accounts on the devastations produced by the earthquake all across the country but it does not mention the thirteen dead (according to the post-war communist narrative) in the catastrophe. The right-wing Iron Guard press reports though the miraculous fact that the Doftana cell in which the Captain, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu resided between June and September 1938⁵⁰ remained untouched by the earthquake, with its bed, chair and holy icon on the wall intact.⁵¹

The day of the earthquake became a good commemoration date when the story of communist struggles and sufferings could be retold, rehearsed and represented. The earthquake tore down Doftana prison but it built up the Doftana myth and secured its entrance into communist History.



Fig. 1.6. Doftana, November 1940. Burial of a Communist inmate killed by the earthquake. In the second row, behind the two women, is Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. © Fototeca online a comunismului românesc, # DA031 (ANR, ISISP Fond, 1/1940)

⁵⁰ The transfer from Jilava to Doftana is recalled by Zelea Codreanu himself in: Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Însemnări de La Jilava* (Bucharest: Majadahonda, 1995); and documents of his stay in Doftana are published in Radu-Dan Vlad, *Procesele Lui Corneliu Zelea Codreanu 1938*, vol. 2 (Bucharest: Majadahonda, 1999).

⁵¹ *Cuvântul*, November 13, 1940 and *Curentul*, November 13, 1940. The fact that Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu, the creator and leader of the Iron Guard movement, was imprisoned in Doftana before his assassination was later obscured in the post-war museum narrative.

The inmates of Doftana were to make history after 1944 and thus turn Doftana itself into a major historical landmark of the Popular Republic of Romania. Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej was sentenced in 1933 to twelve years of hard labor for his involvement in the Grivița railway workers' strikes. He served most of his time in Doftana where he managed to build his position as one of the leaders of the imprisoned communists. In 1936, male Communists from other prisons were all brought to Doftana, a "patent failure," historian Dennis Deletant considers,⁵² of the authorities' attempts to supervise them better. Among Dej's fellow inmates were those whom he would later keep by his side when establishing the communist regime in Romania: Gheorghe Apostol, Alexandru Drăghici, Alexandru Moghioroș, Nicoale Ceușescu, Pintilie Bodnarencu and others. Another Communist railway worker, Ilie Pintilie, was the only competition to Dej among the communist cell in Doftana but he was killed by the earthquake, leaving Dej with no real competition inside the imprisoned communist party. The prison is abandoned immediately after the earthquake and the communist inmates are transferred first to the Caransebeș prison and then to the Târgu-Jiu camp. The ruins of the prison would have probably remained but ruins if not for the post-war incentive to turn Doftana into a "symbol of revolutionary heroism."⁵³

The fact that Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej was imprisoned in Doftana is of crucial importance to the establishment of the Doftana myth. Even more, Gheorghiu-Dej was not only imprisoned in Doftana, but it is in Doftana that he managed to establish his position as the leader of imprisoned Communists that would later assume the

⁵² Dennis Deletant, *Communist Terror in Romania: Gheorghiu-Dej and the Police State, 1948-1965* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 15.

⁵³ Matichescu, *Doftana Simbol Al Eroismului Revolucionar (Doftana Symbol of Revolutionary Heroism)*.

leadership of the Romanian state.⁵⁴ Historian Vladimir Tismăneanu claims that the “experience of prison” was “indispensable for ascension in the communist hierarchy.”⁵⁵ The survival of the Doftana myth all along the communist regime owes to the presence of Nicolae Ceaușescu himself, between 1936 and 1938, as an inmate in Doftana. Unlike other landmarks of Communist prehistory, marked by the personality of Gheorghiu-Dej and for this precise reason silenced after his death, like the Grivița strikes in 1933, Doftana would survive as a symbolic place of Romanian communism up until 1989.

1.2. Exhibiting walls. Turning ruins into museums

The 1940 earthquake turned Doftana prison into ruins, but it also provided the basis for the mythical narrative that provided the foundation of the Doftana museum. The opportunity for creating an appealing narrative, both heroic and tragic was seized by Communist propaganda which started official commemorations on the date of the earthquake as early as 1947. Organizing Doftana as a pilgrimage site finally gave birth to the idea of transforming the ruins into a real museum, by reconstructing not only the story of Doftana but also its walls and cells. Already on the date of the first pilgrimage to Doftana, in November 1947, the proposal is initiated “to construct a mausoleum-museum in the memory of those who suffered and fought, who sacrificed themselves to build a better life for the working people. The initiative committee is created on the spot, with the following members: Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, Chivu

⁵⁴ Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons*, 100.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 158.

Stoica, Emil Bodnăraș, Eduard Mezincescu, Mihail Roller, Pintilie Bodnarenco.”⁵⁶ Apparently, the idea of constructing a “red mausoleum” was present in the minds of the Communist inmates while they were still imprisoned in Doftana. One of the songs popularized after 1945 as being created before 1940 is the *Doftana legend* whose lyrics prophesize: “In Doftana’s place will then be raised / As witness a red mausoleum” (*Pe locul Doftanei atunci se-nălțava/ Ca martor un roș mausoleu*).⁵⁷

The commemorations⁵⁸ of Doftana and its transformation into a museum were officially organized by the National Federation of Former Antifascist Political Prisoners and Inmates (FIAP), an affiliate organization of FIAPP (Fédération Internationale des Anciens Prisonniers Politiques) but also an unofficial section of the RCP, in collaboration with the local authorities in Prahova County. Barely a few months after its creation, in March 1947, FIAP is invested with the task of organizing the 1947 commemoration in Doftana and with making plans for a “national museum” there. The 1947 commemoration preparations consisted of, according to internal FIAP files, arranging two prison cells for visiting, unveiling a marble plaque and mounting 40 banners with slogans.⁵⁹

The organizers do not refrain from using the term *pilgrimage* for the event they are organizing. Even in the printed press of the late 1940s the commemoration of Doftana is narrated as “the pilgrimage to Doftana.”⁶⁰ As for FIAP, they were happy

⁵⁶ “Steagul Luptei Celor Cazuti La Doftana. Comemorarea a 7 Ani de La Prabusirea Inchisorii (The Flag of the Fight of Those Fallen in Doftana. Commemorating 7 Years Since the Prison Crashed),” *Scânteia*, November 12, 1947.

⁵⁷ Muzeul de Istorie a Partidului Muncitoresc Român, *Muzeul Doftana*.

⁵⁸ The organizers of these commemorations seemed eager to depart from an understanding of commemorations as a tribute to the past. “Our actions were never simply commemorations, but were led against spies, saboteurs and imperialist agents in our country, in a combative spirit, of anti-imperialist fight [...]” Elisabeta Comnacu, “Un an de Activitate a Federației Naționale a Foștilor Deținuți Și Internați Politici Antifasciști (One Year of Activity of FIAP),” *Buletinul Federației Naționale a Foștilor Deținuți Și Internați Politici Antifasciști* no. 2 (February 1949): 7.

⁵⁹ ANR, fond FIAP, roll 1293, file 2/1947, f. 19.

⁶⁰ As both terms, pilgrimage and national museum would be soon abandoned, it is possible their usage comes from the international organization, FIAPP who also talked of “organisation de

to count 5000 people attending the pilgrimage on November 10th, 1947 also due to the 300 trucks put at their disposal by the Prahova County Council.⁶¹ Subsequent commemorations are organized each year, and every year the pilgrimage seems to become more important. Aside from November 10th, the day of the earthquake, commemorations in Doftana are also organized on April 11th, the international day of antifascist political inmates, established by the FIAPP on the day of the liberation of the Buchenwald camp.⁶²



Fig. 1.7. Doftana, November 9th, 1952. Commemoration of those killed during the 1940 earthquake. Source: Fototeca online a comunismului românesc, #E142 (ANR, fond ISISP, Photographs, 12/1952, folder I/166)

pèlerinages” and “de musées nationaux qui permettront aux générations futures de retrouver les souvenirs et les vestiges de ce que fut la barbarie hitlérienne et fasciste” Résolution de la Commission de Propagande du Congrès International des anciennes prisonniers politiques, March 29, 1947 – April 6, 1947, ANR, fond FIAP, roll 1293, file 3/1947, f. 43.

⁶¹ ANR, fond FIAP, roll 1293, file 2/1947, f. 20.

⁶² ANR, fond FIAP, roll 1294, file 8/1948, f. 18-19.

In 1952, however, as soon as the Institute for Party History is created, the Doftana museum along with the other propaganda museums become part of the Institute and thus of the official propaganda system.⁶³ The early 1950s are still institutionally instable years not only for the Doftana museum, who is removed from the administration of the Institute in 1954 and given to the care of local authorities in Prahova county,⁶⁴ only to be brought back to the Institute in 1955.⁶⁵ The reasons invoked each time by Leonte Răutu,⁶⁶ head of the Romanian Agitprop, are always about “better administration.”

Doftana Museum was inaugurated on November 10th 1949, on the 9th commemoration of the earthquake that killed “our dear comrades,” but the intention to inaugurate a museum in the former Doftana prison was officially announced in March 1948. On the 10th and 11th of March 1948, major newspapers announce the transformation of the former prison into “a national museum of antifascist fight in our country.”⁶⁷ The ruins of Doftana were reconstructed and became a museum in little more than a year (August 1948 to November 1949), a timeline which is impressive even by today’s standards. A report from August 31st 1948 on the progress of the Doftana working site counts the main objectives of the project:

“The work in Doftana virtually started on August 15th 1948.

According to field observations, the following building objectives have been set:

⁶³ *Information regarding the activity of the Institute for Party History by the CC of RWP in the period May-December 1954*, ANR, fond CC al PCR – Propagandă și Agitație, no.50/1955, p. 4, f. 47.

⁶⁴ *Decision of the CC of RWP 159/1954 regarding the transfer of some museums of the Party History Institute to some state institutions, April 6th 1954*, ANR, fond CC al PCR – Propagandă și Agitație, no.27/1954, f. 14.

⁶⁵ *Decision of the CC of RWP 659/1955 regarding the reorganization and administration of the Doftana Museum, August 29th 1955*, ANR, fond CC al PCR – Propagandă și Agitație, no. 29/1955, ff. 24-25.

⁶⁶ Leonte Răutu was an important member of the RWP/RCP. Head of the Romanian Agitprop until 1965, he was practically the decisive voice in Romanian culture during Dej’s regime. He managed to maintain an important position even during Ceaușescu’s rule, his adaptive qualities recommending him as “the perfect acrobat.” Vladimir Tismăneanu and Cristian Vasile, *Perfectul Acrobat. Leonte Răutu, Măștile Răului (The Perfect Acrobat. Leonte Răutu, the Masks of Evil)* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2008).

⁶⁷ “Muzeul Național La Doftana (National Museum at Doftana),” *România Liberă*, March 10, 1948.

1. Rebuilding the main gate.
2. Building a new gate at the entrance to the prison park.
3. Rebuilding four cells in section F, facing the main gate.
4. Rebuilding the H section (*Haşul*)
5. Rebuilding a part of section B with the cell where comrade Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej stayed.
6. Reinforcing all the ruins so as not to fall down. Those walls that cannot be reinforced should be torn down.
7. Transforming the new building with museum halls. [...]
10. Raising a monument on the central field and bringing the graves up to the monument. [...]⁶⁸

The report subsequently considers these objectives impossible to accomplish by November 1st of the same year, before the earthquake's commemoration and records the decision to renounce building the monument and moving the graves near the monument. Instead, the real cemetery is to be cleaned and the road to this cemetery rebuilt. Inscriptions are to be placed around the site, thus starting the musealisation of the former prison.

The reconstruction of the former prison was an ample and thorough project, radically transforming the architectural structure of the building. The construction works span over several years, with the construction site opening in the spring/summer of each year and ending in early November with the commemoration ceremony of November 9/10th. This was not a merely a consolidation work, entire sections were rebuilt, together with cells that were to be presented as the real cells of the comrades now in leading party and state positions, and some new items were added, such as “a new gate at the entrance of the prison park.”⁶⁹

One structure of the original prison was purposefully not rebuilt and probably even its remnants were removed from the site. The chapel in the main courtyard of the

⁶⁸ *Raport asupra lucrarilor din Doftana*, AMNIR, fond Muzeul Partidului, file i2500 (*Comemorare Doftana 1948. Planuri de Munca*), f. 311-312.

⁶⁹ When discussing this ample reconstruction work, historian Cristian Vasile mentions the sum of 33 million lei invested in rebuilding Doftana, while other art monuments and important buildings were left to decay or were even purposefully devastated. Vasile, *Literatura Si Artele in Romania Comunista 1948-1953 (Literature and the Arts in Communist Romania 1948-1953)*, 166, note 2.

Doftana prison, probably an important element in the daily lives of the inmates as its central position shows (it is indeed the center of the prison, the point which can be seen from all places of the prison and the place from which all the prison can be observed) was not only physically erased during the reconstruction works of 1947 to 1949 but also narratively as it disappeared from all accounts of the life in Doftana before 1940. Although some prison memoirs refer to it, and one can see it in both the original 1897 plan (see fig. 1.1. and 1.2.) and the new map of the museum⁷⁰ (that only copies the original plan, fig. 1.1., although the 1949 structure differs considerably from the 1897 one), the chapel is an uncomfortable part of the site which is finally removed from the Doftana story and building complex.

The architects that made the project for rebuilding Doftana are less reluctant to use the appropriate words. The Resistance Group from the Institute for Construction Design (IPC, Institutul de Proiectare a Construcțiilor) called their project *The Doftana Reconstruction* (Reconstituire Doftana).⁷¹ In a memoir drafted in 1950 for the FIAP, the architects explain:

“The problem faced by the project was the reconstruction, as accurate as possible, of the old penitentiary, transformed today into a museum. The main tendency in such cases is to keep as much as possible from what used to be, giving the old constructions, by improvements and consolidations all the guarantees required for their stability and resistance. [...] In our case, in order to achieve these essential conditions, nothing – or almost nothing – could be kept from the old building. The reason is that its main resistance element – the raw stone masonry – was so poorly made that what did not fall during the November 9/10, 1940 earthquake, and what did not fall afterwards during the clearances made, could have been as easily dismantled with one’s bare hands.”⁷²

⁷⁰ Muzeul de Istorie a Partidului Muncitoresc Român, *Muzeul Doftana*, 4.

⁷¹ ANR, fond FIAP, roll 1304, file 65/ 1948-1958.

⁷² ANR, fond FIAP, roll 1304, file 66/1948-1958, p. 2.

The architects used reinforced concrete for rebuilding Doftana, which, even though not necessary for buildings of its height would nonetheless guarantee the construction “a lifetime of a few centuries.”

The Doftana museum is thus a reconstruction where “nothing – or almost nothing – could be kept from the old building.” The Doftana prison was irretrievably lost in the 1940 earthquake, as images from 1940 convey quite vividly, while the museum is but a gigantic monument to the prison, a walk-through structure whose main purpose is the production of authenticity, if it is to function *as if* it was the real prison.

The question of authenticity is of uttermost importance in the case of memorial-museums in general. As historian James Mark argues, the “production of authenticity” is among their primary concerns.⁷³ The mere foundation of their existence is their ability to function as monumental proofs or even monumental documents of a history narrated around and inside their walls. The reconstruction of traumatic sites has always faced the dilemma of either preserving the site as it was at the (end) moment of the tragic events and thus face the perspective of their eventual destruction or reconstructing the site “as it was” at the time of the events and thus greatly lose on the authenticity scale.

The Doftana museum remained both a reconstruction and a ruin, as the above-cited document shows: cells were reconstructed but some ruins were actually reinforced in order to remain ruins. Putting aside the proper museal exhibition that would be gradually organized on site, the main and most important exhibit and symbol of the Doftana museum remain its walls. The back cover of the Doftana album edited in 1960 as a guide to the museum is a page-wide photograph of one of

⁷³ Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution*, 68.

Doftana's walls, although it would be impossible to decide if it is one of the original walls or a 1948 reconstruction.



Fig. 1.8. Back cover of the album *Muzeul de Istorie a Partidului Muncitoresc Român. Muzeul Doftana*. Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1960.

Contemporary officials seemed to be aware that the amplitude of reconstructions made the Doftana museum something very different from the original prison. While discussing the erection of a tall, fifteen meters high monument in Doftana that would be seen from the highway, one comrade argues: “The reconstructions in Doftana are themselves a monument. It is necessary though to add to this a symbolic monument.”⁷⁴ Finally, the plans for a “symbolic monument” were abandoned.

Discussions on the claim of authenticity are still very present in contemporary museum studies.⁷⁵ As our ability to reproduce increases so does our fascination with

⁷⁴ Minutes of the meeting held on November 30, 1948 regarding the graves of the martyrs that have to be built in Doftana and the National Park, ANR, fond FIAP, roll 1293, file 4/1947-1948, f. 251.

⁷⁵ See Williams, *Memorial Museums*, 80–82; Spencer R. Crew and James E. Sims, “Locating Authenticity: Fragments of a Dialog” in Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 159–175; Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution*; Jenny Edkins, “Authenticity and Memory at Dachau,” *Cultural*

the original, the authentic and museums are still places which derive their authority from their claim on authenticity. This is even more so in the case of memorial-museums where the building itself is the main “authentic” exhibit. This is the case of Doftana and all other former concentration camps museums; more recently it is the case of the Romanian Sighet Memorial-Museum, the Hungarian Terror Háza, the Lithuanian Museum of Genocide Victims and the projected Romanian museums of communism in Râmnicu Sărat and Jilava prisons.

A more nuanced understanding of authenticity would claim that an object as such cannot be deemed fake or authentic, it is the narrative surrounding it that makes it authentic or not.⁷⁶ The Doftana museum is not a fake. It is a real building with real walls, stones and cells. It only becomes fake when it is presented as the prison that functioned in the interwar period and, as will be described below, a place where fascism inflicted victimhood; if presented as a reconstruction of the prison its authenticity cannot be challenged.⁷⁷

The curators of Doftana were concerned with authenticity inasmuch as it provided the necessary persuasiveness of the museums; even though in the late 1940s Doftana was known to be a reconstruction, as the memory of the ruins was still vivid, as decades went by the new building successfully became a genuine former prison for any of its visitors.

Values 5, no. 4 (2001): 405–420; Péter Apor, “An Epistemology of the Spectacle? Arcane Knowledge, Memory and Evidence in the Budapest House of Terror,” manuscript.

⁷⁶ Susan Crane, “Curious cabinets and Imaginary Museums” in Susan A. Crane, ed., *Museums and Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 70.

⁷⁷ Even such a hard-core supporter of the original and authentic such as Walter Benjamin arguing for the crucial presence of the aura in the original, concedes in a footnote that “the concept of authenticity always transcends mere genuineness.” Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 244 f.6; As he puts it, “at the time of its origin a medieval picture of the Madonna could not yet be said to be <<authentic>>. It became <<authentic>> only during the succeeding centuries and perhaps most strikingly so during the last one.” *ibid*, 243 f.2.

During the 1948 commemoration, when the museum had not yet been inaugurated, mentioning of the reconstruction works in explanatory texts displayed on site seemed unproblematic. For example, the text next to Gheorghiu-Dej's reconstructed cell read: "The cell, reconstructed in 1948, belonged to comrade Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, General Secretary of the Romanian Workers Party, beloved leader of the working class."⁷⁸ Equally, the punishing section H is described as "destroyed by the earthquake on November 10th, 1940 and rebuilt in 1948."⁷⁹ However, for the 1949 inauguration, and afterwards as years went by and the Doftana narrative became more and more mythologized, fixed and unmovable, mentioning of the reconstruction works were less frequent and even avoided. The inscription next to Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej's reconstructed cell becomes: "This is where comrade Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, General Secretary of the Romanian Workers Party was imprisoned for seven years"⁸⁰ in total disregard of the fact that comrade Gheorghiu-Dej never actually set foot in that particular cell.

⁷⁸ "Texts for Doftana", AMNIR, fond Muzeul Partidului, file i2500 (*Comemorare Doftana 1948. Planuri de Munca*), f. 254.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 253.

⁸⁰ "Texts for posters and panels in Doftana", AMNIR, fond Muzeul Partidului, file i2501 (*Comemorare Doftana 1948 si 1949*), f. 113

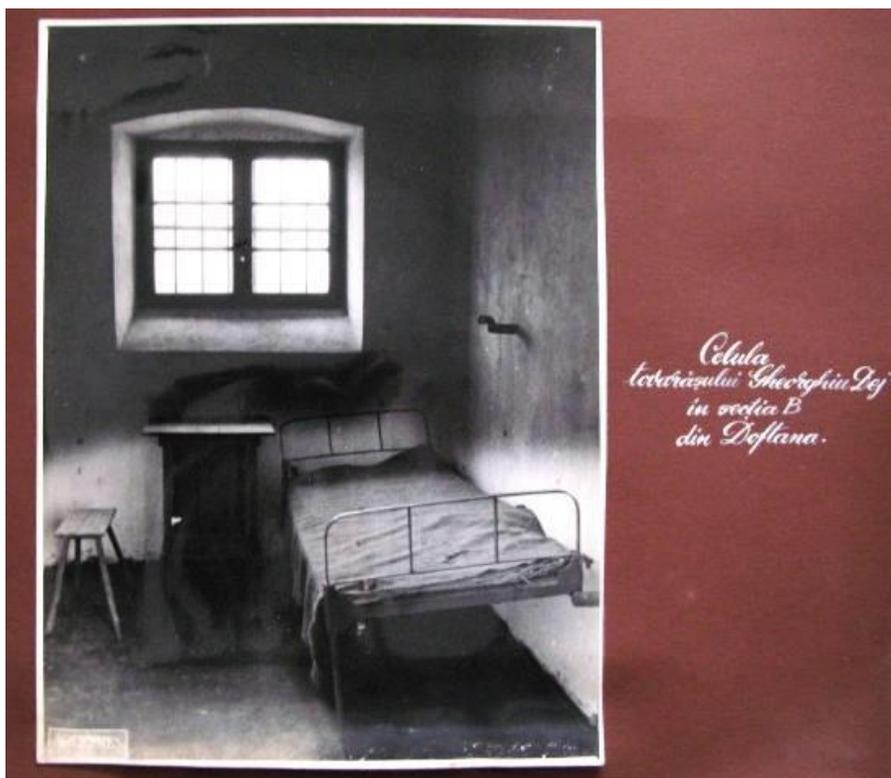


Fig. 1.9. “Comrade Gheorghiu Dej’s cell in section B of Doftana” from the original album offered to Gheorghiu Dej on his anniversary, November 8th 1950, by the National Federation of Former Antifascist Political Prisoners. (Collections of the Romanian Peasant Museum)

The 1948-1949 documents are important as they testify to the hesitations surrounding the proper display and exhibition of the Doftana ruins and story. Unsure of the characters⁸¹ and events they are allowed to mention (“We need the approval of the Party Central Committee for exhibiting documents regarding Max Goldstein”⁸²), the organizers keep writing, rewriting and correcting the labels and texts, always cautious for any political mistake. After the reconstruction works are finished, the

⁸¹ Several variants of the list of those killed by the 1940 earthquake appear in the files, with names and numbers constantly changing. A list dated October 18th, 1949, “a copy after the final list submitted to com. Neumann” counts 16 “dead political inmates in Doftana on November 10th, 1940:” Grigore Zambori, Vasile Pop, Ion Rebac, Ion Galuzinschi, Andrei Prot, Alexandru Niconov, Șaia Cleiman, Ion Herbac, Vasile Melihov, Itzo Salamander, Meer Gofman, Petre Martiniuc, Emanoil Biederman, Aftenie Ciobotaru, Gheorghe Paloș, Petre Onofrenco. Interestingly enough, the most important communist martyr killed by the earthquake, Ilie Pintilie is missing from this “final list.” “Dead political inmates in Doftana on November 10th, 1940,” AMNIR, fond Muzeul Partidului, file i2501 (*Comemorare Doftana 1948 si 1949*), no page numbers.

⁸² “Plan for arranging Doftana museum”, AMNIR, fond Muzeul Partidului, file i2501 (*Comemorare Doftana 1948 si 1949*), no page numbers.

building becomes just another museum object that can be interpreted and narrated by cleverly changing museum texts.

1.3. Inventing artifacts – dealing with the dearth of objects

There is concern among Doftana museum's staff for objects beyond the building per se; one of their major problems was the lack of artifacts to put on display. During a staff meeting on October 21st 1949, A.G. Vaida⁸³ reports: "All these materials, according to the inventories we now have, raise up to 450 big and small objects. These are photocopies, documents, clothes and so on. We think this is a weak start, an opening for the museum to be enriched."⁸⁴ To have an idea of the dearth of object they were confronted with, this the inventory of objects for the 1941-1944 period, when Doftana was already in ruins but which had to be museographically represented: "postal cards, photocopies of documents, one paper banknote with antifascist inscription, photographs of fascist-Antonescian atrocities and death trains, reproduction of a partisan group photograph, one photograph Dachau common grave."⁸⁵

Reacting to the object penury, the same A.G. Vaida is given in 1949 the assignment to acquire "15 mats, 30 sinks, 15 beds from some prison and whatever else you think necessary to be displayed in the cells." On the back of this handwritten

⁸³ A.G. Vaida (1910-1965), a writer and member of the Romanian Communist Party since the interwar illegality years, has held several positions in the cultural and propagandistic system after 1945, such as member of the Scientific Committee of the Institute of Party History (ISISP) or director of the Museum of the Revolutionary Struggle of the People.

⁸⁴ "Minutes of the meeting on October 21st 1949", AMNIR, fond Muzeul Partidului, file i2501 (*Comemorare Doftana 1948 si 1949*), no page numbers.

⁸⁵ "Inventory", AMNIR, fond Muzeul Partidului, file i2501 (*Comemorare Doftana 1948 si 1949*), no page numbers.

document, comrade Tudose records: “Com. Vaida phoned Cluj and all is arranged.”⁸⁶ This unique document in the files consulted is proof of the elasticity of the authenticity principle used by the creators of the Doftana prison-museum. Although the whole claim of this *avant la lettre* memorial-museum is providing a first-hand experience of the life in a bourgeois political prison, despite the massive reconstruction work of the former cells and prison walls, the prison furniture itself is found to belong to a functioning contemporary prison.

Claims have been made over the years on the fakeness of Communist propaganda museums, fakeness that went beyond the reconstructed story, a fakeness that touched objects, images, museum displays.⁸⁷ However, none of these claims has ever been supported by documents created by the curators of these museums; they were rather based on first-hand observations and “common sense.” For example, Ioana Popescu, Romanian visual anthropologist and exhibition curator, once remarked that the History Museum of the Communist Party was in fact a museum of fake photography.⁸⁸ Historian Cornel Constantin Ilie counts the number of duplicates that were presented as original artifacts in several museums in the country, such as the anvil Nicolae Ceausescu used in his apprenticeship years or the siren that triggered the 1933 strikes.⁸⁹ There is wide consensus among museum specialist that Communist

⁸⁶ AMNIR, fond Muzeul Partidului, file i2501 (*Comemorare Doftana 1948 si 1949*), f. 99.

⁸⁷ It is not without interest to mention that even non-propagandistic museums in democratic countries seemed to have encountered similar problems regarding the authenticity of the objects on display: “The problem with things is that they are dumb. They are not eloquent, as some thinkers in art museums claim. They are dumb. And if by some ventriloquism they seem to speak, they lie. The mendacity of objects is all too familiar to makers of collections and exhibitions.” Spencer R. Crew and James E. Sims, “Locating Authenticity: Fragments of a Dialog” in Karp and Lavine, *Exhibiting Cultures*, 159.

⁸⁸ Ioana Popescu, Unpublished discussions during the colloquium *Museums and Society* at the Romanian Peasant Museum, Bucharest, October 2006.

⁸⁹ Cornel Ilie quoted in Vasile Surcel, “Țăranul Român a Cucerit ‘templul’ Fantasmelor Comuniste (The Romanian Peasant Conquered ‘the Temple’ of Communist Ghosts),” *Jurnalul Național*, November 16, 2010 <http://www.jurnalul.ro/acum-20-de-ani/taranul-roman-a-cucerit-templul-fantasmelor-comuniste-559881.htm> (accessed December 15, 2011).

museums were “fake” museums, however the degree to which they were purposefully misleading the visitor has never been really investigated.

The dearth of objects was aggravated by the ever increasing number of artifacts and documents that were not to be displayed. The transcripts filed in the Doftana dossiers testify to the multitude of censorship and self-censorship layers which made the curators’ work almost impossible. As in 1949 the interwar history of the Communist Party was largely in the making, the display of Party history in Doftana was somehow premature and bound to raise questions whose answer was difficult to formulate.

For example, one of the most important and abundant artifacts in Communist museums were newspapers reflecting the events narrated. However, if bourgeois press was easily identifiable as an opponent of the communist movement, and could be framed as such, Party press, or even more broadly leftist press, writing at the time of the events was seen as possibly dangerous as it provided versions of the events that the Party was no longer supporting. As comrade A.G. Vaida explains: “So, for December 13th [1918],⁹⁰ we have some newspapers and the death acts. We must show mainly titles; we don’t know if the text has the approval of the Party as being just. We were told to replace the texts from the newspapers with a quotation from one of com. Gheorghiu-Dej’s conferences.”⁹¹

Furthermore, there were people involved in these events that the museum was not supposed to mention. The discussion continues on the December 1918 rally:

“Com. Agiu: We should have the process.

Com. Vaida: It’s no good. No mentioning of Ilie Moscovici⁹² and all those bastards.

⁹⁰ Important rally of railway workers suppressed with gunfire by the police, killing sixteen workers.

⁹¹ “Minutes of the meeting on October 17th 1949”, AMNIR, fond Muzeul Partidului, file i2501 (*Comemorare Doftana 1948 si 1949*), no file numbers, p. 3.

⁹² Ilie Moscovici was one of the organizers of the 13th of December 1918 rally.

Com. Agiu: We could arrange⁹³ them.
 Com. Vaida: There would be nothing left.”⁹⁴

An almost surreal exchange of replicas follows on the proper political afterlife of the dead:

“Com Vaida: The same with Mohănescu. We don’t have the bourgeois prejudice of not speaking ill of the dead. [...]

Com Agiu: For me, the workers that joined out of solidarity with the typographers and lost their lives were simply workers and nothing can stop me [from talking about them], because they are dead and made no mistakes afterwards.

Com. Vaida: Maybe they made some before. Mohănescu died too and still we don’t speak of him because he did not have a dignified behavior when he was arrested. We have to settle on a principle here: when we are not dealing with people that were dignified, consistent, we should not popularize them.”⁹⁵

Finding exhibits that would fit both political and museologic requirements proved to be an incredibly difficult task. The solution leaned naturally towards the political as the main purpose of the exhibitionary effort was political propaganda. As the genuine documents and artifacts could not be shown (being either absent or politically undesirable), new artifacts had to be invented, re-contextualized, brought in from other moments, places or narratives.

The files documenting the creation of the Doftana museums contain important information on the issue of manipulating and inventing “original” objects as performed in Communist museums. Adapting the museologic techniques of ethnographic museums, the objects created by political inmates while imprisoned in Doftana (wood carvings, cutlery, ornaments, everyday objects, etc.) were displayed in series as to show the increase over the years of their revolutionary consciousness.

⁹³ It seems *arranging (a ajusta)* was the correct term to use when referring to altering and ultimately faking historical documents.

⁹⁴ “Minutes of the meeting on October 17th 1949”, p. 2.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 2-3. The question of the behavior of the political inmate during detention and police/Siguranță investigations is crucial. As shall be seen in the following chapter, an undignified conduct, collaboration with the bourgeois authorities or the fascist perpetrators could lead to the exclusion from the ranks of former political inmates.

Thus, irrespective of their creation date, these small objects were divided into chronological periods, with those simpler, unsophisticated objects assigned to represent an earlier period, while the more developed ones, also decorated with communist symbols were used for exhibiting the post-1938 period, when comrade Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej was brought to Doftana and apparently significantly strengthened political activity in the prison. “We shall choose lower quality objects for the 1922-1929 period, those without a symbol for the 1929-1938 period and in the next period, those with already revolutionary symbol. By this, we will also show the development of the revolutionary movement.”⁹⁶

Further more, as they discuss the arrangement of another museum, the Museum of the Illegal Printing House which was never actually inaugurated, the same committee organizing the Doftana museum decides they have to acquire used chairs for recreating the interior of the clandestine house, chairs who ”don’t have the aspect of a new object.”⁹⁷ The efforts put into recreating true to life scenographies for these propaganda museums are sometime worthy of true professionals and it is not redundant to say that even nowadays memorial museums show the same concern for providing genuine authentic experiences while relying on a very lax concept of authenticity.⁹⁸

The Terror Háza museum in Budapest, inaugurated in 2002 seems to have faced similar problems and also to have found similar solutions. As historian Péter Apor narrates:

“The House of Terror generated a new world different from the concept of previous exhibitions, which had been based on data provided by objects. The House of Terror, instead, had to meet a different sort of challenge: it needed to

⁹⁶ “Minutes of the meeting on October 21st 1949”, AMNIR, fond Muzeul Partidului, file i2501 (*Comemorare Doftana 1948 si 1949*), no file numbers, p. 2.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁹⁸ Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution*, 61–92.

confirm an idea by objects, it needed to adjust the objects into a pre-existing ready-made conceptual frame. In this conception, objects are not expected to inform their spectators; instead, their duty is to evoke various contexts for those who possess memories about them. As a consequence, systematic collection is not a necessary pre-requisite for setting up a museum, instead, a careful selection of a limited number of isolated objects from other museums and collections – the House of Terror staff particularly searched through the stores of the National Museum and the Military History museum for appropriate material – seems sufficient.”⁹⁹



Fig. 1.10 The former Doftana museum in October 2012. This is the central round courtyard where the chapel used to be until the reconstruction of the prison into a museum. (photograph by Simina Bădică)

The dearth of material was also compensated by incorporating into the Doftana story, bits and pieces from the Holocaust story and the atrocities committed by the Iron Guard and the Antonescu regime in Romania. Among the collection lists in Doftana museum, one can find, “one photograph Dachau common grave,”¹⁰⁰ “Nazi atrocities (photographs),”¹⁰¹ “[photographs of] death trains (1941) Iași; fascists

⁹⁹ Apor, “An Epistemology of the Spectacle? Arcane Knowledge, Memory and Evidence in the Budapest House of Terror” ms.

¹⁰⁰ “Inventory”, AMNIR, fond Muzeul Partidului, file i2501 (*Comemorare Doftana 1948 si 1949*), no file numbers.

¹⁰¹ “Inventory” (2), AMNIR, fond Muzeul Partidului, file i2501 (*Comemorare Doftana 1948 si 1949*), no file numbers.

robbing the bodies of the assassinated victims; fascists atrocities during the war; atrocities of the Iron Guard.”¹⁰² However, as it will be explained further on, the inclusion of what we now know as the Holocaust into the Doftana story had wider reasons than just the lack of artifacts to display.

Despite all difficulties and the creative solutions found by party cadres turned museologists, the Doftana museum was inaugurated on November 10th 1949 and it soon became the most successful of all newly created propaganda museums: “We are making these efforts considering that Doftana is very much visited, more than the Revolutionary Struggle museum. In the last six months there were over 16.000 visitors. It must be said that there is almost no foreigner coming to our country that would not visit Doftana [...]”¹⁰³ For forty years, Doftana functioned as a symbolic place of the Communist Party. Pioneers swore their allegiance to the Party there and the museum was a must for any school-age Romanian. Twenty years after, the building has been abandoned, looted and robbed but the ruin remains, listed as a historical monument, and visitors keep trespassing the closed gate to visit it.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² “Table with the material for the Doftana Museum”, AMNIR, fond Muzeul Partidului, file i2501 (*Comemorare Doftana 1948 si 1949*), no file numbers.

¹⁰³ *Minutes of the meeting held at the Party Control Commission with the leadership of the Institute of Party History held on September 17th 1954*, ANR, fond CC al PCR – Propagandă și Agitație, no.53/1954, f. 186.

¹⁰⁴ With official approval, from time to time, private firms organize paint-ball games there and a music video of a reggae band was shot in the ruins.



Fig. 1.11. Section B of the former Doftana museum in October 2012. This section was completely reconstructed in the late 1940s especially for the museum. (photograph by Simina Bădică)

1.4. Doftana on the European map

Doftana is not absent from Romanian post-communist historiography. More as a legitimizing myth and less as a memorial place, it has been so far analyzed only in its national context and in connection to the personality cult of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej.¹⁰⁵ It is usually mentioned as a foundational myth of Romanian communism, a legitimizing narrative accounting for the rapid access to power of the rather small Communist Party. More psychologizing analyses, put forward by self-trained historian Stelian Tănase, claim that Doftana became such a crucial moment of Communist prehistory because Gheorghiu-Dej himself was obsessed with his own

¹⁰⁵ In Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons*; Deletant, *Communist Terror in Romania*.

twelve years long prison experience, loathed any comrade who had not been imprisoned and thus wanted to make the prison experience the defining trait of the interwar Romanian communist movement.¹⁰⁶

This sub-chapter argues it was not only internal politics that shaped Doftana, but also an international context of efforts toward a specific memorialization of the victims of fascism. The Doftana museum was not the result of unidirectional incentives coming from the RWP, but of multiple forces, among them an international network of associations of former political inmates whose role in curating Doftana has so far been obscured.

Concerns about putting Doftana on the European map were not immediately discernible in the available archival documents. On the contrary, the archival fonds concerning Doftana kept at the National History Museum puzzled me as, among fervent preoccupation for preparing the exhibit in Doftana, no indication is given as to what were the models upon which the project was resting. However, spontaneous expressions of the desire to make Doftana relevant on a European level led me to enquire further into the institution that was responsible for curating Doftana and that is where some answers came from.

Constantin Agiu,¹⁰⁷ leader of the National Federation of Former Antifascist Political Prisoners and Inmates (FIAP), the organization responsible for managing the

¹⁰⁶ “His [*Gheorghiu Dej's*] interior world was made of barbed-wired fences, cells, guardians, food allowances, common living, secrets, promiscuity. This is where his resentment and frustrations came from.” Stelian Tănase, *Clienții Lu' Tanti Varvara (Aunt Varvara's Clients)* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2005), 331.

¹⁰⁷ Constantin Agiu (1891-1961) joined the Romanian Communist Party in its illegality years, promoted by party secretary Ștefan Foriș and he was himself imprisoned in Doftana. After 1945 he is part of the Communist administration but never in very high positions: state sub-secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture (1945-1948), president of the Great National Assembly (1948), general secretary of the National Federation of Former Antifascist Political Prisoners and Inmates (FIAP), and president of Centrocop (after 1952). In 1955 he is subject to an internal RWP investigation, concerning his anti-Party (*antipartinice*) activities and sanctioned with a reprimand (*vot de blam*). Dan Cătănuș, “Disciplina de Partid Si Fostii ilegalisti. Cazul Constantin Agiu, 1955 (Party Discipline and

project of rebuilding Doftana, writes to the Central Committee of the RWP in 1949: “Doftana becomes another problem. We have to insist on it, to know what to do with it. [...] By chance, I was abroad, sent by the party and I saw how they present monuments and historical places there. From what I understand, we are very poorly represented in Doftana.”¹⁰⁸ This report was written just a few months before the November 1949 official inauguration of the Doftana museum, and the dissatisfaction of Constantin Agiu was measured against monuments and memorials of former concentration camps, most of which, to be sure, were quite in an incipient form of memorialization themselves.

1.4.1. A memory institution: The National Federation of Former Antifascist Political Prisoners and Inmates (FIAP)

Getting to know the actors involved in the making of the Doftana museum enables a better understanding of the process that led to the final form of the museum.¹⁰⁹ The National Federation of Former Antifascist Political Prisoners and Inmates (Federația Națională a Foștilor Deținuți și Internați Politici Antifasciști), abbreviated as FIAP, was an active organization in the late 1940s and early 1950s whose double affiliation, to the Romanian Communist Party and the FIAPP

Former Communists in Illegality. The Case of Constantin Agiu, 1955),” *Arhivele Totalitarismului* 3–4 (2010): 197–219.

¹⁰⁸ Constantin Agiu, “Adresă a FIAP către Secretariatul Comitetului Central PMR,” May 3, 1949, ANR, fond FIAP, roll 1294, file 11/1949, f. 70-71.

¹⁰⁹ Research-wise, the fact that the National Federation of Former Antifascist Political Prisoners and Inmates, the organization responsible for managing the project of rebuilding Doftana, has not been the subject of any historical research forced me back into the archives only to discover more relevant information new files on the Doftana museum. Out of the 87 files of the FIAP fond at the Romanian National Archives (ANR), 8 files are composed only of “Documents concerning the rebuilding of Doftana prison, projects, financial situations, etc.”

(Fédération Internationale des Anciens Prisonniers Politiques) made it an interesting actor on both national and international scene.

Officially, FIAP was an independent association of former political prisoners. Similar organizations appeared after the Second World War in all countries ruled at some point by a form of fascist or national-socialist government and they all united in an international federation, the FIAPP.¹¹⁰ These organizations were mainly concerned with obtaining rights and financial retributions for those who had suffered political persecutions during the war and also initiating memorial actions to promote and secure remembrance for resistance fighters and victims of fascism. It is important to note that in neither of these national organizations was the Jewish element very vocal or important. In this, the Romanian FIAP was no exception, for even in non-Soviet occupied countries, FIAPP members mainly promoted national resistance and political prisoners while the Jewish or Roma tragedy, inflicted upon them for non-political reasons, was largely ignored.

The narrative of antifascist resistance easily travelled back and forth over the Iron Curtain. The Nazi regime was still an easily identifiable common enemy so, at least until the Cold War became an unmistakable reality, the East and West members of the FIAPP seemed to speak the same language. Although not very much concerned with the immense loss of Jewish lives in what will later be known as the Holocaust, the FIAPP did recognize the atrocities perpetrated in concentration camps all over

¹¹⁰ To my knowledge, there is no consistent historical research on the FIAPP (Fédération Internationale des Anciens Prisonniers Politiques). However, because of the boom in memory studies and the recent focus on historicizing the memorialization of the Holocaust, important histories of the concentration camp memorials have been written and they included information on the national associations of former inmates: Jonathan Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland, and the Politics of Commemoration, 1945-1979*, Ohio University Press Polish and Polish-American Studies Series (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003); Harold Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933-2001* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); Interestingly enough, such a seminal study of memorial work in France after 1945 that is Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France Since 1944* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991) does not consider FIAPP to be a relevant „vector of memory” in post-war France.

Europe and made efforts towards the memorialisation of these sites of suffering. Again, this suffering was narrated politically and nationally. The victims were not Jews, or Roma or homosexuals, they were antifascist fighters.

For this reason, the Romanian FIAP had a strong legitimacy handicap, as no resistance movement was to be found in Romania to either the Iron Guard fascist government (September 1940 – January 1941) or Marshall Antonescu's military dictatorship (January 1941 – August 1944). The levels of popular support for these governments and their policies were quite elevated (including the policy of exterminating Jewish and Roma population), the country had been an ally of Nazi Germany and not an occupied country, and Romanian and German soldiers fought side by side in what they thought was a holy war against Soviet Russia and bolshevism. The Romanian Communist Party was one of the tiniest members of the Comintern, in terms of membership; RCP counted somewhere beneath 1000 members at the end of the war and most of them were either imprisoned or refugees in the Soviet Union.¹¹¹ The story of the Romanian antifascist resistance had to be constructed, not just for the sake of joining the European chorus of resistance but, more importantly for politically justifying the presence of the Communist Party at the head of the Romanian state after the Second World War.

It was only natural that the important task of adding Romania to the transnational history of antifascist resistance could not be left in the hands of any independent organization. The Romanian National Federation of Former Antifascists Political Prisoners and Inmates (FIAP) was constituted in March 1947, as a branch of

¹¹¹ Robert Levy, *Ana Pauker: The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 5.

an already existing organization, the Patriotic Defense (Apărarea Patriotică).¹¹² The Patriotic Defense was active between 1940 and 1948, continuing the work of the Red Help (Ajutorul Roșu), a communist organization meant to help imprisoned comrades.

The Patriotic Defense was a simulacrum of the desired partisan movement whose activities, if any, remained marginal to story of the Second World War in Romania. After the end of the war, Apărarea Patriotică was in charge of the fate of war invalids, widows and orphans and even, ironically enough, of Romanian prisoners on Soviet soil (organizing the correspondence between them and their families back home). AP was not a minor institution: In 1947, it had 1475 employees,¹¹³ out of which 854 were administrative employees and 621 were “political.”¹¹⁴ The institution was state-subsidized and reported directly to the RCP. In 1946, just before the general elections, AP publishes the “We accuse!” (Acuzăm!) pamphlet in which fascist and criminal actions of the concurrent parties are denounced, “the dead of yesterday and today” are summoned by this institution “with an old tradition in fighting against fascist and Iron Guard Terror”¹¹⁵ who finally urges the Romanian voters to “liquidate fascist remnants”¹¹⁶ by voting the Democratic Party Bloc created around the RCP. In 1948, the Patriotic Defense is dissolved and the FIAP takes over most of its activities and members. This genealogy of the Romanian FIAP is important since it clearly shows it to be a branch of the Communist Party, a fact that greatly influences its actions and the monopoly it holds over defining the victimhood of fascism.

¹¹² Comnacu, “Un an de Activitate a Federației Naționale a Foștilor Deținuți Și Internați Politici Antifasciști (One Year of Activity of FIAP),” 5.

¹¹³ ANR, fond Apărarea Patriotică, file 214/1947, f. 6.

¹¹⁴ The Romanian term is “*politici*” and I can only speculate that it refers to members of the RCP working in the AP in their quality of party members.

¹¹⁵ Apărarea Patriotică, *Acuzăm! (We Accuse!)* (Bucharest: Editura Apărării Patriotice, 1946), 3–4.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

When the international organization FIAPP was formed in Warsaw, in February 1946,¹¹⁷ the Romanian FIAP did not yet exist. The existing organization, Patriotic Defense took it upon itself to represent Romania in this union of associations and carefully documented the creation of the network across Europe. The 205/1946 file in the Patriotic Defense fond at the Romanian National Archives contains the statutes of members of FIAPP from France, Belgium and Italy, together with the statute, regulations, reports, publications and even transcripts of meetings of FIAPP. The interest shown in FIAPP is translated only one year later in the creation of the Romanian National Federation of Former Antifascists Political Prisoners and Inmates. The documentation gathered before the creation of the FIAP, first as a branch of the AP and then replacing the mother-organization, testifies to the importance of the FIAPP for the Romanian association of former prisoners. It was not only the Romanian federation adhered to the international FIAPP, but its creation, statute and functioning were meant to fit a certain FIAPP pattern.

What were the main features of the FIAPP model appropriated by the Romanian organization? The definition of the political prisoner is one of them and also a debated issue among FIAPP members.

Coming back from the FIAPP conference in Paris (December 6-10, 1946), Jacques Podoleanu reports to the AP: “After long debates, the text defining the notion of political deportees presented by the Czech delegate was approved.”¹¹⁸ Several separate documents contain this definition and some of the debates around. It is understandable why this was a crucial issue for these associations, as it practically decided who could become a member and who could not. The definition in itself is

¹¹⁷ ANR, fond Apărarea Patriotică, file 205/1946, f. 19-23.

¹¹⁸ Jacques Podoleanu, “Report of the Romanian Delegation to the FIAPP conference in Paris, December 6-10, 1946,” ANR, fond Apărarea Patriotică, file 205/1946, f. 80.

interesting as it overwrites the previous definition, that of the political prisoner as understood by the fascist and Nazi regimes that enforced political captivity. Even if one was imprisoned as a political prisoner between 1933 and 1945, this solely did not guarantee the admission into an association of former inmates. The definition had an exclusion clause of “those who betrayed, collaborated with the enemy or whose release by the enemy was suspect; those whose attitude harmed the antifascist cause and whose acts harmed their co-detainees.”¹¹⁹ Suspicion of collaboration was reason enough to be denied statute of former political prisoner; I suspect that the versatility and ultimate ambiguity of this definition appealed to the Romanian group of activists who will transform it even more, as shall be seen further on.

The other contention point however, was the inclusion of those victims of fascism who were not imprisoned and victimized for political activities but for “racial reasons.” The fact that these prisoners, mainly Jews, formed the bulk of the prisoners in concentration camps must have been known, if not to the general population, who was still unaware of, slowly absorbing or actively denying information about the extent of the extermination policies, at least to these former prisoners who had firsthand knowledge of the reality of the camps.

As the Romanian AP delegate reports on the conference, the delegates finally acknowledge that not only those imprisoned for their “patriotic deeds” should be represented but also those victimized “for racial reasons,” yet still under the condition that they behaved dignified and did not collaborate with the fascist enemy.

The same Paris report gives one a glimpse into the relations of the Romanian FIAP with the Soviet occupying power. Although obedient in following the Soviet

¹¹⁹ “[...] sont exclus de cette qualification: [...] Les personnes convaincues de trahison, de collaboration avec l’ennemi ou dont la libération par l’ennemi est suspecte. Les personnes dont l’attitude fut nuisible à la cause antifasciste ou dont les actes furent préjudiciable a leur codétenus.” ANR, fond Apărarea Patriotică, file 205/1946, f. 71.

example, as a branch of the RCP, in domains where Soviet example was lacking, FIAP is willing to take initiative and it seems that their participation in this European network was one such initiative not necessarily supported by the Soviets. “The Soviet delegation did not participate in the congress. I think we should try to find out how this Federation is seen by the Russians.”¹²⁰ USSR became interested in this organization in the context of the emerging Cold War and this resulted in the 1950 dissolution of FIAPP into two concurrent organizations: FIR (Fédération Internationale des Résistants) supported by the Soviets and FILDIR (Fédération internationale libre des déportés et internés de la résistance). The affiliation to the international FIAPP was not secondary for the Romanian association. On the contrary, when putting forward, at the beginning of 1949, the goals for the next year, the first one for FIAP is “strengthening the connections with the General Secretariat of FIAPP and with the sister-organizations.”¹²¹ Even if the Soviets did not show a particular interest in the FIAPP in its initial years, 1946 to 1950, the fact that the national associations coming from Soviet-occupied countries were actually part of the communist front was not a secret even before 1950.¹²²

In fact, it is precisely this connection that made it very difficult for associations of former inmates on the Western side of the Iron Curtain to succeed in their initiatives of memorialisation. For example, “the largest German organization of camp survivors,”¹²³ the VVN (Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes) was outlawed by some German regional governments already in the early 1950s, because

¹²⁰ Jacques Podoleanu, “Report of the Romanian Delegation to the FIAPP conference in Paris, December 6-10, 1946,” ANR, fond Apărarea Patriotică, file 205/1946, f. 81.

¹²¹ Comnacu, “Un an de Activitate a Federației Naționale a Foștilor Deținuți Și Internați Politici Antifasciști (One Year of Activity of FIAP),” 9.

¹²² Jolande Wihuis, “The Management of Victimhood - Long term health damage from asthenia to PTSD” in Jolande Wihuis and Annet Mooij, *The Politics of War Trauma: The Aftermath of World War II in Eleven European Countries* (Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 295.

¹²³ Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, 67.

of their supposed ties to the Soviet Union.¹²⁴ Formed in January 1947 and affiliated to FIAPP in May 1948, the German VVN's most vocal members were also members of the German Communist Party (KPD). According to historian of the "legacies of Dachau," Harold Marcuse, the VVN supported policies advocated by the German Communist Party (KPD) and this made VVN a „bothersome force”¹²⁵ leading to its ostracism.¹²⁶ Although Marcuse does not refrain from condemning the ostracism measures and considers that it was the „the anticommunist government propaganda” that “began to affect the solidarity of the camp survivors”,¹²⁷ when one looks at the very definition of the prisoner these associations were using, one can see that the seeds of the split inside the groups of former inmates were already there, in the statutes of these organizations. Even more, the fact that, when FIAPP split in 1950, VVN joined FIR¹²⁸ (Fédération Internationale des Résistants) supported by the Soviets and not FILDIR (Fédération internationale libre des déportés et internés de la résistance) is both a reason and a consequence of the ostracism described by Marcuse.¹²⁹

When the Romanian FIAP is created in March 1947, the definition of the political prisoner is clearly delineated in its *Regulament de Funcționare* (Rules of Operation): “The political prisoner is the one who acted revolutionary before detention, had a dignified behavior during detention and joined one of the democratic

¹²⁴ Ibid., 152.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ „In 1948 the established political parties began to ostracize the VVN. On 6 May 1948 the executive committee of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) resolved that no SPD member could also be a member of the VVN [...] In September 1950 the federal government decreed that the members of the VVN could not be employed by the state.” Ibid., 152.

¹²⁷ Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, 153.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 243.

¹²⁹ „Within a few years the status of survivors in West Germany, the majority of whom were Jews and Communists, sank to the point where they were considered common criminals.” *ibid.*, 128.

organizations after August 23rd 1944.”¹³⁰ The Jewish tragedy is thus clearly excluded from memorialization through this organization. Unlike the international FIAPP, the Romanian association of antifascist prisoners does not accept the “racial reason” as a qualifying argument and it clearly states that the former prisoner had to have had revolutionary activities prior to being arrested. Again, unlike the international definition, the Romanian political prisoner is defined based on its current political position. If one is not a member of the “democratic organizations,” i.e. the ones affiliated to the RCP, one cannot be considered a political prisoner. This very restrictive definition allowed the organization to strictly and politically control its membership while shaping the story of the Second World War in a narrative of the fight between communists and fascists in disregard of all other victims.

The reasons behind creating this organization are connected to the creation of the Doftana museum. In 1948, the objectives of the FIAP are outlined and the first among them is “cultivating the memory of the heroes and martyrs of the working class.”¹³¹ Adding to this the fact that the creation of the Doftana museum was delegated to FIAP immediately after its creation, it might be appropriate to conclude that the FIAP was created to become a major institution in the memorialisation activities of the regime, something that we would call today “a memory institution.” In 1951 FIAP becomes a section of the Institute for Party History, together with its creation, the Doftana museum, and in 1955 its name is shortened to Association of Former Antifascist Political Detainees (AFDA). In 1958 AFDA is practically dissolved as its attributions are transferred to local party boards.¹³²

¹³⁰ FIAP, March 1947, “Regulament de functionare,” ANR, fond FIAP, roll 1293, file 1/1947, f. 6.

¹³¹ “Minutes of the meeting held on August 27,” 1948, ANR, fond FIAP, roll 1294, file 8/1948, f. 41.

¹³² “Preface” to ANR, fond FIAP.

1.4.2. Was Doftana a part of a network of Holocaust memorials?

In 1949, FIAP sends a letter to their German homologue, the VVN, at the time involved in the creation of a Hamburg Memorial to the victims of fascism, assuring them that “You can count on our participation in the commemoration of the victims of Hitlerism in Hamburg [...] We will send soil from the Doftana prison where the cemetery of our heroes is, along with documentary material.” The Hamburg memorial to the victims of fascism was inaugurated in May 1949 in the Ohlsdorf cemetery. A stone plaque at the base of the memorial monument listed 25 concentration camps and over 100 urns held ashes of the victims and soil from these concentration camps. If FIAP held true to its promise, the soil of Doftana is also in one of these urns. Since the archives do not contain the original request coming from Hamburg, we cannot know the exact phrasing of the request. We can assume though, from the style of the answer that a request had been made for soil from where fascism victimized the innocents and that FIAP, as the only representative of the victims of fascism in Romania, judged Doftana to be the equivalent of Nazi concentration camps in Romania.



Fig. 1.12. Hamburg Memorial to the Victims of Fascism (Ohlsdorf cemetery) photographed in the 1950s. © Archives of the Ghetto Fighter's House Museum, catalog no. 46968 (available online <http://www.gfh.org.il/Eng/?CategoryID=87>)

It is not that Romania lacked former concentration camps. However, most of the death camps organized, to be sure, by the Romanian administration itself and not by the allied German state, were in the region of Transnistria, no longer part of Romania in 1949 but of USSR.¹³³ The persecution of Romanian Jews and Roma did take place also within the current borders of Romania (the pogrom in Iași and the Iron Guard rebellion in January 1941 are the most notorious examples), but the death camps were located, conveniently outside them.¹³⁴ Even more, in some of these death

¹³³ On the Holocaust in Romania see: International Commission for Studying Holocaust in Romania (presided by Elie Wiesel), *Final Report* (Iasi: Polirom, 2004); Radu Ioanid, "Romania" in David S. Wyman and Charles H. Rosenzweig, eds., *The World Reacts to the Holocaust* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins university Press, 1996); Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies Under the Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000); Matatias Carp, *Cartea Neagră. Suferințele Evreilor Din România 1940-1944 (The Black Book. The Sufferings of Jews in Romania 1940-1944)*, 3 vols. (Bucharest: Dacia Traiană, 1946).

¹³⁴ With the exception of transit camps such as the ones in Târgu-Jiu (which also served for political inmates such as communist or Iron Guard members), Craiova, Caracal, Turnu Severin, and Lugoj.

camps, there were also communists who found their tragic end. All of them were of Jewish origin and were transferred during the war from autochthonous camps, like Târgu-Jiu, where the living conditions were decent and communist inmates lived side by side with Iron Guard members, to Transnistrian camps (Vapniarka,¹³⁵ Mărculești, Moghilev) which were destined mainly for the extermination of Jewish and Roma population.

The Final Report of the Wiesel International Commission for Studying Holocaust in Romania includes a revealing final chapter on “Distorting and Concealing the Holocaust under Communism.” The report argues that, despite its vocal antifascist discourse, the Romanian Communist regime, as other states of the Socialist camp, concealed the reality of the Holocaust, distorted it for propaganda reasons and discursively replaced Jewish and Roma victims with communists and Romanians.

”As early as 1945, the new regime signaled that it was unwilling to acknowledge the role played by state institutions and by the ethnic Romanian majority in the perpetration of anti-Jewish atrocities. In July 1945, the local branch of the Iași Communist Party organization unsuccessfully tried to stop the commemoration of the Iași pogrom.”¹³⁶ The knowledge of the extermination of hundreds of thousands of Jews from Romania and from the territories occupied by Romania during the war was available immediately after the war. At the first national meeting of the Patriot Defense (AP) in August 1945, Dr. Eduard Mezincescu summarizes the “the bloodiest

From there, Jews were transported to the Transnistrian extermination camps. Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 111.

¹³⁵ A detailed account of life in the Vapniarka camp and the contemporary search for the camp in a town where everyone claims “There was never a camp here!” in Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, *Ghosts of Home the Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 197–231.

¹³⁶ International Commission for Studying Holocaust in Romania (presided by Elie Wiesel), *Final Report*, 336.

slaughter in history” brought about “the hoards of Hitler and his accomplices”: “BELSEN-BERGEN: 10.000 people burnt alive. AUSCHWITZ: 4.000.000 Russian, Polish, French, Belgian, Dutch, Czechoslovak, Yugoslav, Romanian, Hungarians citizens asphyxiated in the gas chambers and burnt in ovens. BIRKENAU: where French prisoners were mass murdered [...]. ODESSA: where 14.000 Soviet citizens, innocent, were hanged, shot or burnt alive by Antonescu’s tools. BUCHENWALD AND DACHAU: the terror camps, where antifascist fighters from Germany and from all European countries were exterminated. THERESIENSTADT: 50.000 killed inmates. MAUTHAUSEN: 500.000 political prisoners assassinated. IAMPOL, MĂRCULEȘTI, VARTUJENI, RABNIȚA: the tomb of antifascist Romanian partisans. TREBLINKA: the record of bestiality of all times, 7.000.000 victims.”¹³⁷

In 1947, Matatias Carp, the Jewish lawyer turned historian, published a lengthy three volume monograph, of over one thousand pages, on the Jewish Holocaust in Romania. Lacking the powerful concept of Holocaust, he named it *The Black Book. The Sufferings of Jews in Romania 1940-1944*.¹³⁸ Rather an exception, one of the high-party members, Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu¹³⁹ published in 1944 (in three editions) the successful study *The Fundamental Problems of Romania* in which he acknowledged the state-organized criminal actions against the Jewish population,¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Dr. Eduard Mezincescu, ”Secția de Asistență Socială (Social Welfare Section)” in *Apărarea Patriotică, Primul Congres Liber Al Apărării Patriotice (First Free Congress of Patriotic Defence)* (Bucharest: Editura Apărării Patriotice, 1945), 77–78. Uppercases kept from the original text.

¹³⁸ Carp, *Cartea Neagră. Suferințele Evreilor Din România 1940-1944 (The Black Book. The Sufferings of Jews in Romania 1940-1944)*.

¹³⁹ Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu (1900-1954) was the first Communist to become minister after August 23, 1944. He was Minister of Justice until 1948 when he was arrested and sentenced to death, in 1954 in the Romanian version of the Rajk/Slansky show-trials. See Lavinia Betea, *Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu. Moartea Unui Lider Comunist (Lucretiu Pătrășcanu. The Death of a Communist Leader)* (Bucharest: Editura Curtea Veche, 2011).

¹⁴⁰ “After the individual and collective assassinations perpetrated by the Iron Guard, the systematic and methodical mass extermination of the Jewish population began. Official pogroms were organized and the soldiers and state employees were made to pursue them. Thousands and tens of thousands of men, women, children, and elders were condemned to death – through hunger and frost – by the mid-winter deportations beyond the Dniester, in completely deserted lands. When everything will be known about

but his arrest in 1948 would also mean the end of his version of the Second World War. The Soviet supported historian Mihail Roller succeeded in promoting a different history in which the fascists' crimes are directed at communists and the Jewish or Roma ethnicity of the victims is never mentioned. For Roller in his unique history manual for secondary school, published in 1947, the "advent of the Iron Guard-Antonescu dictatorship signified the aggravation of terror measures directed against popular masses and their leaders. Concentration camps were set up, in which thousands of democratic citizens were locked up." The camps in Transnistria are mentioned only in connection to the imprisonment of communists and Roller's conclusion is that "By these cruel acts, the Iron Guard-Antonescu dictatorship proved its affinity with the crimes committed by the German Hitlerites in the death camps of Auschwitz, Treblinka, Mauthausen, etc."¹⁴¹

If ever the ethnicity of those sent to Transnistrian camps is mentioned, it is always secondary to their political affiliation to the Communist Party: "Another fascist measure was the diversionist decision to separate the Jewish political prisoners and inmates from the rest of the prisoners and inmates and to deport them to the temporarily occupied Soviet territories."¹⁴²

all that happened after June 1941, in Moldova and beyond the Prut river, when the thousands of executions will be revealed, without trial and without any other guilt of those thus killed than the fact of being born Jewish [...]" Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, *Probleme de Bază Ale României (The Fundamental Problems of Romania)* (Bucharest: Socec, 1944), 211. Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu acknowledges the racial argument behind the criminal deeds of the Romanian government during the Second World War. However, the Communist version at the time stated that the racial argument, i.e. anti-Semitism was only covering a deeper fear, a fear of the working class movement. Anti-Semitism, in Pătrășcanu's view was but disguised anti-communism: "It goes without saying that, in Romania, as everywhere, behind the anti-Semitic organizations, as instigators and profiting from the agitations thus born and enhanced, there were the same reactionary forces that fought, once more, this time in the name of "racism", the workers' movement, democracy and all progressive forces." Ibid., p. 183.

¹⁴¹ Mihail Roller, ed., *Istoria României. Manual Unic Pentru Clasa a VIII-a Secundară (History of Romania. Unique Textbook for Secondary 8th Grade)* (Bucharest: Editura de Stat, 1947), 767–768.

¹⁴² Ida Felix, "Râbnița," *Buletinul Federației Naționale a Foștilor Deținuți Și Internați Politici Antifasciști* 11 (March 1951): 15.

The history of distorting the reality of the Holocaust continues all through the communist decades, with changes and twists of narrative according to the political necessities of the day. One argument that could be summoned for the better understanding of the situation, which is not a case of straight-forward misleading, is that the definition of fascism Romanian communists were using led them to this interpretation of what we now call the Holocaust. As the authors of the Wiesel Report explain, “Almost to their collapse, communist regimes continued to abide by the definition of fascism formulated by Georgi Dimitrov in his 1935 report to the Comintern. Fascism, according to this definition, was <<the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital.>>”¹⁴³ As fascism was defined in terms of class and economic power, its victims could not be defined but their ethnicity, but by their position in the class struggle. Fascism was defined as the ultimate enemy of communism, an enemy recently defeated but still threatening; an acknowledgment of the fact that Nazi Germany seemed to consider Jews a greater threat than communists would only amount to diminishing the communist fight for over-coming fascism.¹⁴⁴

In this context, sending soil from Doftana to the Hamburg Memorial to the Victims of Fascism makes sense. If the victims of fascism were the communists then the main political prison of the country was also the main place of martyrdom inflicted by fascism. In a strange foretelling manner, Gheorghe Bujor inscribed Doftana on the map of antifascism as early as 1934: “As of May 1933, Hitlerism, introduced by the government of Mr. Vaida, raised furors in Doftana. The oligarchic

¹⁴³ International Commission for Studying Holocaust in Romania (presided by Elie Wiesel), *Final Report*, 335.

¹⁴⁴ See also Rabinbach, “Introduction.”

and pharaonic beast has apparently become an annex and a branch of the outlaw firm Hitler-Goebbels-Goering.”¹⁴⁵

The question in the title of this subchapter needs to be rephrased; otherwise the answer will not bring new knowledge about Doftana. Doftana was not a part of the Holocaust memorial network because “Holocaust” was not a concept used in the late 1940s and 1950s when the Doftana museum was created. As Carlo Ginzburg has observed “Historians start from questions using terms that are inevitably anachronistic. The research process modifies the initial questions on the grounds of new evidence, retrieving answers that are articulated in the actors’ language, and related to categories peculiar to their society, which is utterly different from ours.”¹⁴⁶ I have been trying to find arguments for the efforts of including Doftana in the Holocaust story, disregarding the fact that there was not Holocaust narrative at the time when these efforts were made.

As Harold Marcuse explains, “Not until the 1970s did “Holocaust” become the most widely used word to denote the Nazi program to systematically exterminate all Jews; since the 1990s, it has expanded to include Nazi programs to decimate or eradicate other groups as well. In fact, an awareness of Nazi genocide as a program distinct from atrocities committed during World War II developed only during the 1960s.”¹⁴⁷

What is thus the connection between Doftana and other memorials and museums inaugurated in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War memorializing the victims of the war and of fascism? It can be argued that Doftana museum had been acting as part of a network of memorials, museums and

¹⁴⁵ Bujor, *Doftana*, 28.

¹⁴⁶ Carlo Ginzburg, “Our Words, and Theirs: A Reflection on the Historian’s Craft, Today,” in Fellman and Rahikainen, *Historical Knowledge*, 108.

¹⁴⁷ Marcuse, “Holocaust Memorials,” 53–54.

monuments, named by their contemporaries memorials of antifascist resistance, or monuments to the victims of fascism and not Holocaust memorials. Due to a recent boom in studies historicizing the memorialisation of the Holocaust, there are important information on these European memory sites in the 1940s and 1950s and we can thus re-create the context in which Doftana emerged as a memorial museum.

The first puzzling discovery is that the creation of the Doftana museum proceeded, or was contemporary to the establishment of most museums of “Nazi atrocities.” Although Marcuse identifies the first three Holocaust monuments to be created even as the war was unfolding (in Majdanek 1943, Warsaw 1943 and New York 1944),¹⁴⁸ the creation of proper museums, even where the reconstruction work was not of the amplitude and financial involvement of Doftana, had to wait for the 1950s or even 1960s: in the German Democratic Republic, the three main museums of former concentration camps were inaugurated in 1958 - Buchenwald, 1959 – Ravensbrück and 1961- Sachsenhausen.¹⁴⁹ Dachau, which was an important reference in the Doftana story (with photographs of the atrocities in Dachau being exhibited in the Doftana museum) would not be organized as a memorial space until the 1950s.¹⁵⁰

The former Auschwitz-Birkenau camps became State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1947, simultaneously with the beginning of reconstructing Doftana into a “national museum.”¹⁵¹ Other memorials, especially in former camps, were being inaugurated in these years and sometimes Romanian delegations would attend these

¹⁴⁸ “The initial stage of Holocaust memorialization is represented by three monuments: one created in the Majdanek concentration camp in 1943; one conceived for the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943, even as the rebellion was happening, and subsequently implemented in 1948; and one proposed for New York City in 1944 but not realized until the 1990s.” *ibid.*, 55.

¹⁴⁹ Thomas C. Fox, *Stated Memory: East Germany and the Holocaust*, Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 1999), 41.

¹⁵⁰ Dachau continued to be inhabited after the war, until 1960, first by German SS prisoners awaiting trial and then by German refugees. The American administration put up an exhibition of atrocity photographs and objects from the camp but it was closed after German locals protested in 1955. Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*; James Edward Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 70.

¹⁵¹ Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland, and the Politics of Commemoration, 1945-1979*.

ceremonies. The national affiliates of FIAPP were usually actively involved in raising these memorials and lobbying for constructing proper museums. The curators of the Doftana museum were truly part of an international network involved in the creation of memorials to the victims of fascism all over Europe and the degree to which they might have found inspiration in the displays and narratives of these museums, later to be known as “the Holocaust genre,”¹⁵² is an intriguing question.

In order to answer this question, it is important to discuss the interaction between Romanian members of FIAP and the memorials inaugurated in Europe in the late 1940s. Fortunately, as the FIAP was sending representatives to some of these inauguration ceremonies, conferences, guided tours, it also required them to report in detail, both verbally and in writing, on the things and events they witnessed. The destinations of these Romanian delegation were within the Soviet occupied area of Europe, as also the efforts of memorializing Nazi crimes were also more lively, because state-supported, in this part of Europe.

In May 1949, a Romanian delegation is sent to the commemoration of 4 years since the liberation of the Mauthausen camp in Austria. Their report accounts for the debates over the “political” character of the camp’s inmates and the current state of the camp which, because of restoration, does not adequately represent the horrendous crimes perpetrated there: “It should be said that the exterior aspect of the camp, even when it was functioning, did not mirror the terror regime that reigned there, and the recent restoration works have erased even more the traces of the hard living conditions. The barracks, the crematoria with its six ovens, the gas chambers, the

¹⁵² Marcuse, “Holocaust Memorials.”

arrest and the cells have an almost harmless appearance. Explanatory tables or texts are nowhere to be found.”¹⁵³

The report details the commemoration ceremony, laying wreaths, the commemorative plaque, the speakers and their discourses. It denounces the religious character of a pastor’s speech, but also records the booing of the local politician accused of using the former camp for his own electoral campaign and boasting about the restoration of the camps, the FIAPP representatives warning that this is not the place for politics but for commemorating victims, and the FIAPP president stressing that “there is no way that people imprisoned for their political views could be apolitical.”¹⁵⁴

This was not the first visit of FIAP representatives to memorial events in former concentration camps. In September 1947, Liuba Chişinevschi went to Warsaw for the FIAPP congress and visited Auschwitz,¹⁵⁵ although there is no account kept in the FIAP files of her impressions. In 1949 another Romanian delegation is invited to Auschwitz-Birkenau and this time their reactions are transcribed as they give an oral report of their visit: “What can be seen there exceeds all human imagination. [...] It was a terrible day when we saw those places. [...] This place constitutes a museum to show what fascism is. This is something we have not yet achieved, to show where our comrades stayed. We have to work towards the creation of a museum to educate, to show where they suffered.”¹⁵⁶ Since this conversation took place only 2 months

¹⁵³ ”Report on the trip made in May 6-19, 1949 in Austria on the occasion of the 4th year commemoration of the liberation of the Mauthausen camp,” ANR, fond FIAP, roll 1294, file 11/1949, f. 72.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 74.

¹⁵⁵ ”Ce-am văzut în Polonia, conferință rostită de tov. Liuba Chişinevshi la sectorul de Artă și Cutură al PCR (What I saw in Poland, conference by com. Liuba Chişinesvchi at the Arts and Culture Section of the RCP)” *Scânteia*, October 1, 1947.

¹⁵⁶ B. Roman, ”Report,” September 23, 1949, ANR, fond FIAP, roll 1294, file 11/1949, f. 129

before the inauguration of the Doftana museum, it seems that its creators were quite aware of the fact that Doftana was not actually a Romanian homologue of Auschwitz.

Another visit is documented in the fall of 1949, to Germany on the occasion of the Peace Week. Comrade Eugenia Luncaș visited Ravensbrück, the former women's camp and was impressed by the number of 92.000 women that suffered there, of all nationalities (although not Jews, the word is never mentioned in her report).¹⁵⁷

The interpretation of the Holocaust as national tragedy, by counting the Jewish victims by their national affiliations is not a Romanian interpretation. The fact that these reports stress the national and political quality of the victims is not a misunderstanding on their part but merely a re-narration of a master-narrative that would not, until the 1960s recognize the distinct nature of the Holocaust, distinct from other war atrocities. When the images of the liberation of the camps toured the world in 1945, they were generally called "world war II atrocity photos"¹⁵⁸ as the former concentration camps were not considered Holocaust sites but sites of war atrocities perpetrated by the Nazi/fascists.

As James Young observed, after 1945, Germans saw themselves too as victims of fascism. The first monument to be erected in Berlin was at the Plötzensee prison where political prisoners, mainly Germans were imprisoned.¹⁵⁹ Dachau, even if not in the Soviet occupied area, was memorialized for decades as a place of political martyrdom. The reasons for this "blindness" for the massive Jewish tragedy in Nazi-occupied Europe are thus not ideologically related to the Soviet occupation. "Victims are remembered according to the experience and identity of the rememberers,"¹⁶⁰ and

¹⁵⁷ Eugenia Luncaș, "Impressions from Peace Week in Germany, September 9-14, 1949," ANR, fond FIAP, roll 1294, file 11/1949, 109-123.

¹⁵⁸ Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera's Eye* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 1.

¹⁵⁹ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 55.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

the rememberers, on both sides of the Iron Curtain were equally interested in stressing the resistance to fascism and the political attributes of the victims of the Nazi regime or occupation. It was this strange consensus that made it possible for Doftana to become indeed a part of this network of memorial places. As long as both victims of Doftana and victims of Auschwitz were named “antifascists” and framed in a story not of racial, but of political and even national (more in Poland’s case¹⁶¹) martyrdom, than Doftana and Auschwitz were indeed parts of the same story.

The fact that the massive and purposeful extermination of Jews and Roma was largely ignored after the Second World War is known today and the reasons for this temporary oblivion have been thoroughly analyzed. Major Holocaust sites, such as Auschwitz or Dachau, have not come to be acknowledged as such up until the 1960s. The peculiarity of Doftana is that, in terms of discourse, it was more honest and revealing than its fellow memorials. Doftana had truly been a political prison (indeed, for both communists / antifascists and fascists) and no racial extermination had ever taken place on its premises. The 1950s antifascist European consensus fit better the Doftana narrative than the Auschwitz narrative and made Doftana one of the genuine sites of memory that claimed to honor political resistance to fascism.

The photographic archive that made it to the National Archives as a part of the ISISP (Institute for Historical and Socio-Political Studies of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party¹⁶²) fond is revealing for the international context that Doftana was made to fit into. The photographic sub-fond I am referring to is called

¹⁶¹ ”In the course of only two years [1945-1947], Polish national sacrifice became the central element of Auschwitz memory, while the fate of the Jews at the camp, although never explicitly denied, remained on the margins of the more comprehensive commemoration of registered Polish prisoners and those of other nationalities.” Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland, and the Politics of Commemoration, 1945-1979*, 35.

¹⁶² As of 1952, Doftana is a section of the Institute for Party History, later to be renamed Institute for Historical and Socio-Political Studies of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party.

*Prisons and Camps*¹⁶³ and it contains 325 images from places as diverse as: Aiud, Buchenwald, Caransebeș, Dachau, Doftana, Gurs, Jilava, Mislea, Odessa, Sachsenhausen, Târgu Jiu, Tomsk, Vapniarka or Văcărești. Concentration camps from Germany (Dachau, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen), France (Gurs) or the Soviet Union (Tomsk) stay side by side with Romanian concentration camps (Vapniarka). However, Doftana is clearly overrepresented with 207 images of the 325 while all the other camps are documented with 1 to 10 images at the most. It is as if Doftana is the main character, while Dachau, Gurs, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen are supporting characters in a narrative made not only of words but also of images.

As decades passed and the horrors of the concentration camps were accepted as public knowledge, the story of Doftana was somehow weakened. No matter how harsh the living conditions might have been in Doftana, even if retrospectively greatly exaggerated, the devastating 1940 earthquake was no match for the gas chambers. Even though the scope of this research does not go beyond the 1950s, I think it can be argued, as a working hypothesis for future studies, that the Doftana narrative tried to keep pace with the emerging Holocaust genre. The 1979 monograph on Doftana by Olimpiu Matichescu,¹⁶⁴ the last monograph on Doftana written during the Communist regime, was translated into German as *Das Konzentrationslager Doftana, Symbol des revolutionären Heldentums*. In his memories about Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, Gheorghe Apostol¹⁶⁵ adds this piece of information that not was not to be found in the 1950s propaganda discourse on Doftana: “It was not for nothing that the general

¹⁶³ ANR, fond ISISP- Fototeca, sub-fond Prisons and Camps.

¹⁶⁴ Matichescu, *Doftana Simbol Al Eroismului Revolucionar (Doftana Symbol of Revolutionary Heroism)*.

¹⁶⁵ Gheorghe Apostol was imprisoned in the interwar period, as a member of the RCP together with Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and he held different important position in the Communist government after the Second World War. He was rejected from Party leadership in 1969 by Nicolae Ceaușescu whom he had hoped to replace as the successor of Dej. Comisia Prezidentiaala pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din Romania, *Raport Final*, ed. Dorin Dobrinu and Cristian Vasile (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2008).

Direction for Penitentiaries of the Ministry of Interior chose a man whom they had sent in Hitler's Germany to study and experiment the methods and regimes used on communist and antifascists prisoners in those prisons. Back to Romania, with a heavy baggage of experience, he was appointed director of the Doftana prison, that Săvinescu or <<the Dragon>> as he was called by the political and common law inmates who suffered his unlawful deeds."¹⁶⁶

However, Doftana sunk into oblivion and was ultimately dismantled, after 1989, while other members of its network in the 1950s thrived and became major sites of European memory. Even though the story they told in the 1950s was quite similar, stressing the antifascist struggle and fascist atrocities (barely mentioning the racial rationale behind the atrocities), in the cases of genuine former concentration camps, the symbolic power of the place survived the misleading narrative and succeeded, when it became politically possible and desirable, in presenting their hidden narratives. In Doftana' case, the lack of any appealing narrative for the end of the 20th century visitor, led to its abandonment and transformation, once again, into a ruin.

1.5. Prisons, museums, memorials: the contact zones

If Doftana's creation is contemporary to the creation of major sites of Holocaust memorialisation, then the question on the possible sources of inspiration for Doftana remains unanswered. When discussing a visible current upsurge in prison

¹⁶⁶ Gheorghe Apostol, *Eu Și Gheorghiu-Dej (Me and Gheorghiu-Dej)* (Bucharest: Asociația Scântea, 2010), 23. I could not verify this information. I find it highly unlikely that the Romanian Ministry of Interior might have sent prison personnel for training in German political prisons and camps. This might be an echo of the fact that German guards themselves were trained in the Dachau camp and then sent throughout the German occupied territory. It might also be one of those rumors circulating inside the prison which might have made the antifascists fight of the Communist prisoners plausible, if the director himself was Nazi-trained. If this were so, traces of this rumor should have been found in other accounts of Doftana former inmates and I could not find any such trace.

and memorial museums current scholarly literature only traces its genealogy back to early Holocaust memorials or sometimes World War One memorials. Because the focus is on memorials, current studies ignore a longer history of transforming prisons into museums which might be very relevant for this discussion.

Buildings are known to be resistant to change. Especially modern institutional buildings, designed to function for a certain purpose are usually hard to transform for a different functionality. Why is it though that prisons seem to transform quite smoothly into museums? Is it the architecture itself that works both as concentrationary and exhibitionary space? Is it their similar birth date, is it the current fascination with places of suffering that made the prison-museum a well-known and wide spread hybrid type of institution?

“Most frequently compared to the temple or the cathedral, the museum is, in fact, closer in age to building types such as the prison, the railway station, or the department store,”¹⁶⁷ writes Michaela Giebelhausen, an art historian of both prison and museum architecture. “Rightfully it seems, the traditional museum has been compared with the disciplinary institutions of the bureaucratic nation state that enforces control over persons, spaces, objects by pigeonholing them and curbing their nomadic tendencies. Thus the museum is like the school in that it purports both to educate and to regiment; it is like the prison in that it isolates its inmates in categorical cells; and it is like the hospital insofar as artworks are sanitized and shielded from the nefarious influence of extra-esthetic abuses.”¹⁶⁸

Both prison and museum are modern institutions, in the Foucauldian understanding of modernity, with similarities and affinities going beyond the mere

¹⁶⁷ Michaela Giebelhausen, “The Architecture Is the Museum,” in *Janet Marstine, New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 41.

¹⁶⁸ Maleuvre, *Museum Memories*, 11.

coincidence of their birth moment. Even more, turning prisons into museums and thus creating this hybrid institution, the prison-museum, is in itself a modern process whose meaning, purpose and consequences will be analyzed in the following pages.

The prison-museum is most of the times analyzed, if at all, as a subspecies of the memorial museum whose importance increased exponentially during the last decades. I define the memorial museum as a form of museum evolved from the memorial, exhibiting a specific event with the purpose of keeping the memory of the event alive. Most often the event memorialized in the memorial-museum is a traumatic one (war, genocide, imprisonment, torture) and the memorial-museum is itself one of the sites where the event occurred. This is one of the reasons why authenticity is of outermost importance in these museums and when the museum is erected on a site unrelated to the event, the efforts to create this authenticity “as if it were on the real site of the event” is even greater (such is the case of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).

While there might be memorial museums who are not housed in former prisons, former concentration camps or, more generally, former sites of suffering, almost all prisons turned into museums function as memorial-museums, emphasizing and memorializing the grim events that took place inside the prison walls. As historian James Mark has observed, “Since the 1970s, the prison has increasingly become the location par excellence for the memorialization of past dictatorships` violence across the globe.”¹⁶⁹

Museum scholar Paul Williams published in 2007 an almost exhaustive inventory of existing memorial-museums where he notes that “Of the institutional

¹⁶⁹ Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution*, 90.

places converted into memorial museums, the most common is the former prison.”¹⁷⁰ His analysis places the genealogy of these memorial-museums in the context of Holocaust memorialization arguing that Holocaust memorials “provide the essential background for the less established examples analyzed here.” While he tries to go further back into history his only other references are the First World War memorials, as he claims “many Holocaust memorials are themselves shaped (positively and negatively) in response to the form and meaning of World War memorials.”¹⁷¹ Williams emphasizes the importance of both the form of these early memorials and the “social practices of visitation”¹⁷² that they established, a practice on which memorial-museums have subsequently built upon.

While there is growing consensus among scholars on the fact that Holocaust memorials have indeed emerged as a genre¹⁷³ which nowadays includes even memorials and memorial-museums that are not dedicated to the Shoah but to other mass atrocities, like war genocides and the crimes of Communism, it is worthwhile, in my view, to analyze more distant, in time and space, examples of places of imprisonment, torture and arbitrary killing turned into museums. Establishing a genealogy of these prison-museums beyond the Holocaust memorial genre might account for the current diversity of memorial-museums and those memorial-museum that fit the genre but were inaugurated before any Holocaust memorial was ever established, like the Doftana prison-museum.

Genealogies of memorial-museums have until now attempted to trace the roots of these institutions to previous memorials, namely war memorials and have thus overlooked the seminal examples of prisons turned into museums as far back as the

¹⁷⁰ Williams, *Memorial Museums*, 88.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁷³ Marcuse, “Holocaust Memorials.”

19th century. Memorializing mass atrocities might be a characteristic of the 20th century, however, the idea of turning prisons into museums can be traced back to 19th century practices and the functioning of such a museum as the Bargello National Museum in Florence¹⁷⁴ bears numerous similarities to the functioning and purpose of contemporary prison-museums.

The modern practice of turning prisons into museums, growing more and more fashionable as I write, is not the only structural connection between prisons and museums. Their compared analysis as institutions, their functioning, organization and purpose revealed similarities that prompted some to include the prison and the museum in the same genre, merely a different incarnation of the surveillance society convincingly described by Michel Foucault already in 1975.¹⁷⁵

The first attempt to substantiate this claim with solid arguments is probably Tony Bennett's 1995 *The Birth of the Museum*, "a politically focused genealogy for the modern public museum."¹⁷⁶ Bennett starts a dialogue with Foucault's disciplinary society gathering pro and cons on whether the museum can or cannot be included in the same genre. The title of Bennett's books, a reverence to Foucault's *Birth of the Prison*, might suggest that the author is inclined to merely follow on Foucault's footsteps. However, Bennett is actually reluctant to include the museum along other Foucauldian institutions, such as the prison.

Both modern prison and modern museum were born around the same period, late 18th century to early 19th century, together with and as institutions of the panoptical society. They share a similar rhetoric of power, the same discretionary

¹⁷⁴ Allie Terry, "Criminals and Tourists: Prison History and Museum Politics at the Bargello in Florence," *Art History* 33, no. 5 (December 2010): 836–855.

¹⁷⁵ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

¹⁷⁶ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 5.

usage of the bodies of visitors/ prisoners and a particularly modern way of appropriating vision with their special emphasis on seeing and being seen.

Bennett describes the public museum as “a space of observation and regulation in order that the visitors’ body might be taken hold of and be molded in accordance with the requirements of new norms of public conduct,”¹⁷⁷ just as the prison takes hold of, controls and moulds the body and soul of the prisoner. Moreover, civic education, for children and adults, is no longer given in front of the scaffold, as public punishment, but in the museum and in the trial room.¹⁷⁸ Bennett agrees that the rhetoric of power embedded in both museums and prison is similar: “This was the rhetoric of power embodied in the exhibitionary complex – a power made manifest not in its ability to inflict pain but by its ability to organize and co-ordinate an order of things and to produce a place for the people in relation to that order.”¹⁷⁹

However, Bennett continues to see major differences between museums and prisons. As punishment is withdrawn from public view with modernity, museums enter public view at the same time. “Museums may have enclosed objects within walls, but the nineteenth century saw their doors opened to the general public – witnesses whose presence was just as essential to a display of power as had been that of the people before the spectacle of punishment in the eighteenth century.”¹⁸⁰ Finally, Bennett includes the museum in the disciplinary society as a sort of preamble of the prison. “For those who failed to adopt the tutelary relation to the self promoted by popular schooling or whose hearts and minds failed to be won in the new pedagogic relations between state and people symbolized by the open doors of the museum, the

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 24.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 67.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 59.

closed walls of the penitentiary threatened a sterner instruction in the lessons of power. Where instruction and rhetoric failed, punishment began.”¹⁸¹

The crucial aspect in Bennett’s analysis, from the point of view of this study, is the inclusion of the visitor in the creation and functioning of the museum, in what Bennett coined as *the exhibitionary complex*. If museum and prison have anything in common it is the role assigned to the human being that enters through their gates. The analogy between prisoners and museum objects is too simple and does not reveal the modern dimension of both institutions. While the purpose of the prison is not simply to isolate and own the body of the prisoner (as might be the case with museum objects) but to mould, perhaps even reform its soul, the museum performs the same role for those who have not sinned against society yet. Visitors and prisoners alike are witnesses to the grandiose display of power organized by the modern state, a spectacle that finally requires they become participants, able to see and to be seen constantly. In 1901, the Pan-American Exposition warned its visitors: “Please remember when you get inside the gates you are part of the show.”¹⁸²

More recent critics are less reluctant than Bennett to put prison and museum side by side: “The relationship between the museum and the prison is not a relationship of analogy but one of continuity – the prison system *is* [authors’ emphasis] the model for the museum. The museum is part and parcel of the prison network described by Foucault [...]”¹⁸³ Vincent Pécoil analyzes the practices of contemporary museums and concludes that Foucault was right even as he was pointing out that the panoptical society was on the way of being replaced by another. Museums, as other institutions follow closely, opening their gates and going out into

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 88.

¹⁸² Quoted in *ibid.*, 68.

¹⁸³ Vincent Pécoil, “The Museum as Prison. Post Post-Scriptum on Control Societies,” *Third Text* 18, no. 5 (2004): 436.

the streets just as the streets themselves became places of ubiquitous surveillance: "Foucault's analysis of disciplinary societies also pointed to certain factors suggesting that these are types of society we were in the process of leaving behind; [...] The ideal project of confinement settings, particularly visible in the factory and shared by the classical Museum – focus, spatial distribution, temporal arrangement – is gradually being replaced by the externalization and spread of these functional aspects. The museum is also caught up in this 'overall crisis in all confinement environments – prison, hospital, factory, school, family', in which, in the wake of Foucault, Deleuze saw a sign of the emergence of what he described by the term 'control societies'."¹⁸⁴

The continuum between prison and museum described by Pécoil might account for the rather smooth and unproblematic transition from prison to museum in an ever increasing number of cases. What might initially seem a difficult task, as the architectural structure of a building poses great impediments when the purpose of the building is changed, seems to function in this case the other way around. The successful transformation of more and more prisons into museums is a starting point of enquiry into similarities that are most of the time denied even by the organizers of such drastic institutional transformations.

An early example of how prisons and museums can function subsequently but also simultaneously is to be found in late 18th century France where Brissot de Warville writes in his *Théorie de lois criminelles* (1781) of opening up prison gates twice a year for the general public to visit prisons and see "the spectacle of the atonement for crime."¹⁸⁵ Architectural historian Anthony Vidler analyzes his writing

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 441.

¹⁸⁵ Quoted in Anthony Vidler, *The Writing of the Walls: Architectural Theory in the Late Enlightenment* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Architectural Press, 1987), 78–79.

and many more of the period and vividly describes the design of punishment,¹⁸⁶ the *architecture terrible* that architects and theorists defined as the most suitable for containing the body and souls of criminals. Both Vidler and Foucault stress the importance of architecture in conceiving these disciplinary spaces and the effect of the architecture on the human being forced or willing (in the case of museum or of the one-a-year visit to the prison) to spend time inside their walls.

While arguing that prison architecture and museum architecture actually diverged greatly, with the prison design becoming more utilitarian while “the museum continued to foster the resonances antiquity could bestow and developed into an overtly symbolic building type,”¹⁸⁷ art historian Michaela Giebelhausen actually argues that “architecture *is* the museum: it is precisely architecture that gives the museum meaning.”¹⁸⁸ Although she certainly means the architecture built purposefully to serve as a museum, one cannot help wondering, if the architecture *is* the museum, what kind of museum a prison is? What are the effects of prison architecture on a prison-museum?

Bargello was a prison and medieval torture site in Florence, ever since the 13th century, until it became visitable in the first half of the 19th century, after the rediscovery of the original school of Giotto frescoes, including a portrait of Dante. In 1857-1865 the site is transformed into a National Museum where everyone could enter and enjoy the Giotto frescoes. The frescoes were ordered there in the first place, in the medieval prison, for moral purposes, hoping to shake the soul of the prisoners brought there to confess and expiate their sins. The 19th century visitor is invited to the museum, to gaze at the same frescoes, for educational and cultural purposes. The

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 73–82.

¹⁸⁷ Michaela Giebelhausen, “The Architecture Is the Museum,” 43.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 42.

modern museum visitor replaces the criminal body but they both contemplate the same works of art. Analyzing this transformation, Allie Terry concludes that “despite the dramatic shift in the audience and the function of the site, violence remained integral to the visual encounter; that is to say, the violence that was once integral to the criminal viewing experience in the prison was translated into a powerful aesthetic experience for the viewer of art within the nineteenth-century museum.”¹⁸⁹

The inauguration of the Bargello museum in 1865¹⁹⁰ was connected to Dante’s sixth centennial. Dante, who had been himself sentenced to death in 1302 in the same Bargello prison, now became the symbol of a resurrection not only of the former prison, but more broadly of art and culture and of “good government” in Florence.¹⁹¹

From a museological point of view, Terry described the transformation of the entire building in a museum object, a “museum effect” to be perfected in the 20th century memorial-museums. “The material artifacts of the prison, including the walls themselves, are severed from their intended utilitarian function and given new context as ‘objects of visual interest’ through this framing as cultural institution. Each aspect of the former prison becomes a site worthy of lingering vision, from the decorative content on the gates of the staircase to the cracked plaster walls of the chapel.”¹⁹² The 19th century visitors were highly aware of the traumatic history of the building. In fact, the attraction for most of them was not the beautiful frescoes but the thrill of being inside a former torture site. “Through their bodily engagement with the spaces

¹⁸⁹ Terry, “Criminals and Tourists: Prison History and Museum Politics at the Bargello in Florence,” 840.

¹⁹⁰ “Within seven years the Bargello was reconfigured as the National Museum, and since that time the Bargello has become a leading art institution. The rapid conversion of the site from prison to museum is startling, since the building’s walls, floors, stairs, and ceilings needed major restoration in order to serve as a museum. After the prisoners were relocated to Le Murate, a team of architects, historians, and art restorers under the guidance of Francesco Mazzei and Ferdinando Segoni transformed the prison’s cells, interrogation rooms and warden’s offices into exhibition halls, permanent galleries, and other spaces to accommodate, museum visitors. The architecture was restored to what was believed to be its ‘medieval’ configuration.”*ibid.*, 843.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 846.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 849.

of former atrocities and the aesthetic encounter with the original decoration, these visitors performed a form of civic cleansing that replaced the former judicial role of punishment in the city.”¹⁹³ This experience is unavailable for contemporary visitors, since the vast majority of them are unaware of the history of the building and do not associate it with a former place of suffering.

However, it is time for a new prison in Florence, Le Murate, the place where the inmates of Bargello had been transferred due to the inauguration of the museum, to become a cultural institution. In 2010, the mayor of Florence announced the transformation of Le Murate “From a prison to liberty, from a place of imprisonment and suffering to a new epicenter of Florentine contemporariness.”¹⁹⁴

The reason for the current upsurge in transforming prisons into cultural institutions, sometimes museums is in itself a subject of academic research.¹⁹⁵ For the purposes of this dissertation, I needed a historical framework for prison-museums built before the current boom. It is highly unlikely that the curators of Doftana might have known the Bargello prison but it is highly likely that similar transformations had been performed in modern Europe with equal smoothness and success. There are important elements outlined here that explain the apparent easiness of the process: the architecture, the position of the visitor, the building that offers itself as primary artifact. The genre of prison-museum is easily identifiable since it only includes prisons that have been transformed into museums. Going beyond this institutional succession, prison-museums also share a number of characteristics. The building is

¹⁹³ Ibid., 838.

¹⁹⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 852.

¹⁹⁵ For penal museums see Kevin Walby and Justin Piché, “The Polysemy of Punishment Memorialization: Dark Tourism and Ontario’s Penal History Museums,” *Punishment & Society* 13, no. 4 (2011): 451–472; For transforming former prisons in heritage sites see Grete Swensen, “Concealment or Spectacularisation – Analysing the Heritagisation Process of Old Prisons,” in C. Clark & C.A. Brebbia (eds.), *Defence Sites. Heritage and Future*, Series WIT Transactions on The Built Environment (Southampton: WIT Press, 2012), 231–243.

the main exhibit, it becomes a museum object, catalogued, restored, exhibited and visited/seen as a museum objects. The claim at authenticity is stronger and underlines the museum discourse more powerfully than in other museum. Even though a museum, the prison somehow still remains a prison, and the visitor's experience is highly transformed by hearing a story and seeing objects in a prison than in some other neutral place. Subsequent chapters will analyze two more Romanian prisons transformed in anti-communist museum, the Sighet Memorial-Museum or on the verge of being transformed into one, the Râmnicu Sărat prison, while this chapter ends with a failed musealisation attempt of a former Romanian concentration camp.

1.6. Failed musealisation: the Târgu Jiu Camp Museum

Among the images comprising the Prisons and Camps sub-fond (fond ISISP-Fototeca) at the Romanian National Archives, there is one puzzling image: a big board on the gates of the internment camp for political prisoners in Târgu Jiu announces that this is the *Museum of the Camp for Political Detainees in Târgu Jiu. Branch of the Museum of History of the Communist Party, of the Revolutionary and Democratic Movement of Romania* (Muzeul Lagărului de Internați Politici de la Târgu Jiu. Filială a Muzeului de Istorie a Partidului Comunist, a Mișcării Revoluționare și Democratice din România). The image is not dated; however, since this long name, Muzeul de Istorie a Partidului Comunist, a Mișcării Revoluționare și Democratice din România, has been assigned to the Party Museum in 1965, we can safely deduce that this is a post-1965, a Ceaușescu-era image. Could we also deduce that a museum of this World War Two internment camp was established during Ceaușescu's regime?

The possibility is not far-fetched since many museums of former extermination and internment camps were established during the 1960s and 1970s all over Europe.

However, my amazement when seeing this photograph came from the lack of any mentioning or trace of this museum in all the literature and sources on communist museums I had so far consulted. And yet, there it was, looking back at me, the photograph, the proof, the visual trace of the existence of a museum I had never heard about. But could the photograph be trusted?



Fig. 1.13 Museum of the Camp for Political Detainees in Târgu Jiu. Section of the Museum of History of the Communist Party, of the Revolutionary and Democratic Movement of Romania. Original caption: *Camp of political detainees in Târgu Jiu. Contemporary image (museum)*. Source: ANR, fond ISISP- Fototeca, Prisons and Camps sub-fond, T30.

Târgu Jiu is a medium-sized provincial town, of just over 100.000 inhabitants, in Southern Romania, a region known as Oltenia. It is nowadays most famous for a monumental sculptural ensemble commissioned by the Romanian state to Constantin Brancusi in 1935. Just a few years later, in 1939, the second site that made Târgu Jiu nationally famous appeared on the town's map: the Târgu Jiu camp was organized

near the city's cemetery. From the city's train station to the camp, the inmates or their visitors passed Brancusi's Infinity Column which, at that time they simply called *Tătărescu's sausage*.¹⁹⁶

The Târgu Jiu camp was frequently mentioned in communist historiography as the last place of imprisonment for Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (from June 1943 to August 1944)¹⁹⁷ and his fellow communists during the Second World War. It is from the Târgu Jiu camp that Dej escaped just a few days prior to August 23rd, 1944,¹⁹⁸ the day when Romania quit the alliance with Nazi Germany and decided to continue the war alongside the Soviet Union and the Allies. It is from the Târgu Jiu camp that Dej, according to Socialist era historiography, organized this coup d'état, the arrest of marshal Antonescu and the changing of Romania's military alliances. Contemporary historians acknowledge that Târgu Jiu camp was the place where, alongside Doftana, Dej established his leadership among the "national" communists, those who spent the war in Romanian prisons and not in Moscow.¹⁹⁹

As communist historiography keeps referring to the Târgu Jiu camp as a camp for political detainees, a terminology that has been taken up unchallenged even in the post-communist historiography, the fact that Târgu Jiu also served as a transit, concentration and labor camp for Jewish deportees was, and still is, obscured. Only the literature dealing specifically with the Romanian Holocaust mentions Târgu Jiu as

¹⁹⁶ Baruşu Arghezi, *Inaintea Uitarii (Before Forgetting)* (Oradea: Mihai Eminescu, 1996), 59; It was Arethie Tătărescu, the wife of Romania's prime minister at the time, Gheorghe Tătărescu that had the initiative to commission a monumental work commemorating the heroes of the First World War to already famous Constantin Brancusi. Sanda Miller, "Brancusi's 'Column of the Infinite'," *The Burlington Magazine* 122, no. 928 (July 1, 1980): 470.

¹⁹⁷ Andrei Muraru, ed., *Dictionarul penitenciarelor din România comunistă: 1945-1967 (Dictionary of penitentiaries in Communist Romania: 1945-1967)* (Iasi: Polirom, 2008), 486.

¹⁹⁸ Dumitru Lăcătuşu, "Fuga spre putere. Evadarea lui Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej din lagărul de la Târgu Jiu" (Flight to Power. The escape of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej from Târgu Jiu camp) in Stefan Bosomitu and Mihai Burcea, *Spectrele lui Dej*.

¹⁹⁹ Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons*, 83, 100, 124; Levy, *Ana Pauker*, 70; Dennis Deletant, "New Light on Gheorghiu-Dej's Struggle for Dominance in the Romanian Communist Party, 1944-49," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 73, no. 4 (October 1, 1995): 659-690.

a concentration camp,²⁰⁰ in the context of state-organized deportations. Starting in 1941, thousands of Jews have been sent to the Târgu Jiu concentration camp and to other camps in the southern area of Romania.

“As early as June 21, 1941, Ion Antonescu ordered that all able-bodied eighteen- to sixty-year-old Jewish males in all villages lying between the Siret and the Prut rivers be removed to the Târgu Jiu camp in Oltenia and the villages surrounding the camp.[...] In addition to Târgu Jiu, the Ministry of the Interior and certain military garrisons set up camps in Craiova, Caracal, Turnu Severin, and Lugoj.”²⁰¹ The historians of the Romanian Holocaust acknowledge that there are important differences between the orders issued by the Conducător and their practical fulfillment.²⁰² The result of this order was that by July 31, 1941 some forty thousand Jews had been evacuated from Moldova, some thousands of them to the Târgu Jiu camp.²⁰³ The hesitations, contradictory orders and discretionary fulfillment of non-contradictory orders make it difficult to trace the numbers and fate of the Jews brought to the Târgu Jiu camp, while there is yet no comprehensive history of this camp in either Romanian or international Holocaust studies.

Although post-war communist historiography insists on using its official name while functioning and call it a camp for political detainees, it is probable that for most of its existence, the majority of the camp inmates were Jews. Some of the Jews

²⁰⁰ Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*; Jean Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, *The Comprehensive History of the Holocaust* (Lincoln: Jerusalem: University of Nebraska Press; Yad Vashem, 2011); Vladimir Solonari, *Purifying the Nation: Population Exchange and Ethnic Cleansing in Nazi-allied Romania* (Washington, D.C.: Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally Ion Antonescu and His Regime, Romania 1940-1944* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Carp, *Cartea Neagră. Suferințele Evreilor Din România 1940-1944 (The Black Book. The Sufferings of Jews in Romania 1940-1944)*.

²⁰¹ Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 111.

²⁰² Ibid., 294–295.

²⁰³ Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, 510–515.

deported in 1941 were later brought back to Moldova,²⁰⁴ while others were deported further to Transnistrian camps.²⁰⁵ On August 8, 1942 Antonescu ordered that all “communist Jews” and all Jewish detainees in the Târgu Jiu camp be deported to Transnistria.²⁰⁶

If there was something worse in World War Two Romania than being a Jew, that was being a Communist Jew. One of the reasons why the post-war blending of the Jewish tragedy in a communist tragedy worked so smoothly is that Antonescu himself based his anti-Jewish policies on the propagandistic slogan that all Jews are communists and thus loyal to the Soviet enemy. The Jewish population, especially those from the territories occupied from the Soviet Union, or living close to its borders was portrayed as the most faithful ally of the Bolsheviks. The Jews were thus framed not only as political but military enemies whose extermination was a legitimate military duty of the Romanian army.

1.6.1. Camp days in Târgu Jiu for political inmates

In want of a comprehensive history of the Târgu Jiu camp, two very different historical traditions have to be summoned in order to compile an accurate picture of the camp’s life and functioning during the Second World War: the literature on the Romanian Holocaust, a field emerging, for quite well-known reasons, only after 1989 and post-war communist historiography. Both historical paradigms seem to enjoy ignoring each other and other relevant historical contexts. While Radu Ioanid acknowledges that “Non-Jews too suffered torture, beatings, and exhausting labor in

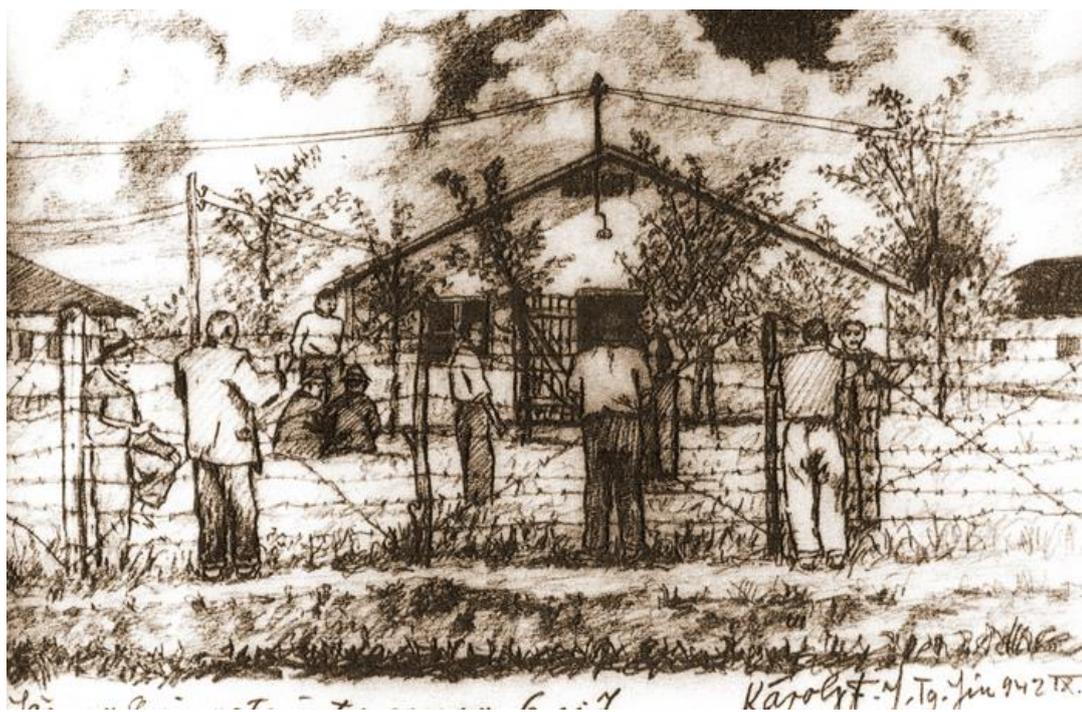
²⁰⁴ “4-5000 Jews from Dorohoi deported in the summer of 1941 to Târgu Jiu and Craiova in southern Romania and later brought back.” Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 159.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 115.

²⁰⁶ Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 291.

the Târgu Jiu camp,²⁰⁷ as he refers to ethnic Hungarians being subjected to forced labor for the Romanian state, he is the only Holocaust historian to put the Jewish Târgu Jiu camp in wider context. On the other hand, those who discuss the political camp, writing during the communist regime, barely ever mention the important Jewish population of inmates.

In order to unify these sometimes contradictory perspectives, I brought into the narrative the perspectives of the political inmates of Târgu Jiu who wrote memoirs immediately after the end of the war (Zaharia Stancu²⁰⁸ and Nicușor Graur²⁰⁹) and the testimonies of Jews interned in the same camp, testimonies gathered in the 1990s by the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive.²¹⁰



²⁰⁷ Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 115.

²⁰⁸ Zaharia Stancu, *Zile de Lagăr (Camp Days)* (Bucharest: Socec, 1945).

²⁰⁹ Nicușor Graur, *In preajma altei lumi; memorii politice, amintiri, portrete, procese și detineri, puscăriile, celulele, și lagărele mele, manifestele clandestine sub regimurile dictatoriale, exilul în Cehoslovacia. (Close to another world: political memoirs, memories, portraits, trials and imprisonments, my prisons, cells and camps, clandestine manifestos, exile in Czechoslovakia)* (București: Editura S.A.R.C., 1946).

²¹⁰ Established in 1994 by Steven Spielberg to collect and preserve the testimonies of survivors and other witnesses of the Holocaust, the USC Shoah Foundation maintains one of the largest video digital libraries in the world: nearly 52,000 video testimonies in 32 languages and from 56 countries. USC Shoah Foundation is part of the Dana and David Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences at the University of Southern California. <http://vha.usc.edu/login.aspx>

Fig. 1.14. Pencil drawing of Târgu Jiu camp by Károlyi F.J. in 1942 reproduced in Stoenescu, Aura. “Lagărul De La Târgu Jiu, o Fantomă Interzisă (The Târgu Jiu Camp, a Forbidden Phantom).” *Vertical*, June 23, 2010.

The most famous literary-historical depiction of the Târgu Jiu camp, in Romanian culture, are the memories of the no less famous, though contested Romanian writer Zaharia Stancu²¹¹ published in 1945, *Camp days* (*Zile de lagăr*). The book, although covering an important topic of communist historiography has not been reprinted until the end of the communist regime, despite the fact that Zaharia Stancu himself became a major Socialist Realist writer. His description of the camp’s life, written in a mixture of tragedy and black humor certainly did not fit the communist narrative of hardship and political resistance.

Although Stancu himself does not devote too many words to the Jewish population he does state: “I can see that among the inmates the majority are Jews;”²¹² “in the fifth cabin, where I live, there are only Jews;”²¹³ “when the group of political inmates was freed, Zlătescu²¹⁴ was glad. He was left again only with the Jews.”²¹⁵ The predominance of the Jewish population is clear, at least for the 1942-1943 years when Stancu himself was interned in the camp, yet the writer chooses to dwell on the exceptional and picturesque characters of the camp. Thus, he makes a character out of the Jew who became a Legionnaire, an opportunistic yet tragic personage rejected by

²¹¹ Zaharia Stancu (1902-1974) was a Romanian writer and journalist close to the left in the interwar period. He was imprisoned during the war for these views and later became a major literary figure of the communist regime. His most famous novel is *Descult* (Barefoot), published in 1948, a typical and canonical account of the life of poor peasants in Romania around the year of the last major peasant revolt in Europe (1907). This novel was so influential and interpreted not as literary fiction but as accurate historical description that scholars and journalists still feel the need to insist nowadays that the famous scene of peasants harvesting grapes with muzzles on their faces is not “true.” Zaharia Stancu is believed to have been an informer of the interwar political police Siguranța but no clear evidence has so far been brought for these allegations.

²¹² Stancu, *Zile de Lagăr (Camp Days)*, 67.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 161.

²¹⁴ Zlătescu was the commander of the camp.

²¹⁵ Stancu, *Zile de Lagăr (Camp Days)*, 149.

both Jews and Iron Guard members;²¹⁶ he describes the prostitutes, the thieves and the social organization of the camp which strangely reproduced the free world outside. The camp was divided into sections theoretically based on the offenses brought by the inmates: the communists were separated from the common thieves; the Jews were separated from the legionnaires. Yet, the first section, to which Zaharia Stancu belonged, housed all of the above, in far better living conditions, due to their higher income and social status. The members of the first section were able to pay for better living conditions, including employing as servants inmates from the other sections. “In that camp, inmates were divided into two classes. In the first class there were those who paid ten thousand lei a month and had better living conditions and more food,”²¹⁷ Ion Gheorghe Maurer²¹⁸ recalls. This explains why this section accommodated writers such as Zaharia Stancu, Tudor Arghezi or Victor Eftimiu, , former politicians, but also Jewish entrepreneurs alongside prominent Iron Guard members and ideologues such as Ernest Bernea, Radu Gyr or P.P. Panaitescu.²¹⁹

²¹⁶ Ibid., 120.

²¹⁷ Lavinia Betea, *Partea lor de adevar: Alexandru Bârladeanu despre Dej, Ceausescu si Iliescu Convorbiri ; Maurer si lumea de ieri. Marturii despre stalinizarea României ; Convorbiri neterminate cu Corneliu Manescu (Their part of truth)* (Bucharest: Compania, 2008), 291.

²¹⁸ Ion Gheorghe Maurer was a lawyer and a RCP member in the interwar period. He became influential after 1957 as president of the Great National Assembly and prim-minister until 1974. His influence was crucial in choosing Ceausescu as the successor of Dej. Maurer himself, in a post-1989 interview claims he never resided in the first section at Târgu Jiu but with the other communists and lost 30 kilograms during his two and a half years interment. Lavinia Betea, *Partea lor de adevar* (Bucharest: Compania, 2008), 290.

²¹⁹ The chapter on the arrival of Iron Guard members in the camp is probably one of the most salient of the book. Fear is the predominant feeling among both Iron Guardists, who fear being shot dead and among Jews who fear being attacked by the Legionnaires. Stancu, *Zile de Lagăr (Camp Days)*, 157–171.



Fig. 1.15. Communist inmates in the Târgu Jiu camp in 1943. Second from the left is Nicolae Ceaușescu. Source: Fototeca online a comunismului românesc, #E013 (ANR, fond ISISP, Fototeca, 1/1943)

A wooden cross (*troița*) divides the camp and functions as a border between the communist political inmates and the first section.²²⁰ It is one of the reasons why Zaharia Stancu never mentions the communist inmates, their names, activities or living conditions. The few communists that are mentioned, like Ion Gheorghe Maurer, reside in the “intellectuals” section and not with the rest of the communist prisoners.²²¹ Stancu’s account of camp life in Târgu Jiu was certainly not of much use to the emerging communist historiography. The narration of the camp as only a political camp strongly conflicts with Stancu’s memoirs of petty thieves, prostitutes,

²²⁰ Ibid., 85.

²²¹ This division of the Târgu Jiu camp was not without consequences. The fact that Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, also interned in Târgu Jiu camp lived in a different section with better living conditions and was released after only eight months due to family interventions, was resented by Gheorghiu-Dej and finally led to Pătrășcanu’s trial and execution. Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons*, 113; Levy claims Pătrășcanu was offered but refused to live in the better section, a fact which did not decrease the resentment felt by Dej’s group. Levy, *Ana Pauker*, 136.

black market dealers and many Jews who keep asking: “Why do I stay here? I am Jew. That is what I am guilty of.”²²²

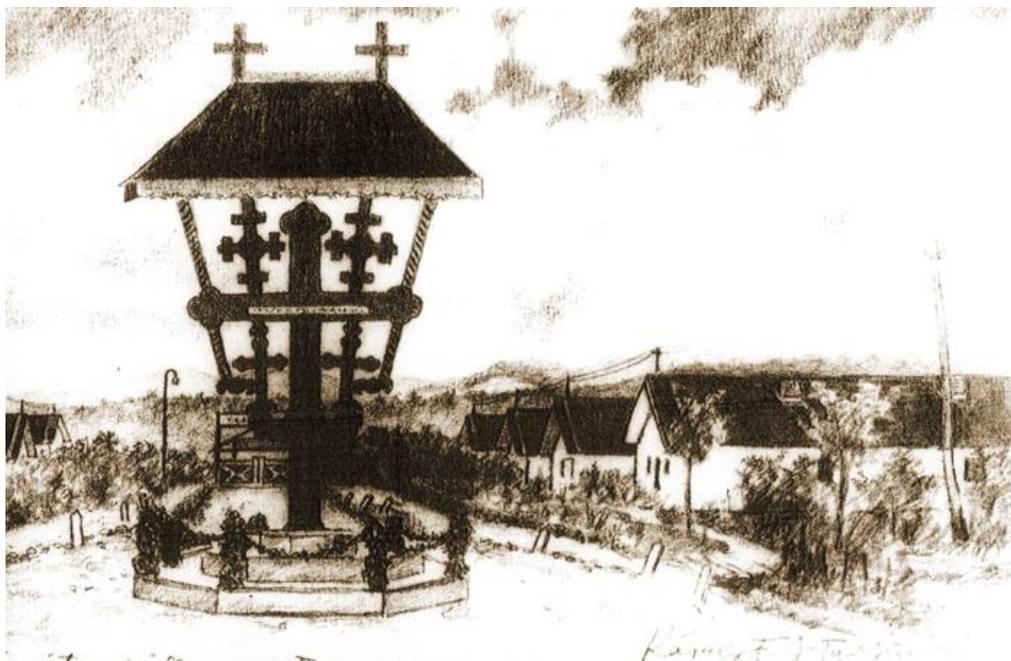


Fig. 1.16. The wooden cross (*troița*) in Târgu Jiu camp. Drawing by Károlyi F.J. in 1942 reproduced in Stoenescu, Aura. “Lagărul De La Târgu Jiu, o Fantomă Interzisă (The Târgu Jiu Camp, a Forbidden Phantom).” *Vertical*, June 23, 2010.

Another contemporary account of life in the Târgu Jiu camp, printed in 1946 but soon put on index, is largely consistent with Stancu’s account. Since the author, Nicușor Graur is a member of the National Peasant Party, the insistence on the political activity and resistance of the peasantists (*țărăniști*) inside the camp is not surprising. A lawyer, journalist and elected deputy in the Romanian Parliament, Nicușor Graur seems to have been close to the left even before the war and certainly during it. After the Soviet occupation of Romania, he was however one of those fellow-travelers that the communists used to destroy from within the “historical parties.” He was interned in Târgu Jiu in December 1942, almost at the same time with Zaharia Stancu and a larger cohort of intellectuals and politicians considered

²²² Stancu, *Zile de Lagăr (Camp Days)*, 157.

political enemies of the Antonescu regime or simply "alarmists" prophesying the defeat of the allied German Army.²²³ He was also interned in the first section of the camp with those who could afford to pay for the upgrade in living conditions. The communists were employed by the internees in the first section as cleaning personnel, while the section peacefully housed "in the most cordial of relations: alarmists, communists, legionnaires, supporters of A.C. Cuza (cuziști)."²²⁴ He describes the most deserving and politically involved inmates as being the communists and his group, the peasantists: "There were basically two parties represented in the camp: the communists, a few hundreds, all in the second section and us, the national-peasantists,"²²⁵ united by what he coins *the Târgu-Jiu spirit* whose guiding principle was "no enemy to the left."²²⁶ No matter the author's strive to include the communists in his narrative, the passages where he praises their dignified behavior and political work (as opposed to that of the legionnaires that he describes as "shipwrecks"²²⁷) are obviously an opportunistic addition to a story that fundamentally argues that it was the national-peasantists and mainly himself who had effectively fought against the Antonescu regime outside and inside the camp. The communist only appear as second rate inmates, in their role of cleaning personnel, and second rate resistance fighters, supported with money and clothes by the peasantists in section one or acting as couriers for the news that Graur himself extracted from forbidden foreign radio broadcast.²²⁸ It is no surprise that the book was never reprinted, but actually "purged" (*epurată*) as the pencil note on the copy from the Bucharest University Library testifies.

²²³ "All those without a political party but condemned for political offenses were called << alarmists >>." Graur, *In preajma altei lumi*, 254.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid., 253.

²²⁶ Ibid., 260–261.

²²⁷ Ibid., 295–306, chapter The Legionnaire Shipwrecks.

²²⁸ Ibid., 326.

Graur's account insists more on the political than Stancu's²²⁹ and probably because of this the presence of the Jews in the camp is even more obscured in Graur's account. Only towards the end of the narrative, when the legionnaires are brought to the camp in large numbers, two to three thousand, do the Jews also appear as inmates:²³⁰ "Especially in our section, where the vast majority of the Jews where [...] Why precisely here, where there were so many Jews and so many communists?"²³¹

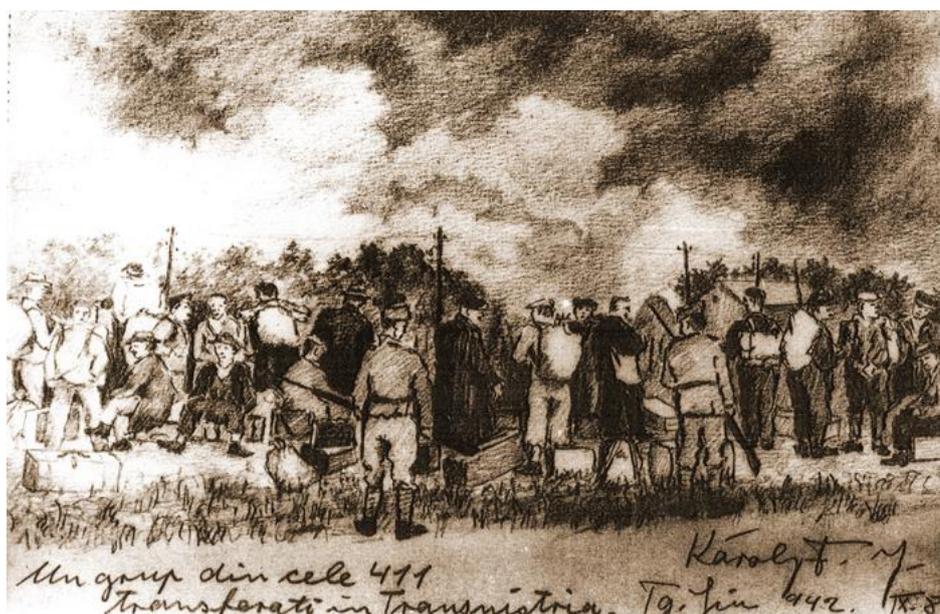


Fig. 1.17. "A group out of the 411 transferred to Transnistria. Karoly F.J. Tg. Jiu 942, September 8." Pencil drawing reproduced in Stoenescu, Aura. "Lagărul De La Târgu Jiu, o Fantomă Interzisă (The Târgu Jiu Camp, a Forbidden Phantom)." *Vertical*, June 23, 2010.

As well as in Stancu's narrative, the humor is an important part of the camp experience, also in this peasantist version of life in Târgu Jiu. Graur and two future inmates, one of them Ion Gheorghe Maurer, the future prim-minister of Socialist Romania, stop in Târgu-Jiu just before their internment in the camp and organize one final festive restaurant meal, with the gipsy band playing and the agents who are

²²⁹ Published on year later that Zaharia Stancu's book, Graur acknowledges to have read "the elite creator's" words on Târgu Jiu. *Ibid.*, 232.

²³⁰ Although Graur is the author of one of the rare Romanian protests against the deportation of Jews to Transnistria. *Ibid.*, 161–167.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 296.

escorting them to the camp by their side.²³² The second time Graur is ordered to be interned in Târgu-Jiu he loses his official escort on the train and goes to the camp by himself where he has to bribe his way behind the barbed wire because the bureaucrats refuse to accept him without the agent and the internment papers lost together with his escort.²³³

The Târgu Jiu camp was created in 1939 to host Polish refugees after the invasion of Poland in September.²³⁴ The Polish refugees built the camp which would host them for the next two years.²³⁵ The fifty wooden barracks had a capacity of two hundred to three hundred people each, thus the camp could host somewhere between six thousand and ten thousand people.²³⁶ In February 1941, by order of the Ministry of Defense, the camp is turned into a camp for political inmates. Thus Poles that had not returned to Poland or went to other European destinations, where surrendered to Germany after marshal Antonescu assumed power. In June and July 1941 the first massive contingents of Jews are brought to the camp from Moldova.²³⁷ The political inmates were not all politically involved but they were all accused of political offenses among which criticism of the regime, of Marshall Antonescu himself²³⁸ or the war alliance with Germany. The camp was successively administrated and guarded by either the Army²³⁹ or the Ministry of Interior, through the Gendarmerie. Although some of the inmates had been condemned by a court of law, as some of the

²³² Ibid., 240–241.

²³³ Ibid., 330–334.

²³⁴ Muraru, *Dictionarul penitenciarelor din România comunistă*, 485.

²³⁵ *Tîrgu Jiu* (Bucharest: Sport-Turism, 1988).

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 111.

²³⁸ Nicusor Graur was interned for a pamphlet ridiculing Marshall Antonescu's wife, Maria for her search of a lost dog with the help of the central printed press. Graur, *In preajma altei lumi*.

²³⁹ Zaharia Stancu describes the deplorable state of the recruited soldiers that guarded them; their living conditions were sometimes worse than that of the inmates, especially during the winters. Stancu, *Zile de Lagăr (Camp Days)*, 151–155.

Communists were, most of the others were interned based on internment orders issued by the government, the police or the Siguranța.



Fig. 1.17. The remains of the sundial built by the Poles in Târgu Jiu camp in 1940, one of the few genuine traces of the camp. Source: Stoenescu, Aura. “Lagărul De La Târgu Jiu, o Fantomă Interzisă (The Târgu Jiu Camp, a Forbidden Phantom).” *Vertical*, June 23, 2010.

The population of the camp was fluctuant, ranging from several hundred to thousands at some moments. As Ion Gheorghe Maurer remembers life in the camp, in a post-1989 interview when the former Communist prime-minister was already 92 years old:

“I only was in the Târgu Jiu camp, during the war, for two years and a half. There were 2-300 inmates, not only Communists, although afterwards there was only talk of the Communists. [...] I do not know the reasons why the others were there because they were not all politicians. In my case, I was simply arrested and taken there. There were about twenty-thirty Communists in Târgu Jiu. We were locked men and women together. We slept in wooden barracks which were not heated during the winter. Three barracks were occupied by men and one by women. [...] The best food was bean soup. In the bean soup that was given to you in a bowl, you were happy if you found three beans. That was the living. While I stayed there, I lost 30 kilograms.”²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ The description fits the camp life on the other side of the wooden cross, in the Communists group. In the first section, the barracks had stoves, a fact confirmed by both Zaharia Stancu and Nicușor Graur. On the other hand, both authors confirm Maurer’s presence in the first section, not with the other Communists as Maurer places himself 50 years after the facts. Betea, *Partea lor de adevar*, 290.

1.6.2. Concentration, hard labor and transit camp in Târgu Jiu and Bumbăești - Livezeni

There is hardly any doubt, when hearing the Jewish testimonies archived in the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,²⁴¹ that Târgu Jiu was both a concentration and labor camp for the perceived enemies of the Romanian state ruled by Marshall Antonescu. Among them, Jews were the most numerous and subjected to the worst living conditions in the camp. Although not an extermination camp, Târgu Jiu also functioned as a transit camp from which Jews, and this time only Jews, were transferred to proper extermination camps in Transnistria (such as Vapniarka).²⁴² Among the inmates of Târgu Jiu, the Jews were also the first ones to experience the camp as a hard labor camp when sent to break stone for the Bumbăești-Livezeni railway and other working sites.²⁴³

The Bumbăești-Livezeni railway, 30 kilometers of railway cut through the mountains on Jiului Valley, was close to the Târgu Jiu camp and one of the sites of hard labor for the camp inmates. “We had then, as we do now, a lot of Jews inmates in the camp. What was their fault? What is my fault? We were born Jews. [...] We were taken to work on Jiului valley. How many indignities, how many crimes perpetrated on Jiului Valley! If someone were to write them once, monstrosities will

²⁴¹ The archive holds 34 testimonies of former inmates of the Târgu Jiu camp. I could only listen and include in my research 23 of them which were recorded in Romanian, English, Italian or Spanish. Even though the interviews are not translated, they are all thoroughly indexed which is a great help in research.

²⁴² Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally Ion Antonescu and His Regime, Romania 1940-1944*, 196–198.

²⁴³ International Commission for Studying Holocaust in Romania (presided by Elie Wiesel), *Final Report*, 116–117.

be revealed!”²⁴⁴ But no one ever did write this story and Bumbești-Livezeni continues to be synonym, in Romanian culture, with voluntary work and maybe communist propaganda and not with forced labor.

Early Communist literature, from the late 1940s, mentions forced labor at the Bumbești-Livezeni railway imposed on Târgu Jiu inmates but only in the context of sabotaging work on the railway. Since constructing this railway became a major volunteering and propaganda event after the war, it is understandable why the early history of the site as a forced labor camp has been obscured. In 1948, Ecaterina Chivu writes in the FIAP journal that when reopening the site as a Communist volunteer site, all the work that had been done during the war by forced labor of the Târgu-Jiu inmates was dismantled: due to effective sabotaging of the Nazi war efforts by the Communist inmates, the resulting work was of very poor quality, she argues, and had to be done all over again.²⁴⁵ Thus, the glorious achievement of the Communist administration, the November 1948 inauguration of the Bumbești-Livezeni railway, could not be tainted by being built with slave labor.

Although hard labor is sometimes mentioned in testimonies of political prisoners in the Târgu Jiu Camp, the detailed accounts of the Jewish inmates are especially revealing.

Vasile Bordeianu was in the camp when the first contingents of Jews began to be sent towards the railway and he was among these first groups.²⁴⁶ He had arrived in the Târgu Jiu camp in early June 1941 but he distinctly remembers that the hard labor was organized after the war started (on June 22st, 1941). He recalls the small food

²⁴⁴ The story continues with a soldier taking back to the camp, with his truck a group of four Jews coming back from work. The soldier is harshly punished for fraternizing with the Jews. Stancu, *Zile de Lagăr (Camp Days)*, 145–146.

²⁴⁵ Ecaterina Chivu, “Aspecte Din Viața de Lagăr (Aspects from the Camp Life),” *Buletinul Federației Naționale a Foștilor Deținuți Și Internați Politici Antifasciști* no. 1 (November 1948): 20–21.

²⁴⁶ Vasile Bordeianu, Interview 2775, May 23, 1995, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

rations (“Even if we did nothing we consumed more calories than we received”) a problem which worsened when difficult labor was expected of them. Most of the work at Bumbesti-Livezeni consisted of stone breaking and each inmate had a daily quota of stones to break. If one of the inmates did not fulfill his quota, the others were forced to do it for him. A Romanian lieutenant, Trepăduș, appears in several testimonies for his sadistic behavior towards the Jews.²⁴⁷ One interviewee recalls him shouting: “I eat Jewish flesh, I will drink your blood!”²⁴⁸ while his beatings and whippings were frequent and coupled with other discretionary punishments (for example, for helping older people work their quota²⁴⁹).

The approximately 30 kilometers distance between the camp and the labor site made it more productive to keep the inmates at the labor sites (Bumbesti Jiu, Meri are named in the testimonies) where housing conditions were worse than in the main camp. Inmates such as Fritz Litvac spent one year cutting tunnels through the mountain for the railway and hoping to be sent back to the Târgu Jiu camp where life was much better. When he was indeed sent back, bare footed all the distance, he was immediately boarded in freight cars deporting them to Transnistria. Although he experienced and survived the extermination camps organized by the Romanian state in Transnistria, Fritz Litvac recalls the Bumbesti-Livezeni labor as the “cruelty of our lives” and the Târgu Jiu camp as “the most destroying life.”²⁵⁰

Other types of inmates were also used for hard labor. Vasile Bordeianu tells of a strike organized by the Romanians in the camp for having the Jews brought back

²⁴⁷ Fritz Litvac, Interview 50214, August 12, 1999, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation; Armin Nagel, Interview 24196, December 15, 1996, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

²⁴⁸ Emanuele Mises, Interview 48019, October 24, 1998, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

²⁴⁹ Armin Nagel, Interview 24196.

²⁵⁰ Fritz Litvac, Interview 50214.

from hard labor.²⁵¹ The result, he claims, was that the strikers, mainly communists, were also brought to Bumbești – Livezeni, among them the future member of RWPs Central Committee, Gheorghe Apostol.²⁵² The interviewee remembers the situation improving after the arrival of the Romanians and he also mentions solidarity between Romanians and Jews. The same testimony declares to have only seen one man dying in the camp because of the harsh conditions.

The Jewish testimonies confirm the division of the camp on financial and social grounds as well as the diversity of inmates.²⁵³ Those who had money to pay enjoyed far better living conditions, no matter if they were Jewish, Communist or even both.²⁵⁴ A Polish Jewish young woman making her way to Palestine briefly stayed in the Târgu Jiu camp that she remembers in bright colors. “You had to pay 15000 lei a month to get decent food, tables with table cloth red and white checkers, people were serving like waiters and the food was pretty decent, very good food.”²⁵⁵

Bumbești – Livezeni was not the only forced labor site for the inmates of Târgu Jiu camp. They were also used, as one testimony reveals, to be build roads along the Jiului Valley. As Manes Leib remembers, they had to break two tons of stone every day and walk eight to ten kilometers to their night shelters. Scarce and bad food and whipping for every minor mistake were the rule in all labor sites.²⁵⁶ As compared to forced labor, the communists, as political inmates, were also working but their work was paid for and it was mainly taking place in factories and workshops in Târgu Jiu.

²⁵¹ Vasile Bordeianu, Interview 2775.

²⁵² Although in his memoirs Apostol does not mention performing hard labor during his internment in the Târgu Jiu camp. Apostol, *Eu Și Gheorghiu-Dej (Me and Gheorghiu-Dej)*.

²⁵³ Armin Nagel, Interview 24196.

²⁵⁴ Victor David, Interview 15378, n.d., Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

²⁵⁵ Jeanette Ehrlich Winogrom, Interview 42531, June 23, 1998, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

²⁵⁶ Manes Leib, Interview 843, January 24, 1995, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

Female experiences in Târgu Jiu lack the hard labor component but dwell on feelings of humiliation (when being undressed for clothes' disinfection and left naked in the plain view of Romanian soldiers²⁵⁷) or hint at sexual harassment or even sexual abuse. Tuba was seventeen when she arrived in Târgu Jiu from her hometown Dorohoi in North-Eastern Romania and she recalls:

“Then they made us work, washing and other things...
What other things?
 Things... because we were young, young girls, you can imagine...”²⁵⁸

Another detail about life in the Târgu Jiu camp, from the point of view of the political history of Romanian communism, is also revealed in the Jewish testimonies. Gheorghiu-Dej, Romania's leader for the first two decades of socialism, constructed the story of his crucial participation in the overthrow of the Antonescu's regime on August 23rd 1944 on a spectacular escape from the Târgu Jiu camp a few days before Romania quit the alliance with Nazi Germany. The story of the Polish Jewish young woman, mentioned above, although spectacular in itself (she managed to make her way from Poland, through Hungary, Romania, Turkey all the way to Palestine alone, pregnant and taking care of somebody else's child) also includes an escape from the Târgu Jiu camp in 1944. A group of more than ten Jewish people escaped then, each of them paying around 200 dollars to be included in the group. A taxi came from Bucharest to get them, while some of the money and three bottles of wine were given to the soldier who guarded the gate. She was eight month pregnant and she practically bribed her way out of the camp, through the camp's gates. From her narrative, this seemed to be a regular event in the camp's life, again restricted to those who could

²⁵⁷ Frida Kornbluth-Seinfeld, Interview 11633, February 4, 1996, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

²⁵⁸ Tuba Abramovici, Interview 44484, July 3, 1998, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

afford it. The context of Gheorghiu-Dej's escape is, I think, illuminated by the fact that escapes were an occurring event in the last year of the war.



Fig. 1.18. “The escape of com. Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej from the Târgu Jiu camp on the night of August 12, 1944” Photograph of charcoal drawing. Source: Fototeca online a comunismului românesc, # DA037 (ANR, ISISP Fond, 2/1944)

The Târgu Jiu camp bore the name of “camp for political prisoners” all through its war-time existence. Strange enough, it only officially became a concentration camp after Romania quit the alliance with Nazi Germany.²⁵⁹ However, even if mine is just a preliminary research meant to provide a longer and more contextualized history of the camp and the museum it almost became, there is enough evidence to conclude that Târgu-Jiu, between 1941 and 1944 did indeed function as a concentration, hard labor and transit camp for Jews and different political opponents of Marshall Antonescu's Regime. The level to which such knowledge is ignored in contemporary Romania can best be seen when sixty years later, a local historian from

²⁵⁹ Dan-Simion Grecu, “Lagăre de Internare În Județul Hunedoara (1944-1945) (Internment Camps in Hunedoara County: 1944-1945),” *Buletinul Cercului de Studii Al Istoriei Poștale Din Ardeal, Banat Și Bucovina* XIII, no. 4 (n.d.) <http://membres.multimania.fr/dgrecu/PDF/InternatiHD.pdf>.

Târgu Jiu briefly posits in a lengthy television interview that this was not a concentration camp.²⁶⁰

1.6.3. Ruins of the camp or ruins of the museum? The Târgu Jiu camp after the war: destruction, reconstruction and failed musealisation

The inmates were liberated in August 1944, while some of them stayed until September. The camp was however not closed, but used for ethnic Germans and Hungarians who were now considered, until the end of the war, “citizens of enemy states.” The Târgu Jiu camp was officially re-opened for this purpose on October 23rd, 1944 and by November 9th it became full so that it had to stop admitting new inmates.²⁶¹ After the end of the war, the camp served as a transit camp for ethnic Germans, around five thousand people, on their way to being deported to the USSR.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Gheorghe Gorun, history professor in Târgu Jiu, in Denisa Șuță, *Lagărul de La Târgu Jiu (Târgu Jiu Camp) - Television Documentary*, 2009.

²⁶¹ Dan-Simion Grecu, “Lagăre de Internare În Județul Hunedoara (1944-1945) (Internment Camps in Hunedoara County: 1944-1945).”

²⁶² Muraru, *Dictionarul penitenciarelor din România comunista*, 486.



Fig. 1.19. Section 7 of the Târgu Jiu camp. Pencil drawing by Károlyi F.J. in 1942 reproduced in Stoenescu, Aura. “Lagărul De La Târgu Jiu, o Fantomă Interzisă (The Târgu Jiu Camp, a Forbidden Phantom).” *Vertical*, June 23, 2010.

From this moment on, the history of the camp becomes even more blurred as the camp physically disappears from the cartography of Târgu Jiu. Barutu Arghezi, the son of famous poet Tudor Arghezi, interned in Târgu Jiu for anti-German poetry,²⁶³ visited the site of the camp several years after the war and discovered that the barracks had been razed to the ground: “A bare field with wild grass. One could recognize rectangular marks of some of the barracks [...] Bombshell-like holes gave the site the feeling of a corpse bitten by rats and mangled by eagles. The locals told nothing of the camp, or the little church, or the inmates. They kept silent at my questions as if nothing had ever happened...”²⁶⁴

²⁶³ Barutu Arghezi spent a day with his father, as a visitor, in the Târgu Jiu camp in 1943. His assessment of the role of the camp in wartime Romania is: “The Târgu Jiu camp was, all through the war, the place where a big part of the human values of the age had been saved from the fate other neighboring governments destined to their intellectuals, workers or army men opposed to the war and Nazi occupation. This fact is part of the generosity and profound humanist spirit of our people.” Barutu Arghezi, *Inaintea Uitarii (Before Forgetting)* (Oradea: Mihai Eminescu, 1996), 60–61.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 67–68.

The silence was lifted at the end of the 1960s, after Ceaușescu's accession to power. In a 1969 tourist guide of Târgu Jiu, the former camp is identified as the Heroes Cemetery (probably due to the fact that the camp, even today, is bordered by the town cemetery), the post-war dismantling of the barracks is certified, but a new information is added: "Measures have been taken for the reconstruction of the main parts of the former camp and the organization of a museum with aspects from the life and death of the political detainees."²⁶⁵ Ten years later, in 1979, a similar touristic guide lists the former camp and gives its address, on Cemetery Street, but there is no mentioning of a museum functioning there.²⁶⁶ In 1971 however, a history book on the antifascist resistance publishes images from the camp with the mention that the images are also exhibited in the museum of the former Târgu Jiu camp.²⁶⁷

What happened in the 1970s with the former camp? Was there a functioning museum of the camp? The answer is ambivalent: there was and there was not a museum of the camp. The barracks that can now be seen on the outskirts of Târgu Jiu were museum artifacts, built as reconstructions of the original barracks, but the museum was never inaugurated so the barracks are the traces not of the camp, as some of the contemporary dwellers of Târgu Jiu seem to think, as apparent in the local press, but of a museum that never existed.

²⁶⁵ Cornel Cirstoiu, *Tirgu Jiu. Mic Indreptar Turistic (Small Touristic Guide)* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1969), 20.

²⁶⁶ Elisabeta Ancuța-Rușinaru, *Tîrgu-Jiu* (Comitetul de Cultura si Educatie Socialista al judetului Gorj, 1979).

²⁶⁷ Olimpiu Matichescu, *Apararea patriotica (Patriotic Defence)* (Bucharest: Editura Stiintifica, 1971).



Fig. 1.20. The reconstructed barracks of Târgu Jiu in the 1970s. Original caption: “Camp of political detainees in Târgu Jiu. Contemporary image (museum)”. Source: ANR, fond ISISP- Fototeca, Prisons and Camps sub-fond, T31.

“Only one wooden barrack is left from the camp of refugees and political inmates in Târgu Jiu,” complains a local journalist in 2007.

“The construction is near the municipal cemetery in Târgu Jiu. Beside it, one can see the cement pylons of another barrack perished in a recent fire. Although the camp represented an important episode in our country’s history, the testimonies left are forgotten. Of all the buildings that formed the Târgu Jiu camp, only one is still there. The barrack is made of wooden boards, as were all the others, but nothing reminds one of the thousands of Polish refugees, fleeing the war, and then of all the important men of culture, writers, Communist leaders which later became heads of state.”²⁶⁸

It is the local press again who demystifies the above allegations by conducting an investigation with the local historians and the local museum. An old professor is found, Grigore Haidău, a distant relative of the former camp commander Leoveanu, who remembers that the museum was supposed to open in 1971, on the 50th

²⁶⁸ Andrei Ionescu, “Fostul Lagăr de La Târgu Jiu, Abandonat de Autorități (The Former Camp in Târgu Jiu, Abandoned by the Authorities),” *Gazeta de Sud*, September 11, 2007.

anniversary of the creation of the RCP as a gift to the Party. The work started, two barracks were reconstructed and a sign with the museum name was erected. “We constructed, polished, put everything in place and then, if my memory does not betray me, Maurer came just a few days before the inauguration and said there will be no museum and the construction we made (the barracks that everyone knows) should be given to Party administration (*gospodăria de partid*).”²⁶⁹ Even if the inauguration of the camp museum failed, the idea was not totally abandoned by the local museographers who made a diorama of the camp inside the regional history museum in Târgu Jiu.²⁷⁰



Fig. 1.21. Contemporary Târgu Jiu camp diorama inside the Regional Museum in Târgu Jiu. © Muzeul Județean Târgu Jiu

²⁶⁹ Aura Stoenescu, “Lagărul de La Târgu Jiu, o Fantomă Interzisă (The Târgu Jiu Camp, a Forbidden Phantom),” *Vertical*, June 23, 2010, <http://www.verticalonline.ro/lagarul-de-la-targu-jiu-o-fantoma-interzisa>.

²⁷⁰ If inaugurated, Târgu Jiu would not have been the only camp to exhibit reconstructed barracks. Dachau, for example, the barracks are also reconstructions. “In fact, what we are offered in Dachau is a reconstructed barracks or Wohnbaracken which contains examples of all three types of accommodation and visitors are conducted from one to another. There remains a feeling of unreality. These are reconstructions. The wood is clean and new. There is no sign of the filth or the horror of life in close proximity.” Jenny Edkins, “Authenticity and Memory at Dachau,” *Cultural Values* 5, no. 4 (2001): 407.

The attitude towards the camp of the contemporary press of Târgu Jiu is mainly a positive one. The camp is considered an important moment in the country's history and a chance for so many Romanian intellectuals and politicians to reside in Târgu Jiu, even if as inmates of the camp. A forty minutes television documentary²⁷¹ made in 2009 for the local television, Gorj TV, basically interviews one local history professor Gheorghe Gorun on the background of the only surviving barrack (although no mentioning is made that the barrack is a relic of the 1970s, not of the 1940s). The historian stresses that this was not a concentration camp, nor an extermination camp, aware of and thus cautious not to invite the plausible association with camps as Holocaust sites.

After this brief connection with Holocaust history, only to deny any connection, there is no further mentioning of the Jews that were interned in the camp as the narratives insists on the cultural personalities, among which Tudor Arghezi and Zaharia Stancu seem to come first to mind. To refute the Communist narrative of the hard life in the camp, the history professor summons some widely spread rumors and arguments (on the lack of political activity of Nicolae Ceausescu, prior to his imprisonment, for example). He closes his narration by stating that this camp, as all pre-1945 prison were not to be compared with the communist prisons that will follow, as these later were much harsher, but it is an important moment in Târgu Jiu's history and it should be remembered as such.

The question remains why Doftana was preferred over Târgu Jiu as a memory site and a museum of the antifascist struggle. Even in the immediate post-war context of downplaying the Jewish tragedy and insisting on the antifascist and anti-Nazi resistance, Târgu-Jiu would have proven a more fitting memory place even if only for

²⁷¹ Şuţă, *Lagărul de La Târgu Jiu (Târgu Jiu Camp) - Television Documentary*.

the chronologic argument of having actually functioned all through the war and Antonescu's regime while Doftana stopped functioning as a prison in November 1940.

I believe the reasons for this unquestioned choice, as I could not find any discussion in the late 1940s on whether the former Târgu Jiu camp should be memorialized or not, are twofold. One of the reasons is museological. The Doftana building simply provided a more powerful experience of what a prison was supposed to mean in popular representation: the thick walls, even though reconstructed, the darkness, the watchtowers, the small individual cells provided the perfect scenography for a narrative of seclusion, imprisonment and suffering. As opposed to Doftana's thick stone walls, Târgu Jiu's wooden barracks and the not-so-well-guarded barbed wire fence (Gheorghiu-Dej, and many others as revealed in this chapter, escaped the camp in 1944 by crawling under the fence to the neighboring cemetery or bribing their way out through the main gates) appeared harmless and probably unimpressive. A second reason might reside in the multitude of competing stories in Târgu-Jiu. This was a place for internment not only for Communists but also for Jews (some of them interned with the pretext of being Communists), Legionnaires (a few thousand flooded the camp for a few months in early 1943), peasantists and liberals, other opponents of the regime or simply those whom Antonescu's bureaucracy thought potentially dangerous. The peasantists had already coined the term *Târgu Jiu spirit* in which the Communist voice was only one of the choir. Compared to this multitude of stories, the Communists Doftana had only the common law inmates as potential competitors which made the master narrative on Doftana go practically unchallenged.

It is also worth mentioning that in the late 1940s *the (concentration) camp* was by no means a European established site of memorialisation of antifascism. It was only starting in the 1960s that *the camp* became to symbolize Holocaust and Nazi atrocities during the Second World War. In the immediate aftermath of the war, many of the former camps were simply transformed in refugee camps or prisoner of war camps (similar to Târgu Jiu's fate) and memorialisation, when possible, happened outside the former camps. The first memorial opened in Berlin after the war was the Plötzensee Prison where German political prisoners had been imprisoned and executed for opposing Nazism. "By an act of the Berlin senate in 1952, the prison was restored, an inscribed wall erected, and an urn with soil from the concentration camps places near the courtyard entrance."²⁷² The Hamburg Memorial to the victims of fascism, inaugurated in 1949 was placed in Ohlsdorf cemetery while the concentration camps were listed and again, soil from these sites was brought to the monument (soil from Doftana was sent for this monument, see chapter two). As more concentration camp memorials and museum opened up in the 1960s and 1970s, the camp becomes THE site of Second World War memorialisation. It is probably in this international context that we should place the attempt of the early 1970s to turn Târgu Jiu into a museum of the camp. The reasons why this plan was abandoned, and in such a late stage, after the museum was actually, physically built, remain for the moment obscured.

²⁷² Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 50.

Chapter 2. The First Museums of Communism in Romania and Soviet museology. 1946-1958.

The 1958 inauguration of the History Museum of the Romanian Workers' Party in the sumptuous palace on Kiseleff Boulevard no.3 is the climax and final point not only of this chapter but of more than a decade of turmoil in museum life. The efforts to create a museum displaying a version of Romanian history which would legitimize the Communist regime started with the 1946 law regarding the organization of national museums, the 1947 inauguration of the Romanian-Russian museum and of the Party Museum one year later (under the transitional name of Moments of the People's Struggle [for Freedom] Museum). 1958 is the year when the Party Museum is re-inaugurated in a central location, with a new permanent exhibition testifying to the consensus reached inside the Romanian Workers Party as to the appropriate permanent display of theirs and the country's past.

A meaningful coincidence makes 1958 also a landmark in the larger history of Romanian communism. For political history, 1958 is the year of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Romanian territory. For the history of Romanian historiography, 1958 is marked by Mihail Roller's death, the discovery in Amsterdam, by a Polish historian, of Karl Marx's notes on Romanian history and thus of the re-nationalization of Romanian history writing.¹ Historians Cristina and Dragoş Petrescu emphasized

¹ "Such an apparently minor event had a tremendous influence on historical writing, because it allowed the recuperation of the pre-Communist interpretation of history— which emphasized Romanians'

the landmark role of 1958, as they divided Romanian Communist historiography in three stages, out of which, the 1948-1958 one is defined by the insistence on the Russian/ Slavic/ Soviet component in Romanian history.²

The purpose of this chapter is to shed light on the struggles and difficult adjustments museums went through during the establishment of the Communist regime in Romania. Although the time span was short, there was time for some museums to be inaugurated and then disbanded, like the Romanian-Russian Museum, or to have their name, location and supervising institutions changed several times, like the History Museum of the Romanian Workers' Party. The adjustment period was not only difficult for already existing museums, although they were also severely and incoherently reorganized, but also for the new museums that the regime inaugurated and organized in order to promote itself and its version of history. The uncertainties and tribulations of the newly established regime are visible in museum life precisely in the several reorganizations, renaming and dramatic changes of the narrative unfolded in the permanent exhibitions of these museums.

Museums are known to be highly conservative institutions. This is embedded in their definition and goal, which is to acquire and preserve collections and to display permanent exhibitions. The very idea of a permanent exhibition, whole life span can extend to fifteen, twenty and even beyond twenty years, contributes to the conservative nature of museum institutions. However, the museums discussed in this chapter, while profiting from the preconception of the conservative nature of the

struggle against the neighboring adversarial empires, including the Tsarist one – by using arguments provided by Marx himself.”Cristina Petrescu and Dragoş Petrescu, “Mastering Vs. Coming to Terms with the Past: A Critical Analysis of Post-Communist Romanian Historiography,” in Sorin Antohi, Balázs Trencsenyi, Péter Apor (eds.), *Narratives Unbound: Historical Studies in Post-communist Eastern Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007), 315.

² Sorin Antohi, Balázs Trencsényi, and Péter Apor, eds., *Historical Studies in Post-Communist Eastern Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007), 314–315.

museum, were in fact highly renewable institutions, forced into constant innovation by the political context that created and ultimately disbanded them.

This chapter is equally concerned with an analysis of the displays these new museums proposed to the public, the innovation they proposed in form and content; for it was not only a new narrative that was proposed but a whole new way of telling it and this new way was Soviet museology. This chapter describes the main characteristics of Soviet museology, as it was born in the USSR in the 1920s and 1930s and the impact it had in 1950s Romania. It reveals the solid theoretical basis behind museum practices, such as the overabundance of texts in Romanian communist museums and its disregard for the (authenticity of) the object. The museal object again loses forefront when confronted with the visitor. This chapter describes the socialist museum visitor, which I call “the Socialist pilgrim” emphasizing an important shift in museum practice, from focusing on the object to focusing on the visitor, a shift that will be observed in international museology only in the 1990s.

2.1. New laws for old museums. 1946.

The new social and political order established in Romania after 1945 has naturally influenced museum history. Although museums were never a crucial concern of the new socialist regime, always mentioned somewhere between mere propaganda tools and education for the masses, the new socialist order became a crucial milestone in the life of Romanian museums. Unlike in other fields of cultural life, the post-1989 assessment of the massive museum transformation of the 1940s and 50s is not generally negative.

The only scholar to have attempted a history of Romanian museums, Ioan Opriș considers it a benefic period, with the centralization of collections seen as a modernizing reform and the inauguration of new museums as a sign of vitality and hope for the museum profession. He claims, for example, the Transylvanian Museum of History to have enjoyed “unprecedented development after 1944.”³ His student, also a researcher of museum history, Cornel Constantin Ilie writes “We could say that, in museum life, the creative << effervescence >> (in the proper meaning of the word) of the 50s and early 60s has never been attained since.”⁴ The development and effervescence of museums can also be read as centralization and reorganization to the point of erasing all previous structures and heritage.

A new law for museums was drafted and approved as early as 1946 aiming at a strict reform based on centralization and state control. However, the 803/1946 law regarding the organization of national museums is more of an intention letter, a statement of plans in regards to Romanian museums: as drastic as it appears in its rigid centralization policies, almost none of its decisions were ever put into practice.

The text of the law opens with the establishment of a grand, all encompassing National Museum of Art and Archeology in Bucharest, in the building on Boulevard Kiseleff no. 3 (originally built and still occupied by the National Museum King Carol I⁵). However, this was not meant to be a mere renaming or institutional replacing. The new National Museum of Art and Archaeology was to unite and engulf all museums of history, art, and ethnology in Romania’s capital city: “all museums of art, archaeology, history and ethnography and public picture galleries in the capital, are

³ Ioan Opriș, *Istoria Muzeelor Din România (The History of Romanian Museums)* (Bucharest: Museion, 1994), 87.

⁴ Cornel Constantin Ilie, “Regimul Comunist Si Muzeele de Istorie Din Romania (The Communist Regime and History Museums in Romania)” (Universitatea Valahia Targoviste, 2012), 25, unpublished PhD thesis.

⁵ See subchapter on the Romanian Peasant Museum for its prehistory as the National Museum Carol I.

part of the National Museum of Art and Archaeology, even if administratively they rely on other public authorities”⁶ The same simplistic scheme was applied to other two major cities, Iași and Cluj, who were also endowed with National Museums of Art and Archaeology engulfing and controlling all museum activity in the surrounding regions.

Centralization has been one of the keywords of socialist societies; it is thus no wonder that the same centralization has been attempted in museum life. However, it is probably the over simplistic manner in which this specific centralization was to be done, one big museum in each city and one Superior Council of Museums to regulate their activity that accounts for the failure of this specific project.

In its report attached to the project of the law when presented to King Michael I, ministry of Arts Octav Livezeanu argues that the previous 1932 law⁷ was “faulty, incomplete and even incapable” while this new law promoted “the principle of concentration and classification of collections in our national museums in the capital and the provincial cities, according to their nature and purpose.”⁸ It is indeed noticeable, when reading through the text of the law that a major concern of the law makers seems to have been not the functioning of the museums as such, but the possibility to centrally control their collections. In a country where museums had been mainly the outcome of personal initiative, with no attempt at constructing a representative national museum, important and valuable artifacts were to be found in rather minor museum collections, if anyone knew of their existence.⁹

⁶ *Law no. 803/1946 regarding the organization of National Museums*, art. 5, published in *Monitorul Oficial* no. 288, October 14, 1946, p. 11046 – 11052.

⁷ *Law for organizing communal libraries and public museums*, published in *Monitorul Oficial* no. 89, April 14th 1932, pp. 2468 -2470.

⁸ *Law no. 803/1946 regarding the organization of National Museums*.

⁹ “While less important settlements who enjoyed the privilege of some well off noble (*boier*) who exploited them, hide some rare collection of folk art which cannot be seen and profited from by almost anyone. This is the case of the Sever Bocu collection from Lipova (former Ministry of Banat in the

The importance of this 1946 law, putting aside the National Museum that was soon forgotten even by its initiators, was the obligation for every local museum, which became overnight a section of a National Museum, to submit within a year their complete patrimonial list. The same law granted the state the possibility to transfer into its administration those collection items which “serve the country’s general interest,” thus legalizing a massive transfer of collections from periphery to center, far more important and with further reaching consequences for museum life than the institutional creations of the same law. During the next decades, as the central, national museums finally became reality, the local museums were relegated to a status of museum of replicas as their collections no longer contained any valuable items. However, the same Ioan Oprea considers this 1946 law to be “constructive, a progress factor in the evolution of institutions and of the whole Romanian museum system.”¹⁰

The 803/1946 law stipulated the creation of local museums in every county’s capital city that did not possess one, a decision that was to be accomplished over the years; it also established a National School of Museography and a Superior Museum Council that were never to properly function. However, this law’s biggest fiction remains the National Museum of Art and Archaeology, the foundational stone of the museum network as it was imagined by the 1946 law. Although preparations were made for a museum functioning according to law, the project was aborted within a few years. Historian Cornel Ilie argues that it was “political involvement, lack of necessary funds for repairing the building on Kiseleff Boulevard and the confusion on

Maniu government).” *Report of the Commission for Reorganizing Museums in the Country*, ANR, fond CC al PCR – Propagandă și Agitație, no.88/1949, f.2.

¹⁰ Ioan Oprea, *Istoria Muzeelor Din România (The History of Romanian Museums)*, 62.

the reorganization of collections”¹¹ that led to the final failure of the project. He also argues that the final blow to the project was given by the decision to use the former Royal Palace for a National Art Museum and the Kiseleff building for the Lenin-Stalin Museum. However, his assessment of the consequences of the law, following Ioan Opriș, is also overall positive: “The law, abrogated only in 1960 has a special significance, first of all because it promoted a new attitude in Romanian museal organization: it imposed the national museum as a reality and a necessity to reflect the country’s history; it unified spread collections in strong units and it created the instruments and means for guiding museum activity.”¹²

The level to which the new regime was confused about its own decisions and plans, at least in regards to museums, can be seen in tracing subsequent steps in museum policy making. In 1948 a Committee for Reorganizing Museums was set up by the same Ministry of Arts who issued the 1946 law.¹³ Although according to the law all museums were supposed to be under the guidance of the Superior Council of Museums and each one a section of a bigger National Museum, the situation recorded by the Committee was in total disregard with the 1946 law. Even more, the members of the Committee themselves (mainly artists, collectors and art critics) although acknowledging the need for centralization, propose solutions and centralization schemes in contradiction with the 1946 law. Their proposal is for establishing a Museum of Universal Art in the former Royal Palace and a Museum of National Art in the Kiseleff building which was already, de facto, a museum of national art. Although the commission formally supports the centralization principle, its proposals

¹¹ Cornel Constantin Ilie, “Un proiect efemer: Muzeul Național de Artă și Arheologie” in *România În Relațiile Internaționale. Diplomatie, Minorități, Istorie. In Honorem Ion Calafeteanu (Romania in International Relations. Diplomacy, Minorities, History)* (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2010).

¹² Cornel Constantin Ilie, “Regimul Comunist Si Muzeele de Istorie Din Romania (The Communist Regime and History Museums in Romania),” 8–9.

¹³ Cristian Vasile, “Evoluția Artelor Plastice în Primul Deceniu Comunist (The Evolution of Plastic Arts in the First Communist Decade),” *Revista Arhivelor* no. 1 (2008): 257.

rather go in the subtle direction of maintaining the status quo; the only notable addition is the Art Museum in the Royal Palace which was to become reality the next year.

The museum network resisted attempts at centralization and systematization mainly because of heavy institutional inertia;¹⁴ this seems to be the main reason for a reported stable situation, in the years following the Second World War, despite renewed attempts at reform at grass-root and central level: the Committee for Art replacing the Ministry of Art in 1950,¹⁵ creation the Committee for Cultural Establishments of the Council of Ministries also in 1950¹⁶ and the Scientific Commission for Museums and Historical and Artistic Monuments by the Academy of RPR in 1951.¹⁷ As historian C.C. Ilie rightfully observed, at least until the 1960s, there is no central coordination of museums,¹⁸ no guiding institution to which all museums would answer to as museal institutions continue to belong and depend upon very different institutions.¹⁹

The final irony of these repeated attempts at centralization of the museums network is that it managed to confuse the museum scene even more, adding more fictitious institutions, as the National Museum of Art and Archaeology, and more supervising committees and commissions. The chaos became complete when, in addition to the diversity of old museums and collections, the Communist Party

¹⁴ An example such as Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcas who actively tried to save his life-long project, the National Museum King Carol I is quite unique. See chapter 4 of this dissertation and Petru Popovăț, “Muzeul de La Șosea (The Museum by the Boulevard),” *Martor. Supliment* 4 (1999).

¹⁵ *Decree 166/July 10th, 1950 for the establishment and organization of the Committee for Art depending on the Council of Ministries.*

¹⁶ *HCM 501/May 5th, 1950 regarding the organization, functioning and establishing assignments for the Committee for Cultural Establishment of the Council of Ministries.*

¹⁷ *Regulations for the functioning of the Scientific Commission for Museums and Historical and Artistic Monuments*, published in *Monumente si Muzeu. Buletinul Comisiei Stiintifice a Muzeelor si Monumentelor istorice si artistice* I (1958), 283-284.

¹⁸ Cornel Constantin Ilie, “Regimul Comunist Si Muzeele de Istorie Din Romania (The Communist Regime and History Museums in Romania),” 25.

¹⁹ Ioan Opriș lists at least 3 different institutions that supervised museums in 1949. Ioan Opriș, *Istoria Muzeelor Din România (The History of Romanian Museums)*, 63–64.

starting building its own network of Party museums whose names, purpose and administrators changed even more confusingly than the old, *bourgeois* museums. Needless to say, all these new museums, the very first museums of communism to be inaugurated in Romania, all fell outside the approved scheme of the museum network, belonging and answering neither to the National Museum of Art and Archeology, nor to the Ministry of Arts nor to the Superior Council of Museums. The incentive for creating these museums is very often hidden in haze, as not all documents related to their creation have survived in the archives. The researcher can only postulate that they are all initiatives from inside the Romanian Communist Party²⁰ while their development is intimately linked with the development of the RCP/RWP. In a short enumeration, the first museums of communism I am discussing here, in the chronological order of their inauguration (but not of their appearance in this dissertation), are: the Romanian-Russian Museum (1947), The Party Museum (1948), the Doftana prison museum (1949) and the Lenin-Stalin Museum (1955). The chapter closes with a failed musealisation, the organized but never inaugurated Museum of the Illegal Printing House.

2.2. Soviet museology and its impact on Romanian museums

Romanian museums inaugurated in late 1940s and 1950s were no doubt influenced by Soviet museological practice and the ideological constraints of the new communist regime established in Romania, however the concrete impact of this influence has not been so far described or analyzed in academic scholarship. Some of these museums were actual branches of Soviet museums, like the Lenin-Stalin

²⁰ Although the Romanian-Russian Museum is strangely enough presented as a private initiative, see below in this chapter.

Museum in Bucharest a branch of the Central Lenin Museum in Moscow, and the instructions for building them were very strict, while others were trying to emulate the Soviet model as closely as possible acting as unofficial branches, such as the Revolutionary/Party Museum or the Romanian-Russian Museum. It is the purpose of this subchapter to establish what was this model they were trying to emulate and what were the sources available for implementing Soviet museology in Romanian museums. How did Soviet museology differ from other museologies? How did Soviet museology emerge in the Soviet Union and what was the form in which it was imported in the countries of popular democracy after the Second World War?

Soviet museology was used as a concept in Romania in the 1950s and manuals such as *Bases of Soviet Museology* (1957) were published and used in museum practice. It is important to note though that Soviet museology had changed greatly over the decades in USSR and what Soviet museology meant in the 1950s was the result of radical transformations and adjustments, ever since 1917, that made Soviet museums a particular kind of museum in the international museological landscape of the postwar era.

2.2.1. Bullets against museum walls? Reinventing museums after the Bolshevik Revolution

It is useful to start this brief overview of museology in the Soviet Union by noting that some critics believe Soviet museums were threatened with disappearance after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The radical artistic movement emerging in the young state of the Soviets wanted to get rid of these symbols and homes of bourgeois art and values, the argument goes. It was the bureaucrats, the politicians

that saved Soviet museums and, at the same time, sealed their fate as institutions subordinated to bureaucracy rather than to creativity.

This story of “the ideological struggle against the museum and museum art conducted by the Russian avant-garde” is convincingly told by art critic and philosopher Boris Groys. He acknowledges that the anti-museum discourse²¹ was part of the international avant-garde movement in the first decades of the twentieth century; however, it was only in revolutionary Russia that this discourse came so close to producing a museum-free reality, as painter Kazimir Malevich was writing: “Do we need Rubens or the Cheops Pyramid? Is the depraved Venus necessary to the pilot in the heights of our new comprehension? Do we need old copies of clay towns, supported on the crutches of Greek columns?”²² Another Russian avant-garde artist, Nikolai Tarabukin, was comparing museums to graves and art historians to gravediggers: “And ‘art historians,’ those indefatigable grave robbers, for their part have the task of composing the explanatory texts for these mortuary crypts.”²³ The revolutionary poet, Vladimir Mayakovsky, declared “it’s time bullets rang out against museum walls.”²⁴

“One topos of Soviet avant-garde criticism,” Groys explains, “was the conviction that the very institution of the museum was connected with *vita contemplativa*, understood as a purely consumerist attitude toward life deserving no place in a society in which he who does not work does not eat... For a proletarian to go to a museum to gaze on the beautiful meant that his labors toward the aesthetic

²¹ Daniel J. Sherman, “Quatremère/Benjamin/Marx: Art Museums, Aura, and Commodity Fetishism,” in *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

²² Boris Groys, “The Struggle Against the Museum; or, the Display of Art in Totalitarian Space,” in *Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff, Eds., Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 147.

²³ Tarabukin quoted in *ibid.*, 150.

²⁴ Evgeny Dobrenko, *Stalinist Cinema and the Production of History Museum of the Revolution* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 8.

transformation of life itself had failed. The avant-garde aesthetic understood the museum-as-temple-of-beauty exclusively as compensation for an absence of beauty in life itself.”²⁵

The Soviet leadership seemed for once less radical than “the people.” It was Soviet bureaucracy that saved the museum if only for the reason that the immense number of artworks inherited from the former regime were not to be easily disposed of or could be sold to subsidize the needs of the socialist transformation.²⁶ “From the very beginning, this radical point of view failed to satisfy the Soviet authorities, if only because it failed to explain what was to be done with the mass of artworks they had inherited.”²⁷

The propaganda potential of the museum must also have appealed to the newly established Soviet government. Consequently, it is in the form of propaganda and didactic material that the museum was reborn from the ashes of the bourgeois museum. “The goal of this newly conceived museum became not to present objects and artifacts that might be considered original, characteristic, and specific in the historical development of art; rather, it was to present only those elements that appeared useful from a didactic point of view.”²⁸

What was problematic about bourgeois museums, from a Soviet point of view, was that they did not reflect the truthfulness and beauty of life. Yet, by transforming museums into propaganda, by commissioning art specifically for the museum, the Soviets managed to further estrange the museum from life outside its walls. The solution to this dilemma came not by another transformation of the museum but by a

²⁵ Boris Groys, “The Struggle Against the Museum,” 145.

²⁶ Anne Odom and Wendy R. Salmond, eds., *Treasures into Tractors: The Selling of Russia’s Cultural Heritage, 1918-1938* (Washington: Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens; University of Washington Press, 2009).

²⁷ Boris Groys, “The Struggle Against the Museum,” 145.

²⁸ Ibid.

transformation of reality itself: “Soviet communism itself came to look more like a museum exhibit than like the society of the future.”²⁹

“In essence” Groys concludes, “the Stalinist aesthetic preserved the same goal of overcoming the division between art and life. However, it undertook to solve the problem not by destroying the museum but by a sort of equalization of museum exhibits and their surrounding milieu, accomplished by physically filling the milieu with art indistinguishable from that in museums. It is this strategy of equalizing what is in museums with what lies outside them that creates the very specific aesthetic atmosphere found in totalitarian societies of the Stalinist type.”³⁰

What Groys fails to take into consideration is the fact that not all avant-garde despised museums and what the avant-garde conceived as a role for museums was highly innovative and thus potentially dangerous. The Soviet bureaucracy did not only “save” the museum as institution, it actually saved a particular kind of institution, with a focus on education and not inspiration, and a focus on words not objects. New scholarship on Soviet museums actually argues that, “During the years of War Communism (1918-1921) and the New Economic Policy (1921-1928), the Soviet museum would evolve from an experimental novelty into a full-blown federation of institutions under the liberal leadership of Anatolii Lunacharskii.”³¹ Although Soviet museology is not a fashionable topic per se, it is in the context of studying the Russian avant-garde, which still holds fascination for both historians and art historians, that insights into Soviet museology of the 1920s and 1930s can be gained.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 157.

³¹ Konstantin Akinsha and Adam Jolles, “On the Third Front: The Soviet Museum and Its Public During the Cultural Revolution,” in *Anne Odom and Wendy R. Salmond (eds.), Treasures into Tractors: The Selling of Russia’s Cultural Heritage 1918-1938* (Washington: Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens; University of Washington Press, 2009), 167.

One of the institutions whose existence contradicts Groys's arguments is the Museum of Painterly Culture (1919-1929). Initially called the Museum of Artistic Culture it was run exclusively by avant-garde artists such as Tatlin, Malevich, Rodchenko and Kandinskii. It proves that the Russian avant-garde was virulent against what they considered bourgeois museums but cared enough for the idea of museum as such that they created their own.³² While discussing the "brief but eventful life" of the Moscow Museum of Painterly Culture, Svetlana Dzhafarova also mentions that the immediate post-revolutionary era was an age when museum "proliferated" and does not mention any real intention to abolish museums. On the contrary, avant-garde members, in her narrative, are part of the process of preserving Tsarist Russia's art heritage in the new proletarian museums created after the revolution.³³

This narrative of preserving rather than destroying is strongly supported by older generation historian Richard Stites. "On the very day the Bolsheviks took power, they appointed <<commissars>> to protect museums and art collections during the fighting. [...] As in the French revolution, travelling teams were sent into the country to assess the damage and collect and preserve what was left."³⁴ Anatol Lunacharskii, the head of Narkompros, the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment,³⁵ was essential in saving Russian museums as he is known to have tried to "show the masses that the museum is essential to them."³⁶

³² Svetlana Dzhafarova, "The Creation of the Museum of Painterly Culture," in *The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-garde, 1915-1932* (New York: Guggenheim Museum : Distributed by Rizzoli International Publications, 1992), 474–481.

³³ *Ibid.*, 475–476.

³⁴ Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 76–77.

³⁵ More in Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts Under Lunacharsky, October 1917-1921*, Soviet and East European Studies (Cambridge [Eng.]: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

³⁶ Lunacharskii quoted in Natalia Semenova, "A Soviet Museum Experiment," in Anne Odom and Wendy R. Salmond (eds.), *Treasures into Tractors: The Selling of Russia's Cultural Heritage 1918-1938* (Washington: Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens; University of Washington Press, 2009), 65.

„By the end of the Civil War,” Richard Stites continues, “a network of museums in the Soviet Union was fully operating. [...] Though there was much looting, much carting of precious objects abroad, a paucity of museums, and maladministration, the fact remains that the private treasures of the imperial past were opened to the public. [...] Thus, as in Revolutionary France, the museum solved the dilemma posed by the desire to <<deromanovize>> Russia graphically and to save the esthetic treasures of that dynasty and its supporters. By placing crowns, thrones, and imperial regalia in the people’s museum, the regime depoliticized them, neutralized their former symbolic power, and offered them as a gift to the masses who – by means of guides and rituals – were to view them as emblems both of a national genius and of an exploitative order of luxury and oppressive power. Bolshevism was the anti-iconoclasm of order, disarming, demythologizing, and antiquarianism. In their selectivity, the Bolsheviks resembled the anti-iconoclasts of the French revolution.”³⁷

But are the museums Lunacharskii wanted to protect the same kind of institutions that the avant-garde created “for the illumination of the spirit and the creative work of the masses?”³⁸ Are they not talking about radically different institutions while using the same word, *museum*? I believe that the discussion in the young state of the Soviets was not whether museums should or should not continue to exist but what kind of museums would better suit the revolutionary, socialist society the Bolsheviks sought to build.

The avant-garde proposed a new, radical type of museum that, although finally rejected by the Soviet bureaucracy, along with all things avant-garde, did leave its imprint on what will be known in the 1950s as Soviet museology. The main traits of this new museum are continuous transformation, according to the transformation of art and life itself, a museum administration left totally in the hands of the artists and a fascination with the object, the artifact and its capacity to illuminate, to inspire, to speak to the audience. The avant-garde museum produced the absolutely innovative idea that the museum is not only a place of preservation but also of creation. “The

³⁷ Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 78; For the emergence of the Musée des Monuments Français after the French Revolution see Deborah Jenson, *Trauma and Its Representations: The Social Life of Mimesis in Post-revolutionary France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 30–55.

³⁸ Svetlana Dzhafarova, “The Creation of the Museum of Painterly Culture,” 480.

Museum of Painterly Culture is not for the education but for the illumination of the spirit and the creative work of the masses, for the nurturing and building of the artist's trade...”³⁹

And even though the Soviet museum as the avant-garde envisaged it would be finally rejected by Soviet Stalinism, the basic principles of this new type of museum would survive even in the strictest socialist-realist museological eras.

2.2.2. Talking museums: text as museum artifact

The solution found for Soviet museums during the first Five-Year Plan (1928-1933) is highly relevant for the Romanian museums of the 1950s. It was during these years that Stalin's “talking museums” emerged as a genre that was still seminal not only in Romanian museums of the socialist era but also in Romanian museums in the 21st century.

“If the effort under Lenin, as Richard Stites has argued, had been to <<deromanovise>> the museums by neutralising Tsarist emblems and insignia, and seizing and centralising private collections, but still preserving the rich, cultural heritage of Russia, how then might we characterize the drive under Stalin to introduce the signs of class struggle directly into spaces traditionally reserved for detached aesthetic or spiritual contemplation? The invasion of didactic text into the traditionally austere interior space of the museum is highly relevant to resolving this issue, as it signals a major shift taking place in Russian museology. It bears witness to the rise of a new species of exhibition, one that is coextensive with the push in the Soviet Union to establish what its own cultural commissars would refer to as ‘selfexplaining’ or ‘talking museums’ (samogovoriashchie muzei).”⁴⁰

Stalin's talking museums were “selfexplaining” in as much as nothing was left to the free interpretation of the visitor. The text became a mandatory presence in all type of museums, art museums and historical museum alike. As explained by Victor

³⁹ As quoted in *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Jolles, “Stalin's Talking Museums,” 432–434.

Grinevich, one of the advocates of the new museology: “Its task is to give every worker or peasant, seeking knowledge, the possibility to look over the whole museum on his own, reading only the explanatory labels and posters. Thus, besides the disposition of exhibits great importance is acquired by inscriptions, labels, posters, and every kind of ‘supplementary’ illustrative exhibits, such as maps, designs, plans, drawings, and photos.”⁴¹

The conflict between text and object/image is thus decisively resolved in favor of the text. It is in this context that Soviet culture, although highly visual, has also been characterized as iconophobic.⁴² It is not that images were banned in the Soviet Union, quite the contrary; it is more the context in which they were displayed and used that actually undermined their power and constantly framed them as potentially dangerous and untrustworthy. “What becomes clear in the ensuing debates is that objects and images could not be trusted to complete this task independently. Only by exhibiting them with discursive explanations and supplementary materials could the museums bring to light the ideological significance of form.”⁴³

Although, the prototype for “Stalin’s talking museums” were the anti-religious and anti-avant-garde museums, as explained by Adam Jolles in the same article, the new museology actually borrowed forms invented in the very post-revolutionary avant-garde museums that they were trying to replace and condemn. “Arguably, Stalin’s talking museums succeeded precisely where Kurella and the Octyabr group failed in their efforts to establish new forms for the Soviet Union. They adopted an

⁴¹ Victor Grinevich quoted in *ibid.*, 438–439.

⁴² “Such privileging of text speaks undoubtedly to a pervasive iconophobia, a deep distrust among museums administrators of the public’s ability to glean the history of form independently of textual assistance.” Konstantin Akinsha and Adam Jolles, “On the Third Front: The Soviet Museum and Its Public During the Cultural Revolution,” in Anne Odom and Wendy R. Salmond (eds.), *Treasures into Tractors: The Selling of Russia’s Cultural Heritage 1918-1938* (Washington: Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens; University of Washington Press, 2009), 172.

⁴³ Jolles, “Stalin’s Talking Museums,” 438.

installation format modeled in large part upon the dynamic graphic and exhibition designs of such avant-garde predecessors as El Lissitzky and Rodchenko, and paired it with an aggressively conservative critical platform. Thus, the rhetoric that animates these installations often seems strikingly at odds with the forms through which it is delivered.”⁴⁴

The same contrast between an apparently innovative museology designed to refute precisely the museology and regime that preceded it can also be observed in post-1989 Romania in the anti-communist museums which will be analyzed in the final chapter of this dissertation precisely from this point of view: the use of museological and narrative forms developed during Romanian communism in an exhibition that seeks to condemn Romanian communism. It is thus possible to argue, by looking at the long history of museum transformation,⁴⁵ that the inherent conservatism of these institutions may lie precisely in their ability to retain exhibition forms or techniques born in certain ideological contexts beyond these specific contexts.

Soviet museology continued to transform in this mixture of both revolutionary and conservative developments. Jolles suggests that talking museums slowly disappeared by the end of the first Five-Year Plan replaced by “Socialist Realism’s more organic manner of exhibiting class history”⁴⁶ yet the preference of explicit text over artifact continued to prevail in museologies of socialist regimes up to their demise. This is however not the only legacy of Soviet “selfexplaining” museums. One

⁴⁴ Ibid., 436.

⁴⁵ Jolles continues by arguing for a comparison between Stalin’s talking museums and Nazi museums after 1933. “It should come as no surprise then, that at precisely the moment the talking museum waned in the Soviet Union, around 1932–33, it seems to have re-emerged in only slightly modified form in Nazi Germany, and it is worth pausing here for a moment to observe the striking parallels evident between Soviet museology under Stalin and German museum policy under the National Socialist party in the mid-1930s.” *ibid.*, 452.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

imperative of museum practice that developed in late 1920s USSR would become a defining trait in international museology by the end of the 20th century as it is currently sometimes called “the new orthodoxy of visitor sovereignty.”⁴⁷

Recognizing the central role of the visitor and the need for museums to understand and comply with the needs of their public was an innovation contemporary with the talking museums: “Beginning in 1927, the leading Soviet museums created internal departments responsible for museum education and statistical investigation into the preferences and demographics of their constituents.”⁴⁸ By the 1950s, as will become apparent in Soviet museology translated into Romanian practice, the visitor is assigned the role of witness of the events he saw displayed in the museum. The high interest in finding the best ways of conveying their message to the visitor-witness is thus understandable and the (over)use of explanatory texts is a step towards this purpose.

A less internationally successful characteristic of this phase of Soviet museology is downplaying the museum object to the level of equating the original with the replica. “Museums unable to procure examples of period styles they needed for juxtapositions opted willingly for copies and reproductions; curators found guilty of overvaluing the originality and uniqueness of objects in their collections were subject to scathing critique”⁴⁹ A. Fedorov-Davydov, one of the leading figures of what will later be condemned as “vulgar sociology,”⁵⁰ accused curators of “object-

⁴⁷ Macdonald, “Expanding Museum Studies: An Introduction,” 8.

⁴⁸ Konstantin Akinsha and Adam Jolles, “On the Third Front,” 177.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁵⁰ “Vulgar sociology” is a term coined in 1930s USSR in order to condemn the sociological approach to Marxism. “If, for example, in the early 1920s A. Fedorov-Davydov, one of the founding theoreticians of Soviet museum administration, was still able to boast that both permanent displays and large exhibitions had been organized according to sociological criteria, before long the sociological method had been subjected to harsh criticism and was open to serious accusations like the following: <<The role of the folk as the chief creator of artistic values was negated [by the sociological method],

fetishism” and a “bourgeois feeling of property”⁵¹ when over-treasuring the original objects in their collections and opposing the policy of transferring objects among museums in order to balance collections, another one of the measures accompanying the cultural revolution of the First Five-Year Plan. The dilemma of authenticity that haunts any researcher concerned with Socialist museums of the 1950s is thus rooted in this phase of Soviet museology. Even if by the mid-1930s, both Fedorov-Davydov’s “vulgar sociology” and the “talking museums” were already condemned as deviations, their legacy was stronger and pervaded Soviet museology, and the museology of Soviet satellites after the Second World War, for decades to follow.

2.2.3 The textbooks of Soviet museology in Romania

Soviet museology was introduced in Romania first in practice, by building actual museums, and only then in theory. The first textbooks of Soviet museology were translated from Russian and printed in 1954 and respectively 1957, by the Romanian Ministry of Culture, quite a few years after the first museums based on Soviet museology were already inaugurated in Romania. A.I. Mihailovskaia’s *Organization and technique of the museum exhibit*⁵² was translated from a 1951 Russian edition, while the collective volume *Bases of Soviet Museology*⁵³ was translated in 1957 from an edition printed in USSR two years before; they were both printed “for internal use” and will become the fundamentals of Romanian museology in the years to come.

and all the achievements of the past were given away to the dominant exploiting classes>> Boris Groys, “The Struggle Against the Museum,” 155.

⁵¹ Konstantin Akinsha and Adam Jolles, “On the Third Front,” 169, 174.

⁵² A.I. Mihailovskaia, *Organizarea Şi Tehnica Expoziţiei de Muzeu (Organization and Technique of the Museum Exhibit)* (Bucharest: Ministerul Culturii, 1954).

⁵³ Galkina P.I. et al., *Bazele Muzeologiei Sovietice. Manual Pentru Uz Intern (Bases of Soviet Museology. Manual for Internal Use)* (Bucharest: Ministerul Culturii, 1957).

Both volumes open by stating the educational and propagandistic role of museums and provide a harsh criticism of possible deviations in museological practice, insisting on the ideological mistakes of 1930s “vulgar sociology” museums. Mihailovskaia defines Soviet museums as the “most active means of communist education of the working class,”⁵⁴ while *Bases of Soviet Museology* defines them as “an efficient propaganda means for communist ideas, communist world view and thus for communist education.”⁵⁵ The Soviet museum, Mihailovskaia continues, is an avant-garde museum: “it is different from bourgeois tsarist museums, collections of curiosities and also from foreign museums which reflect the crisis of bourgeois science[...] Soviet museums must fight against apolitical trends, against the objectivist approach and obsequiousness to bourgeois culture. Finally, Soviet museums must fight the lack of criticism.”⁵⁶

Both manuals mention only to refute previous trends in museum exhibition. The sociological school of M. N. Pokrovsky and the first Soviet Museological Congress of 1930 is mentioned only to be aggressively criticized. Pokrovsky is accused of “vulgar sociology” and “anti-scientific approach” because he promoted the display of interior dioramas in order to represent historical eras: “These exhibitions were based on the idea of presenting ‘pieces’ of real life in order to mirror characteristic traits of different historical periods. According to the authors of these exhibitions, these were the interiors, that is, they were the interior aspects of the life of people belonging to different classes of society. In reality, such interiors were only presenting exterior aspects of life, life-conditions of different classes, but gave no notions of the production modes. They could not unveil the essence of main

⁵⁴ Mihailovskaia, *Organisation and Technique of the Museum Exhibit*, 5.

⁵⁵ Galkina P.I. et al., *Bases of Soviet Museology*, 3.

⁵⁶ Mihailovskaia, *Organisation and Technique of the Museum Exhibit*, 7.

historical periods, of socio-economical formations, of correlations between classes, of the class struggle.”⁵⁷

The introduction to Mihailovskaia’s textbook, signed by F.N. Petrov insists on the dangerous political mistakes that can appear in museums. “The mistakes made in the ideological content of the soviet museum exhibitions, due to the harmful guidelines of the first [museological] congress that oriented museum personnel towards vane sociologizing, were also accompanied by mistakes in the form of museum exhibits. [...] The inability to put the ideological content in appropriate forms often leads to a decrease of the ideological-theoretical level of the exhibition and sometimes even to distortions and political mistakes.”⁵⁸

Although what the Soviet authors term “vulgar sociologism” never influenced Romanian museology before the communist takeover, the only possible reason for insisting on these apparently historical overviews must have been to raise awareness on the possibility of “distortions and political mistakes” in museums and the devastating effects that might result from such apparently benign artifacts as dioramas. Romanian museum were supposed to embrace and represent through exhibitions not only a totally new narrative on distant and recent history, art, folklore or science but also to achieve this by using the new museological forms provided by Soviet museology. The new museums of the 1950s were new not only in content but also in form and it is possible that the effect these new museological displays had on the unassuming visitor were probably greater than it is usually acknowledged.

Romanian museologists were quick to pick up on the new language in texts such as this 1959 review in a fine arts journal: “[...] the new function museums have in our cultural revolution, through the radically different purpose of educating and

⁵⁷ Galkina P.I. et al., *Bases of Soviet Museology*, 175.

⁵⁸ Mihailovskaia, *Organisation and Technique of the Museum Exhibit*, 3.

forming the public. The Soviet experience based on Marxist-Leninist aesthetics is felt in this domain in exhibitions based on the principles of chronology and content, not on the often subjective and misleading lineages of bourgeois museums.”⁵⁹

Soviet museology of the 1930s is also criticized for refusing to place original objects in exhibitions and using “pure formalist procedures” and “color and construction symbolism.”⁶⁰ From this perspective, the museology of the 1950s seems to be a conservative return to re-placing the object at the center of museum practice. The textbooks of the 1950s emphasize the importance of the original object, “the concrete material” as they call it, for the effect of authenticity on the visitor. The visitor of Soviet museum of the 1950s is to be turned into an eye-witness after seeing the original objects connected to certain historical events: “In the exhibitions, the visitor is to presented with the concrete materials he could have seen, where he the eye- witness the strikes at the beginning of the 20th century.”⁶¹

However, the deep mistrust in the object presented without textual guidance for its interpretation is still present in the postwar Soviet museology: “To help the visitor examine the exhibits in a correct manner and draw the correct conclusions, text-quotes and a system of texts by the authors are introduced in the exhibition.”⁶² It is hard to underestimate the importance of texts in Romanian museums of the 1950s. Probably more than half of the documents concerning the building of the Doftana museum, presented in the previous chapter, although a quite complex and artifact-based museum, were concerned with drafting, having approved and placing the most suitable texts and quotes from preeminent communists, dead or alive, in the museum.

⁵⁹ Al. P., “Recenzie La <<Artele Plastice in Rominia După 23 August 1944>> (Review of <<Fine Art in Romania After August 23 1944>>),” *Studii* 12, no. 4 (1959): 398.

⁶⁰ Galkina P.I. et al., *Bases of Soviet Museology*, 175.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 177.

After all, in the 1950s the censorship for museums was performed by an institution named the General Department for Press and Printing (DGPT)⁶³ whose main expertise was in censoring published texts. Their controls in museums, as narratively preserved in its archive,⁶⁴ were equally focused on museum texts as their reports and suggestions for improvement were always related to the text present in museums. Although this is not the place to discuss further the functioning of censorship in Romania through the DGPT it is important to note though that there was one museum in Romania that was not submitted to formal censorship but instead provided inspiration for censorship. The DGPT employees were visiting the Museum of Party History in Bucharest in order to become more acquainted with and knowledgeable about the norm they were supposed to apply to other museums. The display in the central Party Museum was most up-to-date and, if confused about the ideological correctness, the censors were to repeat visits: “Before each assignment, the latest Party documents will be studied in connection to the assignment’s purpose. Upon return, if necessary, the History Museum of the Communist Party, of the Revolutionary and Democratic Movement of Romania will again be visited.”⁶⁵ This is the museum whose story will be told in the next subchapter.

⁶³ In 1949, the General Department for Press and Printing (Directia Generala a Presei si Tipariturilor) was established in order to “exercise State control towards defending state secrets and for the political content, over all propaganda material, agitation and any other printed materials to be publicly disseminated”(Decree 214/1949 for establishing DGPT, May 20, 1949). In 1975 it was renamed the Committee for Press and Printing only to be abolished two years later, in 1977. From 1977 on, censorship, officially nonexistent, became a more diffuse yet still powerful instrument of the Communist state.

⁶⁴ ANR, fond Comitetul Pentru Presă și Tipărituri (Committee for Press and Printing).

⁶⁵ ANR, fond Comitetul Pentru Presă și Tipărituri (Committee for Press and Printing), dossier 60/1966, f. 42

2.3. The Party Museum. 1948-1958

Museums of the communist revolution and of the history of the communist movement appeared in Eastern Europe almost immediately after the region entered the Soviet camp. The haste of their establishment suggests an existing recipe that could be easily transformed into a real museum. The master-recipe was clearly the Museum of the Revolution established in Moscow in 1924 and still functioning to this day under the new name, as of 1998, of The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia. According to the site of the museum, the initiative to establish a museum of the revolution preceded the Bolshevik revolution by a few months, as the Society of the Museum of the Revolution was formed in April 1917.⁶⁶ An exhibition called “Red Moscow” was opened in 1922 and would form the basis of what will be called first the Moscow Historical-Revolutionary Museum and then, as of 1924, the Museum of the Revolution of the USSR.⁶⁷ Interestingly enough, the Romanian variant of this museum would not only replicate its discourse in full Stalinism but also its swift sequence of names, among which the nick-names of *Revolutionary museum*, for the late 40s and early 50s, and *Party museum*, since the 50s seem to have been most widely used.

⁶⁶ <http://eng.sovr.ru/museum/history/>, accessed May 14, 2013.

⁶⁷ Ibid.



Fig. 2.1. The Party Museum after 1958 in the neo-Romanian palace on no.3 Kiseleff Boulevard. Source: Cover of the album *Muzeul de Istorie a Partidului Muncitoresc Român* (*History Museum of the Romanian Workers' Party*). Bucharest, 1960.

The Party museum⁶⁸ has had at least five very different official names during its 40 years existence.⁶⁹ I am listing them here for clarity, yet I will mostly refer to it by its informal but consistent name, the Party Museum, a name which was, and still is, most commonly and widely used by those who still remember the propaganda museum in the monumental building on no. 3 Kiseleff Boulevard.

⁶⁸ My own research into the history of the Party Museum could only access few archival documents and mostly printed materials (museum albums, newspapers, Museum's review) as the archive of the former History Museum of the Communist Party is still not archived and thus unavailable for research at the ANR (Romanian National Archives).

⁶⁹ The history of the Party Museum has attracted so little attention among researchers, that not even its successive names have been so far correctly recorded. The only publication that briefly touches upon the history of the building on 3 Kiseleff Blvd. during communism, records an inaccurate succession of names. Petru Popovăț, "Muzeul de La Șosea (The Museum by the Boulevard)"; A more recent and accurate historical account in Cornel Constantin Ilie, "Regimul Comunist Si Muzeele de Istorie Din Romania (The Communist Regime and History Museums in Romania)."

Chronology of names and locations of the Party museum:

1948 – 1950: **Moments of the People’s Struggle [for Freedom] Museum** (*Muzeul Momente din lupta poporului [pentru libertate]*); sometimes called **the Bălcescu Establishment** (*Așezămintele Bălcescu*) or Moments from the Revolutionary Struggle of the People Museum (*Muzeul Momente din lupta revoluționară a poporului*); located in the Bălcescu Establishment, former Brătianu palace on Biserica Amzei Street no. 5-7.

1950 - 1954: **Museum [of the PRR People’s] Revolutionary Struggle** (*Muzeul luptei revoluționare [a poporului din RPR]*); informally called the Revolutionary Museum (*Muzeul revoluționar*) closed for reorganization 1951-1954.

1954 – 1965: **History Museum of the Romanian Worker’s Party** (*Muzeul de istorie al Partidului Muncitoresc Român*); in 1958 relocated to Kiseleff Blvd no. 3 (see figure)

1965: **History Museum of the Romanian Communist Party** (*Muzeul de istorie al Partidului Comunist Român*)

1966 – 1990: **History Museum of the Communist Party, of the Revolutionary and Democratic Movement of Romania** (*Muzeul de Istorie a Partidului Comunist, a Miscării Revolutionare și Democratice din Romania*)

2.3.1. Moments of history. From Revolutionary Museum to Party Museum

Already in the 1949 report of the Committee for Reorganizing Museums, two new museums were mentioned, but were not put under scrutiny; on the contrary, despite falling aside of the main concern of the report, which was art museums, the report mentions the Bălcescu Establishment (*Așezămintele Bălcescu*) in an praising

context: “From the point of view of organization and systematization, these [museums in the capital] leave as much for wanting as those in the provinces, with the exception of the recently inaugurated Bălcescu Establishment.”⁷⁰

But what is the Bălcescu Establishment? The reluctance of the Committee’s members to name the museum is it owed to fear, lack of knowledge or simple precaution? It is most probably a reflection of the uncertainty in naming the museum of the people who created it, the top hierarchy of the Romanian Communist Party. The Party needed a museum to legitimize its accession to power, yet the history of the Communist party per se was unwritten, full of blind spots, secrets, stories and characters whose post-mortem fate had not yet been decided upon. Thus, the new museum was neither a museum of party history nor a museum of national history; it was, to use its initial name, strangely accurate, a collection of moments, of Moments of the People’s Struggle Museum. The peculiarity of the name gave way to numerous adaptations: it was sometimes referred to as Moments from our People’s Struggle for Freedom until 1950 when the “moments” were dropped from the title and the name was officially changed into Museum of the RPR people’s revolutionary struggle (*Muzeul luptei revoluționare a poporului din RPR*). It was evasively and informally called The Bălcescu Establishment because of its location in a former palace of the Brătianu family and the Brătianu library⁷¹ transformed by the new power into a cultural establishment bearing the name of 1848 revolutionary figure, Nicolae

⁷⁰ *Report of the Commission for Reorganizing Museums in the Country*, ANIC, fond CC al PCR – Propagandă și Agitație, no.88/1949, ff. 2-3.

⁷¹ The Brătianu family was an important dynasty of politicians, leading the Liberal Party, involved in transforming Romania into a kingdom, gaining independence and achieving the post-1918 unification of Great Romania.

Bălcescu.⁷² The building was designed by architect Petre Antonescu⁷³ in the same neo-Romanian style as the future location of the museum, on Kiseleff Boulevard.



Fig. 2.2. The former Bălcescu Establishment, former Brătianu palace, in 2013 an abandoned branch of the National Library. The Revolutionary Museum turned Party Museum functioned here between 1948 and 1958. Photograph by Simina Bădică.

The building was initially built as the residence of Ion. I.C. Brătianu. After his death in 1927, his wife donated the building, the money and the books to open a public library bearing her husband's name. Its holdings were considered the most important collection of historical and rare books in the country. A new wing was designed and built by the same Petre Antonescu to answer the requirements of

⁷² Nicolae Bălcescu is one of the leaders of the 1848 revolution in the Romanian provinces, consistently very well regarded by Communist propaganda, proudly listed among the predecessors of the socialist movement, although his vehement anti-Russian writings had to be withdrawn from publication throughout the Communist regime. Vlad Georgescu, *Politică Și Istorie. Cazul Comuniștilor Români (Politics and History. The Case of Romanian Communists)*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Jon Dumitru Verlag, 1983), 31 Bălcescu's image was printed on the most valuable Romanian bill, of one hundred lei, all through Romanian socialism.

⁷³ George Fotino, "Biblioteca I.I.C. Brătianu (I.I.C. Brătianul Library)," *Boabe de Grâu* IV, no. 5 (May 1933): 257–273.

modern biblioteconomy. After the war, the building continued to function as a cultural establishment, this time as a propaganda museum. It is likely that, while the revolutionary museum functioned here, between 1948 and 1958 (although closed for reorganization 1951 to 1954), the rare book collection was not removed from the building; after the museum moved on Kiseleff Boulevard, the building housed the foreign language and rare book collection of the National Library, a collection probably based on Brătianu's library.

The haste of changing names and replacing old institutions with new ones was sometimes translated as an attempt to metaphorically and physically erase the past. Replacing the Brătianu Library with the Revolutionary Museum is recorded by one of the information items drafted by Radio Free Europe as "the destruction of Romania's best historical library."⁷⁴ The informer, an Italian who spent four years in a Romanian prison claims to have "witnessed the removal of the books to the Ministry of Interior and their destruction in the cellars of the ministry."⁷⁵ There is however no other information to confirm this hypothesis while the Romanian communists are known to have taken books away from public access but very rarely to actually destroy them.

The inauguration of the Revolutionary museum in the former Brătianu Library, in July 1948 was to celebrate one hundred years since the 1848 revolutionary year, a revolution now symbolized by the tragic fate of Nicolae Bălcescu. Establishing moments of struggle in Romanian history was nothing other than putting the communist take-over on a historical map as the final point of a series of fiercely

⁷⁴ "Romania's Best Historical Library Destroyed", 14 April 1956. HU OSA 300-1-2-69964; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: General Records: Information Items; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest. Electronic record available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10891/osa:d9a09191-23d3-4cd4-852b-00a234ad6d26> accessed May 30, 2013.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 1.

fought struggles for freedom and making way for the idea of a "true history of Romanians"⁷⁶ that had been previously hidden from them.

2.3.1.1. Darkness. A visit to the Moments of the People's Struggle [for Freedom] Museum in 1948

The rewriting of Romanian history through the eyes and for the benefit of the Communist party is a well researched academic subject. From the early writings of Vlad Georgescu⁷⁷ to the recent analyses of Bogdan Iacob,⁷⁸ the main coordinates of the official narrative have been traced. It is enough to mention for the purposes of this chapter, that with the publication in 1947 of the *History of Romania*⁷⁹ edited by the new historian-in-chief of the regime, Mihail Roller,⁸⁰ Romanian history acquired its most rigid Marxist interpretation, based on class struggle, with a focus on tight Romanian-Russian relations throughout the centuries.

The *Moments* museum attempts to display this new narrative in a vivid manner with specific museological techniques. The museum of the 1950s is meant to be a living history book⁸¹ where evidences of the narrated past become tangible and the

⁷⁶ Victor Nămlaru, "Un Muzeu Despre Istoria Adevărată a Poporului Român. Dela Roata Pe Care a Fost Zdrobit Trupul Lui Horea, La Celula H, Dela Doftana (A Museum About the True History of the Romanian People. From the Wheel That Broke Horea's Body to the H Cell in Doftana)," *Scânteia*, July 5, 1948.

⁷⁷ Vlad Georgescu, *Politics and History*.

⁷⁸ Bogdan Cristian Iacob, "Stalinism, Historians, and the Nation: History-production Under Communism in Romania (1955-1966)," 2010, PhD thesis, Central European University.

⁷⁹ Roller, *History of Romania*.

⁸⁰ "Roller was deputy-chief of the Propaganda Section of the Romanian Workers Party and vice-president of the R.P.R. Academy (1949-1954). In 1955, he was demoted to the position of vice-president of the Institute of Party History. M.Roller's activity as a party historian is severely criticized during the 9-13th, June 1958 plenary session of the PMR. Roller gradually loses influence. He did not survive both politically and physically to the change in party-line." Bogdan Cristian Iacob, "Stalinism, Historians, and the Nation: History-production Under Communism in Romania (1955-1966)," 105; See also Liviu Pleșa, "Mihail Roller și „stalinizarea” Istoriografiei Românești (Mihail Roller and the 'Stalinization' of Romanian Historiography)," *Annals of the University of Alba Iulia History (Annales Universitatis Apulensis Series Historica)* 10, no. 1 (2006): 165–177.

⁸¹ "Through its exhibits – documents, objects, graphics, models, sculptures and paintings – the History Museum of the Romanian Workers' Party constitutes a living book of our people's fight, under the

words of the historian acquire additional power. The moments chosen for representation in the museum are moments of conflict, moments whose script and scenography could be successfully displayed. The first *moment* in the museum is the Gheorghe Doja rebellion,⁸² followed by the Horea, Cloșca and Crișan peasant riots (1784), the Tudor Vladimirescu rising (1821) and the 1848 revolutionary moment. The room dedicated to Horea claims to display the original wheel on which Horea was tortured to death.⁸³ Information on the original display of the museum only comes from written press with unfortunately little visual and archival material to rely on. However, the articles in the *Scânteia* journal, the official newspaper of the RCP can be trusted as an integral part of the exhibition: quoting directly from the words of the museum guides, the article itself can be considered a narrative translation of the museum with outmost concern for the intentions of the museum curators.



Fig. 2.3. Ana Pauker's cell reproduced in the Revolutionary Museum.
Source: Buletinul FIAP, February 1950

leadership of its heroic party.” Ardeleanu, Ion T., “Muzeul de Istorie a Partidului Muncitoresc Roman (The History Museum of RWP),” *Analele Institutului de Istorie a Partidului de Pe Langa C.C. Al P.M.R.* IV, no. 4 (August 1958): 56.

⁸² Gheorghe Doja is the Romanian version of his name, as he is equally, as Dózsa György, a Hungarian national hero.

⁸³ Victor Nămlaru, “Un Muzeu Despre Istoria Adevărată.”

The 1948 Moments museum becomes a real terror house⁸⁴ *avant la lettre* in the last sections dedicated to the fight of communists during their illegal years. The visitors can enter no less than three recreated cells, all in profound darkness, with original doors and adorned with prison props, heavy hand and feet-cuffs.

”You climb a steep, narrow iron staircase. Darkness. In the corner, a gas lamp burns with a weak flame. The words of the guide are cold, ruthless: *Here, in front of us, we have recreated the famous H cell from Doftana. Always humid and dark. Airless. Only a bucket for the prisoner’s necessities and an earth bowl (strachina) for food. No bed. [...] You look inside the cell. Darkness. And yet political detainees managed to write, to lay on the prison’s walls their thoughts and hopes. The words are strong: Long live the Soviet Union! And the same writing, in another part, Down with fascist terror!, Long live RCP! One has drawn on the wall a hammer and a sickle...*”⁸⁵

The replica-cell, including fake scratching on the fake walls, aims at stirring emotions. Visitors must feel as if they had really been in the H cell in Doftana and seen the writings and drawings on the prison walls.⁸⁶ The three cells are not random cells. Although mere props, they aim at recreating particular cells inhabited by precise real persons. Along the generic H cell from Doftana, the museum displays cell no. 7 from Doftana prison, “narrow, miserable” where Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej spent ten years and cell no. 32 from Râmnicu Sărat penitentiary where Ana Pauker was imprisoned in “deep darkness.” As if to add more authenticity to their scenography, the curators insist that the doors of the cells are genuine, one brought from Doftana, the other from Râmnicu Sărat.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ In what concerns prison cell recreation, it can arguably be a forerunner of the Budapest Terror Háza (Terror House) inaugurated in 2002.

⁸⁵ Victor Nămolaru, “In Fata Celulei H Dela Doftana (In Front of the H Cell in Doftana),” *Scânteia*, July 7, 1948.

⁸⁶ At the time of the opening of this museum, July 1948, the reconstruction works on the ruins of the Doftana prison had not yet begun. Among the cells to be reconstructed were those in the H and B section including the cell belonging to Gheorghiu-Dej.

⁸⁷ The veracity of this information is highly debatable. The cell of Gheorghiu-Dej in Doftana had collapsed in the earthquake seven years before and the ruins had been abandoned since (see chapter on Doftana prison-museum), while the Râmnicu Sărat penitentiary was still a functioning prison and will continue to be used for important political prisoners by the Communist regime.

The recreated cells and the two rooms dedicated to the imprisoned antifascists were organized with the help of the National Federation of Former Antifascist Political Prisoners and Inmates (FIAP) which was, at the same time, organizing the Doftana prison-museum 100 km away from Bucharest.⁸⁸ Other supposedly genuine objects displayed are the iron chains and cuffs attached to the detainees' feet. Apparently the visitors were allowed to touch these torture objects in order to get a real feeling of what being a communist prisoner meant.

“A group of high-school students also visits the exhibition. They listen, in silence, to the explanations of the guide. A student, she should be around 12, tries to lift the iron chains worn around their feet by the Doftana prisoners. Her face was gentle, her blue eyes had the clearness of a mountain spring. She tries in vain. He cannot even move them. Now, her eyes have darkened with fear...”⁸⁹

However, it is not fear that the museum seeks to induce to its visitors. As the narrator continues, “You have in front of you heavy chains, torture instruments but in spite of them the unbeatable moral force of the communists, their overwhelming power, appears to you bright and clear.”⁹⁰ And to sum up the whole museum experience, the *Scântea* journalist spells out the correct thoughts to be thought when the visitor leaves the exhibition, addressing the visitor directly, in the second person: “You have seen the fight and the actions of the Party, you have lived the accomplishments achieved under the guidance and rule of the Party and now you understand why Ana Pauker was so right in saying that <<if Doja, Horea, Closca, Crisan, Tudor Vladimirescu, Nicolae Bălcescu were among us now, with the peasants

⁸⁸ Comnacu, “Un an de Activitate a Federației Naționale a Foștilor Deținuți Și Internați Politici Antifasciști (One Year of Activity of FIAP).”

⁸⁹ Victor Nămolaru, “In Fata Celulei H Dela Doftana (In Front of the H Cell in Doftana).”

⁹⁰ Ibid.

and townsmen they led in battle against their perpetrators, they would all recognize in communists their fellow fighters.>>”⁹¹

The Revolutionary Museum in Moscow, the model for the Romanian one, was perceived by its visitors with similar emotions: “Overwhelmed by emotions, with a feeling of deep veneration, we silently walk through the precious relics. [...] Staggering testimonies: heavy hand and feet-cuffs worn by the victims of the prisons, the deportees of remote Siberia; straightjackets, all kinds of torture instruments, monstrous, savage. It is hard to look away from them.”⁹²

2.3.1.2. A counter-visit to the Revolutionary Museum in Bucharest

Among the strange *information items* held by the Open Society Archives in Budapest and produced as part of the documentation process at Radio Free Europe, there is a vivid description of a July 1952 visit to the Romanian Revolutionary Museum. The group of visitors is probably composed of foreigners, although their knowledge of Romanian history suggests either Romanian origin or a long residence in Romania. The peculiarity of these information items rests though in their problematic reliability,⁹³ as most of these documents were drafted based on information retrieved from people who had fled their Soviet camp countries.⁹⁴

Narrators on both sides of the Iron Curtain agree that the museum is “arranged in such a way as to appear like an open book of Romanian history.”⁹⁵ The guide of the

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Marin Mihalache, *Moscova Leningrad. Muzei Şi Monumente* (Bucharest: Cartea Rusă, 1957), 69–70.

⁹³ Rév, *Retroactive Justice*, 266.

⁹⁴ See the description of this collection on OSA’s site, <http://hdl.handle.net/10891/osa:484d852e-1334-4570-a2be-e41230b9e36a>, accessed May 24, 2013.

⁹⁵ “The Historical Museum at Bucharest “The People's Revolutionary Fight””, 13 August 1952. HU OSA 300-1-2-23755; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: General Records: Information Items; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

anonymous group is Mihail Roller's assistant who tries, unsuccessfully to convince the visitor of the authenticity of the museum's narrative although he seems himself not very much convinced of it. "The way which these developments are presented cannot very well be considered objective – but at least an attempt for objectivity can be noted, apparently, with the intention to prepare the public for the enormities, which will be presented in the successive rooms."⁹⁶ The text mentions museum artifacts that have been removed due to recent political changes. Images and, in fact, any mentioning of Ana Pauker⁹⁷ had disappeared from the museum, as explained by their host. The same host that gained the sympathy of his visitors by acknowledging the terror he lived in and asking them not to mention his name when reporting this visit. The reconstructed cells triggered a most tensed conversation: "When we asked him: << have you ever been to the DOFTANA castle?>> he had to admit that he had never been there. We told him, that we were there no more than seven months ago, and did not remember the cells being in the deplorable conditions as a result of the illustrations we saw in the museum. He seemed to be very impressed and had no reply to this. We also added that the cells where PAUKER Ana, GHEORGHIU etc. were imprisoned had been restored, and the few cells still in their original condition were very different indeed from those which were reconstructed. How could this difference be explained? <<Did it not appear – we asked our friend – as if the reconstructed cells were only set up for propaganda purposes, as they were reconstructed so different from the original?>> We also implied that, should PAUKER Ana be in PARIS or LONDON at present, she most probably would have to say a few things regarding

Electronic record available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10891/osa:5e072177-a843-4f43-adcf-87a54b8eefe0> accessed May 30, 2013.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 1.

⁹⁷ Ana Pauker, the unofficial leader of the RWP after the war, alongside Dej, was purged in 1952 as part of transnational anti-Jewish purges in the Stalinist parties. Levy, *Ana Pauker*, 2–6.

those cells of the Doftana prison. At this point our guide was so terrified that he asked us most insistently to leave and to have pity on him and his position. [...] Our guide took us to our legation but refused to follow us inside and went off in a great hurry, asking us again not to cause any trouble, which would lead to his imprisonment.”⁹⁸

As I could not access contemporary sincere accounts of visits to the Revolutionary museum, the two extremes provided by one extremely laudatory and one extremely critical account of the museum discourse could provide a sense of how the museum was perceived in the era, depending on one’s political affinities. It should be stressed however that this museological discourse, aiming at stirring emotion by showing shocking images and artifacts, like objects and images of torture, was new in Romanian museums and thus it might have had greater impact and increased credibility, than what is assumed by the foreign visitors in this last information item. The following pages try to provide a more general understanding of what was expected of visitors in Socialist museums.

2.3.2. The Socialist Pilgrim

Soviet museology was arguably the first museology to grant an important place to the visitor in the exhibitionary complex, to research the profile of the visitor and to try to adapt its discourse in order to open communication channels to particular kinds of visitors. Soviet museum were highly innovative in opening departments of museum education as early as 1927,⁹⁹ trying to make the museum not only open to less educated visitors, but also available, understandable, friendly. The downside of

⁹⁸ "The Historical Museum at Bucharest "The People's Revolutionary Fight"", 13 August 1952. HU OSA 300-1-2-23755, p. 4.

⁹⁹ Konstantin Akinsha and Adam Jolles, "On the Third Front," 177.

this apparent democratization of museums was the great pressure that would finally be exerted on the visitor. As with most avant-garde innovations in museum practice, this emphasis on the visitor would also be transformed into a pressure tool as the museum visit became so regulated that the visitor's freedom was totally abolished. This subchapter will discuss the ideal-type Socialist visitor, performing collective visits, wary of becoming an "unorganized visitor," acting as true pilgrim while travelling to designated sites of symbolic value and becoming upon return a witness of the "holy relics" she had seen.

2.3.2.1. "When you get inside the gates you are part of the show." The visitor as exhibit.

The warning at the entrance of the 1901 Pan-American Exposition, quoted by Tony Bennett, "Please remember when you get inside the gates you are part of the show,"¹⁰⁰ hints to the complex role of the visitor inside a museum, or any other exhibition. Is the visitor merely a spectator, observing the exhibits with a distant and objectifying gaze? Are the objects on display actually domesticated and submissive as the archiving and classification techniques attempt to make them? Is the museum something to walk through or does it possess more subtle ways of making the visitor "part of the show?" These questions are general questions in understanding the functioning of museums. They will be contextualized to the particular situation of communist museums in order to define this new character, that I name *the socialist pilgrim*, which plays an important role in the story of museums in Socialist Romania.

For Tony Bennett, the answer is clear: the visitor is part of the *exhibitionary complex*. He describes "the museum as a space of observation and regulation in order

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Bennett, p. 68

that the visitors' body might be taken hold of and be molded in accordance with the requirements of new norms of public conduct."¹⁰¹ And this inclusion of the visitor into the exhibition has nothing to do with the post-modern acclaimed and sought-after interactivity of the museum. The visitor has been embedded into the museum institution ever since its creation. Bennett argues that visitors are not lured into the museum merely to see, to be educated, to be molded but also to be seen, as museums are "making the crowd itself the ultimate spectacle."¹⁰² Bennett would rather speak of exhibitionary complexes, than of museums, where the spectator/visitor is definitely part of the exhibitionary complex.

I have started with Tony Bennett's analysis of the role of the visitor in museums since his narrative fits the role assigned to the visitor in socialist museums. It also shows that this is not a totalitarian trait enforced on the museum world by an oppressive government, but it is rather an inherent and historically documented component of museum practice.

In a more recent example, Patrick T. Houlihan observed the unsettling arrangement of objects in the U'mista Cultural Centre in British Columbia, an exhibition of Native American culture curated by Native Americans. In this exhibition, "the expected positions of objects and visitor are reversed. The visitor is made to pass before the objects at rest in the places normally reserved for spectators. It is in this reverse placement that one experiences also the reversal and the confusion of roles. That is, the object becomes the viewer and the visitor becomes the objects."¹⁰³ Unlike the 1901 welcome message at the Pan-American Exhibition, the

¹⁰¹ Bennett, p. 24

¹⁰² Bennett, p. 68

¹⁰³ Patrick T. Houlihan, "The Poetic Image and Native American Art" in Karp and Lavine, *Exhibiting Cultures*, 206.

visitor of these post-modern, and usually experimental exhibitions, is usually not warned of the changing role she is about to play when entering a museum.

In the case of prison-museums analyzed in the previous chapter, the position of the visitor in the exhibitionary complex is perhaps easier to grasp: the visitor is not only an exhibit but is actually engulfed, swollen into the main exhibit and artifact which is the prison itself. The visitor literally takes the place of the former prisoners, as the body of the visitor takes the place previously inhabited by the body of the prisoner. The example of the Bargello former prison, now a national museum in Florence is convincing. When analyzing the transformation from prison to museum, historian Allie Terry explains that, “In the second half of the nineteenth century the bodies within the Bargello were cultivated as part of the elite class of society. These were bodies that voluntarily travelled to the Bargello to view the works of art displayed inside its walls and that were made aware of sensory stimuli provoked by the material and behavioral frames of the museum. As the participatory bodies within the Bargello walls shifted from criminal to museum visitor, the physical experience of beholding was necessarily transformed. Despite the dramatic shift in the audience and the function of the site, violence remained integral to the visual encounter; that is to say, the violence that was once integral to the criminal viewing experience in the prison was translated into a powerful aesthetic experience for the viewer of art within the nineteenth-century museum.”¹⁰⁴ She concludes that, “Through their bodily engagement with the spaces of former atrocities and the aesthetic encounter with the original decoration, these visitors performed a form of civic cleansing that replaced the former judicial role of punishment in the city.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Terry, “Criminals and Tourists: Prison History and Museum Politics at the Bargello in Florence,” 838–840.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 838.

The socialist museum is usually defined by its creators and theoreticians as an educational institution. In the 1950s, the accent falls more on the ideological accents of education: “the museum is a sector of ideological work. Museum propaganda cannot be abstract, it must set as its final goal the formation of high moral and spiritual qualities in Soviet men.”¹⁰⁶ While in the 1970s education is seen more as bringing culture the socialist citizen: “the essential purpose of the museum in contemporary society is educating and enlightening the masses,”¹⁰⁷ what remains unchanged throughout the communist regime is an insistence on “the masses” as the main focus of museum activity in an almost post-modern insistence on the crucial part played by the visitor in museums. A visit to a socialist museum is not just a visit, museum professionals insist; a museum visit is transformative for the socialist citizen. The socialist visitor not only does, or sees or learns, the socialist visitor becomes. The socialist visitor becomes a witness and a pilgrim. It is my attempt in these pages to trace an ideal-type Socialist visitor constructed around the concepts of collectivism (the socialist visitor performs collective visits), witnessing and pilgrimage.

2.3.2.2. The collective visit

Soviet museology, as presented in one of the manuals translated in 1957 from Russian to Romanian¹⁰⁸ is especially concerned with the museum visitor. The chapter dedicated to “Museums’ work with the masses” (*Munca de masă a muzeelor*) is entirely dedicated to methods of educating and entertaining the Soviet visitor. As “the main form of working with the masses,” is, for the Soviet museum, “the collective

¹⁰⁶ Galkina P.I. et al., *Bases of Soviet Museology*, 245.

¹⁰⁷ Corina Nicolescu, *Muzeologie Generală (General Museology)* (Bucharest: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1979).

¹⁰⁸ Galkina P.I. et al., *Bases of Soviet Museology*.

visit, politically oriented and scientifically substantiated,”¹⁰⁹ the bulk of this chapter, its main argument, is concerned with the collective visit. “The visit has the goal of not only enriching the visitors with new scientific knowledge, but of helping to form their political consciousness.”¹¹⁰



Fig. 2.4. “Working people visit Doftana”. From the album *Muzeul de Istorie a Partidului Muncitoresc Român. Muzeul Doftana*. Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1960.

The importance of the collective visit, as opposed to the individual visit of the “unorganized visitor” can be explained on multiple levels. The need to increase the number of visitors to socialist museums, the need to attract the kind of public that does not normally pass museum gates (workers and peasants) and a fascination with

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 243.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 245.

collective activities as opposed to the bourgeois individualistic organization of leisure time. The collective visit might also be decoded as one form of the *etatization of time* as defined by anthropologist Katherine Verdery¹¹¹ (true, for late communist Romania), however I believe the most important factor is the high degree of control over the visitor's experience during the collective visit, where the presence of the guide and the strict schedule are crucial.

In this chapter of *Bases of Soviet Museology*, concerned with engaging the masses in Soviet museums, the guide is as important a character as the visitor: "The duty of the guide is to mobilize the masses around the concrete burning duties (*sarcini*) that stand before the Soviet people. The guide must not forget that the museum is a sector of ideological work. Museum propaganda cannot be abstract, it must set as its final goal the formation of high moral and spiritual qualities in Soviet men."¹¹²

During the collective visit, whose theme had to be firmly established and explained in advance, the visitors are not to stop to examine exhibits that are not part of the thematic guided visit. The guide is firmly instructed to regulate this. Detailed instructions are also given to the guide on how to maintain the discipline within the group, how to use an elegant stick (and never the hand, finger or pencil), how to raise or lower the voice.¹¹³

The *Bases of Soviet Museology* (1957) deals with the individual visitor only towards the end of the chapter, while she is labeled the "unorganized visitor" or the "isolated visitor." The unorganized visitor can be accommodated by providing her with guidebooks and explanatory texts but the ultimate goal is to actually organize the

¹¹¹ Katherine Verdery, "The 'Etatization' of Time in Ceaușescu's Romania," in *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

¹¹² Galkina P.I. et al., *Bases of Soviet Museology*, 245.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 258–259.

unorganized visitor. She is to be informed of the possibilities of joining groups of visitors and other collective activities: “Providing this kind of visits for the isolated visitors must be systematized. We must inform the isolated visitors about the schedule of organized visits and the themes of these visits.”¹¹⁴

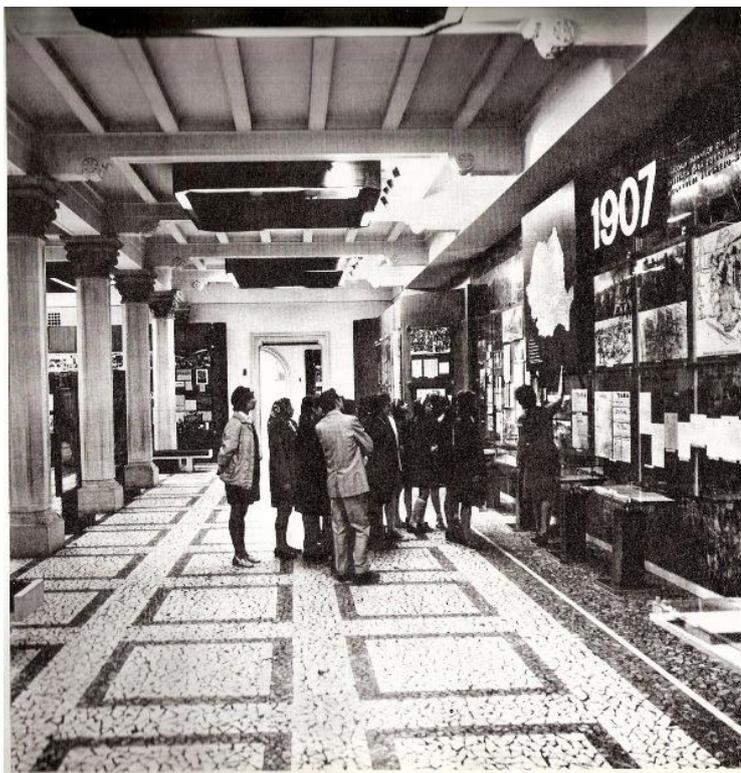


Fig. 2.5. Guided visit to the Museum of Party History in the early 1970s. From the album Ioan Lupescu. *Întâlnire Cu Istoria. Muzeul de Istorie a Partidului Comunist, a Mișcării Revoluționare Și Democratice Din România (Meeting History. History Museum of the Communist Party, of the Revolutionary and Democratic Movement of Romania)*. Bucharest: Arta Grafică, 1974.

Two “essential categories of visitors” are identified by socialist museology in Romania: school-children and proletarians,¹¹⁵ testifying to the essentially didactic structure and purpose of the socialist museum. When finally Romanian museologists conclude that “the visit is a creative process,” they are referring to the creativity

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 275.

¹¹⁵ Nicolae Dunăre, “Legătura muzeelor din regiunea Cluj cu masele” (The connection with the masses of Cluj region museums) *Din Activitatea Muzeelor Noastre (From Our Museums’ Activity)* (Cluj: Sfatul Popular al Regiunii Cluj, Secțiunea Culturală, 1955), 76–77.

required of the guide and not to the creativity of the visitor. The visitor is perceived as a mere recipient of information whose attention has to be seized and controlled but whose creative dealing with the received information is not taken into consideration: “In a scientifically organized museum, the visitor easily assimilates the content, through strong and direct impressions which remain engraved in his mind through their intensity.”¹¹⁶

2.3.2.3. The Socialist visitor: witness and a pilgrim

The visitor to a socialist museum should not leave the premises of the museum the same person she came in. The visitor is to be transformed by the museum experience, as the museum is part and parcel of the transformative plan, the creation of the new man, organized by the newly established socialist regime in Romania, on Soviet inspiration. The visitor has to be transformed. She has to be transformed into an eye-witness. It is not only that the visitor has to be convinced of the things, objects and narratives she sees with her own eye, but she has to be able to internalize this knowledge, to be able to bear witness to it, to spread this knowledge and become herself an agent of the transformation she has underwent.

The expectation of the visitor witnessing while visiting museums is still one highly sought after quality of contemporary museums, especially in those dealing with past atrocities. The Holocaust memorial in Washington D.C. is, for example, one of the world-acclaimed and equally criticized museums precisely for forcing the visitor into becoming witness.¹¹⁷ The witness and the idea of becoming witness, actually

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 3.

¹¹⁷ “Finally, words of warning written next to the federal government’s American eagle symbol sum up the agenda of the museum: <<For the dead and the living, we must bear witness.>> And, having turned

became a crucial concept after the Second World War as the extent of the atrocities committed in the concentration camps were slowly uncovered, mainly with the help and because of the existence of witnesses. As Giorgio Agamben challenges the possibility of ever bearing witness to the ultimate and most radical experience of the Holocaust, becoming a Muslim, a living-dead in a concentration camp, he also discusses the concept of witness (even if only to refute it). Agamben discerns two meanings of the term witness: “In Latin, there are two words for <<witness>>. The first word, *testis*, from which our word *testimony* derives, etymologically signifies the person who, in a trial or law suit between two rival parties, is in the position of a third party. The second word, *superstes*, designates a person who has lived through something, who has experienced an event from beginning to end and can therefore bear witness to it.”¹¹⁸ The confusion between the two meanings exists to this day, and Agamben is concerned with “the tacit confusion of ethical categories and juridical categories.”¹¹⁹

Soviet museology, as translated for the use of Romanian museologists and later on Romanian socialist museology uses the ideal-type of visitor-witness in constructing its exhibitionary discourse. The goal of transforming the visitor into a witness is one very seriously assumed purpose of socialist museums. The manual *Bases of Soviet Museology* states this clearly: “In the exhibition, the visitor will see the concrete materials that he would have seen were he the eye witness of the strikes at the beginning of the 20th century.”¹²⁰ As it has been already discussed in the subchapter on Soviet museology, the issue of authenticity and the presence in the

the pages of one’s Pass for his or her Holocaust persona, the visitor must now bear witness to that person’s fate, discovering whether this soul met death or continued living in the aftermath of the camps.” Timothy W. Luke, *Museum Politics. Power Plays at the Exhibition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 46.

¹¹⁸ Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 18.

¹¹⁹ Agamben, p. 18.

¹²⁰ Galkina P.I. et al., *Bases of Soviet Museology*, 176.

exhibition of original objects is thus justified not by a bourgeois object fetishism but by the explicit purpose of producing eye-witnesses.

In the case of the Doftana museum, a translation of the witnessing qualities takes place between walls and visitors. It is the walls that had been the witnesses of the struggle and suffering of the communist martyrs and, by seeing the walls, the visitors themselves become witnesses. The true witnesses, the impossible witnesses, in Agamben's understanding, the ones who did not survive Doftana are gone. But the walls remained to bear witness. "Here where these torn down walls have witnessed all the decades of suffering of the anti-fascist political prisoners [...]"¹²¹ goes the speech of Alexandru Drăghici, member of the Central Committee of the RWP at Doftana's inauguration in 1949. A 1948 newspaper supplement invites visitors to take testimony from the walls: "Look at these walls and you will see that in the middle of the greatest terror in Doftana, meetings were held there and reports [*referate*] were written."¹²² Doftana museum breeds witnesses but it also breeds future fighters: "This is why this museum is a school. A school that every young constructor of socialism should visit. In this school you learn to hate even more the class enemy, in this school you learn even better that you have to fight with all your strength so that a new Doftana will never exist in our Homeland."¹²³ In the Lenin-Stalin Museum, inaugurated in Bucharest in 1955, the visitor "re-lives in a few hours, the touching history of communists' endless battles for the happiness of man."¹²⁴

¹²¹ "Comemorarea Luptătorilor Clasei Muncitoare Uciși Sub Zidurile Doftanei (Commemoration of Working Class Fighters Killed Under Doftana's Walls)," *Scânteia*, November 11, 1949.

¹²² "Doftana. Fortăreață neagră și umedă," (Doftana. Black and humid fortress) newspaper clipping from *Romania Libera magazin* in AMNIR, fond Muzeul Partidului, file i2500 (*Comemorare Doftana 1948. Planuri de Munca*)

¹²³ "Pe Locul Doftanei Atunci Se-nălța-va ca Martor Un Roș Mausoleum (In Doftana's Place Will Then Be Raised as Witness a Red Mausoleum)," *Scânteia Tineretului* no. November 12, 1949 (n.d.).

¹²⁴ V. Bîrlădeanu, "Prin Muzeul Lenin-Stalin," *Scânteia*, February 13, 1955.

The Socialist pilgrim did not only visit Romanian museums. Whenever it was possible visits to Soviet museums were even more worthwhile pilgrimage sites. If the direct experience was not possible, the narratives of those who had seen the museums of Soviet Russia were then widely printed and distributed. A Romanian visiting Soviet museums in the 1950s easily steps into the assigned role of Socialist pilgrim ; even more as he is a journalist, on official mission to see and then narrate for the Romanian reader the museums and monuments of Moscow and Leningrad. He enters the Moscow Revolutionary Museum (inaugurated in 1923, it became the ideal-type for all Revolutionary Museums all over Eastern Europe after 1945) “filled with emotion, with feelings of profound veneration, we walk silently among these precious relics. We relive memorable events. We study museum exhibits, always overwhelmed by feelings of respect, of piety.”¹²⁵ Not only is his language infused with religious terminology (“Flags riddled by bullets. We look at them as sacred things.”¹²⁶) as he puts himself in the shoes of a pilgrim finally able to see the holy relics, but he also uses in his narrative the *we*, the first person plural, as if he takes the reader by the hand and walks her through the halls of the Moscow museum. The visitor becomes a witness in both meanings observed by Agamben, as he “relives memorable events” and also as he bears witness, through his writings of what he has lived in the museum. As a true believer and pilgrim, the visitor has visions going through the exhibition and seeing objects of torture: “You feel as if you truly see in these handcuffs the hands of Lenin’s brother after he, at the end of the last century, had ended the life of one of the bloody tsars that had ruled orthodox Russia.”¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Mihalache, *Moscova Leningrad*, 69.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 70; Lenin’s brother, Alexander Ulyanov did not kill the tsar of Russia, but he was involved in an attempt to kill Tsar Alexander III in 1887 and was hanged on this charge. See Philip Pomper, *Lenin’s Brother : the Origins of the October Revolution* (New York: W.W. Norton & co., 2010).

The concept of organizing museum visits as pilgrimages is not a post-factum scholarly analysis of the events of the 1950s. On the contrary, it is the actors themselves that used the term pilgrimage at the time of the events. In 1949, the commemoration of Doftana is thus announced in the papers: “Yesterday morning, a pilgrimage took place to Doftana, to the graves of the heroes of the working class fallen 9 years ago beneath the walls of this prison.”¹²⁸ One year earlier, in 1948, the official invitation to Doftana’s November commemorations read: “You are kindly asked to take part in the pilgrimage to Doftana, on November 14th 1948, for commemorating of the communist and anti-fascist fighters assassinated by the bourgeois regimes in this prison.”¹²⁹

¹²⁸ “Comemorarea Luptătorilor Clasei Muncitoare Uciși Sub Zidurile Doftanei (Commemoration of Working Class Fighters Killed Under Doftana’s Walls).”

¹²⁹ *Invitation*, 1948, AMNIR, fond Muzeul Partidului, file i2500 (*Comemorare Doftana 1948. Planuri de Munca*), f. 192.

2.3.3. “The museum is my estate.” Institutional developments and internal struggles at the Party Museum (1948 – 1958)

The Party Museum belongs to the Party, yet if the RWP is not to be seen as a monolith, but a dynamic organization with various groups and individuals fighting for a better position inside the organization, then the coordination of the Party museum becomes a contestation point. The communists’ insistence on controlling the past can be seen in the internal struggles fought for and sometimes through the Party Museum and the Institute of Party History.

As the archive of the former Party Museum is unavailable for research at the National Archives (ANIC), because un-archived, some scattered information regarding the early years of the museum, before its installation in the monumental building on Kiseleff Boulevard in 1958 can only be found in the archives of the Propaganda and Agitation Section of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party. For most of its existence, the Party Museum was a section of the Institute of Party History, itself a branch of the Agitation and Propaganda Section of the CC of RCP. Thus, discussing the Party Museum as a propaganda museum is not a mere rhetorical twist: the Party museum, together with the Doftana museum and the Lenin-Stalin museum where all part of the propaganda system organized by the Communist party-state. In the 1950s, they were all part of the Institute of Party History.¹³⁰ A note on the homologous museums in Czechoslovakia is revealing although the situation is not completely similar: “Museum play an important role,

¹³⁰ *Information regarding the activity of the Institute of Party History by the CC of RWP in the period May-December 1954*, ANR, fond CC al PCR – Propaganda si Agitatie (Propaganda and Agitation), dossier no. 50/1955, p. 4, f. 47.

from an organizational point of view they are standalone party institutions, but ideologically they follow our institutes' leadership."¹³¹

The first mentioning of the Party museum in the archives of the Agitation and Propaganda Section of the CC of RCP can only be found in 1950, 3 years after its inauguration when it is transformed into a section of the newly created Institute of Party History. Created in 1950 by the CC of PWR, the Institute began its activity in May 1951¹³² with a subsection of 15 employees in charge of the re-baptized Museum of the people's revolutionary struggle:

“The museum Moments from the people's revolutionary struggle (*Muzeul Momente din lupta revoluționară a poporului*) will be taken care of by the Institute of Party History. It will be enlarged especially in the part regarding the history of the workers' movement and it will bear the name Museum of the PRR people's revolutionary struggle (*Muzeul luptei revoluționare a poporului din RPR*).”¹³³

The names of those in charge of the museum are to be found scattered among reports and other documents of the Institute of Party History. Mihail Roller, although not part of the museum's team, played an important part not only in its thematic unfolding, which diligently followed the narrative of his 1947 manual of Romanian history,¹³⁴ but also in its management, as he is reported to have said during an

¹³¹ P. Reiman, “On the Activity of the Party History Institute of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and the Preparation of the New Party History Manual,” *Analele Institutului de Istorie a Partidului de Pe Langa C.C. Al P.M.R.* IV, no. 2 (1958): 139.

¹³² Oana Ilie, “Propaganda Politică. Tipologii Și Arii de Manifestare (1945-1958) (Political Propaganda. Typologies and Manifestation Areas)” (Universitatea din București, 2010), 108, unpublished PhD thesis.

¹³³ *Project Decision regarding the creation of the Institute of Party History*, January 18th 1950, ANR, fond CC al PCR – Propaganda și Agitație, dossier no.64/1950, f. 1.

¹³⁴ Roller, *op.cit.*

argument with the director of the Institute, Clara Cuşnir Mihailovici, "The museum is my estate."¹³⁵

Between 1949 and 1954, three people are consecutively heading the museum: A.G. Vaida, Constantin Agiu and Vasile Varga. In 1949, A.G. Vaida's¹³⁶ name appears as museum director¹³⁷ which is consistent with his parallel assignment that year, which was the creation of the Doftana prison-museum.¹³⁸ The fact that the two museums were actually under the same management might account for the similarities in their display and the focus on prison life in the Moments from the People's Struggle Museum. In 1953, the now informally called Revolutionary Museum, is headed by Constantin Agiu.¹³⁹ The data comes from an informative note kept in the archives of the AgitProp section. Constantin Agiu is reported by Vasile Varga, employee of the museum and the one to replace Agiu at the head of the museum, to have unjust opinions related to the politics of the party but also about museum displays:

"I have lately noticed that com. Agiu director of the People's Revolutionary Struggle Museum displays wrong and unjust opinions with regard to our Party's and our government's politics. Thus, on the occasion of a visit to

¹³⁵ As Mihail Roller was vice-president of the Academy of RPR, he tried (but failed) to transfer the Party museum from the Institute of Party History to the Academy. *Note regarding some difficulties in the work of the Institute of Party History, due to unjust methods of work practiced by the Propaganda and Agitation Section*, written by Clara Cuşnir-Mihailovici on February 25th 1955, ANR, fond CC al PCR – Propaganda si Agitatie, dossier no.29/1955, p. 4, f. 40.

¹³⁶ A. Goldenberg-Vaida (1910-1965), a writer and member of the Romanian Communist Party since the interwar illegality years, has held several positions in the cultural and propagandistic system after 1945, such as member of the scientific committee of the Institute of Party History (ISISP) or director of the Party Museum.

¹³⁷ *Institute of Party History*, ANR, fond CC al PCR – Propaganda si Agitatie, dossier no.51/1949, f. 121.

¹³⁸ See chapter on the creation of Doftana prison-museum.

¹³⁹ Constantin Agiu (1891-1961) joined the Romanian Communist Party in its illegality years, promoted by party secretary Stefan Foris and he was himself imprisoned in Doftana. After 1945 he is part of the Communist administration but never in very high positions: state sub-secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture (1945-1948), president of the Great National Assembly (1948), general secretary of the National Federation of Former Antifascist Political Prisoners and Inmates (FIAP), and president of Centrocoup (after 1952). In 1955 he is subject to an internal RWP investigation, concerning his anti-Party (antipartinice) activities and sanctioned with a reprimand (vot de blam). Cătănuş, "Disciplina de Partid Si Fostii ilegalisti.Cazul Constantin Agiu, 1955 (Party Discipline and Former Communists in Illegality. The Case of Constantin Agiu, 1955)."

Doftana on July 2nd 1953, com. Agiu declared that “the people are hungry,” “we made everyone poor,” “people hate us” and so on [...] Arriving to Doftana, to the museum, regarding the problem that there too many quotations, com. Agiu asked why are there so many quotations and <<what if there was no comrade Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej?>>”¹⁴⁰

It is probably not coincidental that the next year, in 1954, Vasile Varga is already head of the museums section of the Institute,¹⁴¹ confessing that it is the first time he has ever worked for a museum and this is why his work poses many difficulties.¹⁴²

In 1954, the museum is “reorganized.” For a few months, the Revolutionary museum is fought over between the Romanian Academy, whose vice-president was until 1954 Mihail Roller, and the Institute of Party History.¹⁴³ Finally, the decision in taken in favor of the Institute and the name change, from Museum of the Revolutionary Struggle to History Museum of the Romanian Workers’ party means a drastic change in the thematic and content of the museum. The new narrative is constructed by the researchers of the Institute of Party History and a new building is being prepared to host the Party museum.¹⁴⁴ The political battles behind this apparently benign institutional affiliation are described by historian Bogdan Iacob. It is the time when Mihail Roller and *rollerism* (that historical narrative centered on class struggle and the importance on the Slavic/Soviet input) are challenged and finally defeated, as a part of the political struggles that finally promoted the “national”

¹⁴⁰ *Informative note written by Vasile Varga*, November 3rd 1953, ANR, fond CC al PCR – Propaganda si Agitatie, dossier no.89/1953, ff. 1-2.

¹⁴¹ *Minutes of the meeting held at the Party Control Commission with the leadership of the Institute of Party History held on September 17th 1954*, ANR, fond CC al PCR – Propaganda si Agitatie, dossier no.53/1954, f. 188.

¹⁴² *Minutes of the meeting held at the Party Control Commission*, f.196.

¹⁴³ *Minutes of the meeting held at the Party Control Commission*, f. 186 and *Regarding the transfer of some museums of the Party History Institute to some state institutions*, April 6th 1954, fond CC al PCR – Secția de Propagandă și Agitație, no.27/1954, f. 14.

¹⁴⁴ *Information regarding the activity of the Institute of Party History by the CC of RWP in the period May-December 1954*, ANR, fond CC al PCR – Propaganda si Agitatie, dossier no.50/1955, pp. 4-5, ff. 47-48.

variant of Romanian communism.¹⁴⁵ Roller does not succeed in gaining administration of the museum that he considered “his estate.”

In 1955, Clara Cuşnir-Mihailovici¹⁴⁶ is director of the Museum of Party History and deputy director of the Institute of Party History.¹⁴⁷ She tries to delimitate herself vigorously from Roller and *rollerism*, and, in this informative note from 1955, she puts a lot of the blame for the failures of the Institute on the discretionary involvement of Mihail Roller, sometimes insistent and at other times, when needed, absent:

“The pressure exercised by com. Roller over the Institute [...] so that the Revolutionary Struggle of the People Museum would go to the RPR Academy is significant and characteristic for his work conduct. One good day com. Roller asked for a report suggesting the transfer of the museum to the Academy. Because I did not agree to write it and I opposed it vehemently I had to endure a number of offences from com. Roller (<<The museum is my estate>>, etc.) [...] I was forced to write the report asked for by com. Roller.”¹⁴⁸

In the second half of the 1950s, the museum is moved to another building and thus necessarily reorganized. It is unclear however, if the museum was reorganized behind closed doors and how long was it still open for visiting. While not being able to consult the archive of the museum, information from various sources points to the conclusion that the Museum of Party History was actually not open to the public for

¹⁴⁵ Bogdan Cristian Iacob, “Stalinism, Historians, and the Nation: History-production Under Communism in Romania (1955-1966),” 128 n. 42.

¹⁴⁶ Clara Cuşnir-Mihailovici (1903-1987) was one of the most important Party historians, director of the Institute of Party History (1951-1953), and then deputy director of the same institution (1953-1955). She supervised the publication of several volumes on the history of the Romanian Communist Party and the workers’ movement.

¹⁴⁷ *Proposals for the enlargement of the Scientific Committee of the Institute of Party History*, June 22nd 1955, ANR, fond CC al PCR – Propaganda si Agitatie, dossier no.29/1955 , f. 17.

¹⁴⁸ *Note regarding some difficulties in the work of the Institute of Party History, due to unjust methods of work practiced by the Propaganda and Agitation Section*, written by Clara Cuşnir-Mihailovici on February 25th 1955, ANR, fond CC al PCR – Propaganda si Agitatie, dossier no.29/1955, p. 4, f. 40.

most of the 1950s. The internal struggles at the Institute of Party History and the internal struggles at the highest Party levels (the demise of leaders like Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, Ana Pauker and Vasile Luca), the uncertainty as to what was the approved narrative to be displayed in the museum probably made the succession of reorganizations a perfect excuse for having the museum more often closed than open. It is certain that it was closed for reorganization between 1951 and 1954¹⁴⁹ (although the foreigner's visit analyzed in the previous pages took place in July 1952) and again for some time before 1958 before moving to another building.

The difficulties of history writing in the 1950s, especially in the field of Party history with its ever-changing past, are doubled by the special difficulties entailed by museum work. Most of the people writing Party history in the 1950s were not historians as the people creating Party museums were not museographers. And yet, because of their trust in rules, recipes and the justness of Party regulations, the political museums created in the 50s were good enough to meet their purpose and compete in effectiveness with their Soviet models and East-European counterparts.

2.3.4. The museum as history book. The new permanent exhibition of the Party Museum. 1958.

Under the leadership of Clara Cușnir-Mihailovici, the History Museum of the Romanian Workers' Party is reopened in one of the most beautiful museum buildings in the capital of Romania. The neo-Romanian palace on Kiseleff Boulevard had been built between 1912 and 1940 especially to house a museum, a national museum focusing on ethnography and rural life. This museum, the National Art Museum had

¹⁴⁹ *Muzeul de Istorie a Partidului Muncitoresc Român (History Museum of the Romanian Workers' Party)* (Bucharest, 1960), last page.

already been chased away from the building in 1952 to be replaced by the I.V. Lenin – V.I. Stalin museum. The Lenin-Stalin museum only occupied the right wing of the building which makes it plausible that the plans to move the Museum of Party History in the same building were already made at the beginning of the 1950s. As a more detailed history of the building is provided in the last chapter, when discussing the post-1989 Romanian Peasant Museum, it is for the moment important to note that this was the most important museum building in Bucharest and it is not by chance that the new regime chose it for its most representative museum. While Romania was still lacking a national history museum, the National Museum Carol I, although mainly an ethnographic museum, at the time of its removal from the building, represented the most developed and state-supported project for a Romanian national museum. Its replacement first by the highly ideological Lenin-Stalin museum and then also by the Museum of Party History is not without symbolical significance. After 1989, this appropriation of the building of the National museum was described as the cuckoos' habit of putting its eggs in some other bird's nest.¹⁵⁰

The lack of visual documents of the exhibitions before 1958 makes it very hard to compare the two permanent exhibitions. No museum guide had been printed for the pre-1958 museum: the first images of the exhibits were gathered in a museum guidebook only in 1960. The 1958 Party Museum occupies nine big halls, practically the entire left side, half of the former building of the National Museum. The ground floor tells the story of the development of the workers' movement in Romania up to 1944 while the first floor occupies the same amount of space with the very recent history of building socialism in Romania between 1944 and 1958. The narrative starts later than the previous Revolutionary Museum. It ignores the medieval and early-

¹⁵⁰ Irina Nicolau and Carmen Hulață, *Dosar Sentimental* (Bucharest: Liternet, 2003), 70.

modern conflicts and begins in 1848 with the first Romanian socialists (first hall), dwells for some time on the last peasant revolt in Europe in 1907 (second hall) and by-passes the First World War by focusing on the influence of the Bolshevik Revolution in Romania (third hall). The exhibition in the fourth hall culminates with the railway workers' strikes in 1933 while the antifascist resistance during the Second World War is the main focus of the fifth hall.

The visitor then climbs up to the first floor where the detailed story of Socialist achievements awaits him. August 23rd 1944, Romania's exit from the alliance with Nazi Germany is detailed, with maps, texts and images in one entire exhibition hall (the sixth hall) while the next halls detail the political, economical and cultural achievements of the new regime: the agrarian reform, the abolition of monarchy, nationalization, the first and second five year plans, the diplomatic relationships of the new Romanian republic, the raising cultural and economic status of the Romanian people. The insistence on presenting contemporaneity in the museum is certainly a characteristic formerly lacking in Romanian museums. If there is one thing that museums were in Romania before the war, they were about the past.

The inclusion of the present in museums was certainly felt as one of the greatest challenges for museum professionals trained in the old school of presenting past events in museums. Soon, the inclusion of a section entitled "the construction of Socialism" became mandatory in Romanian museums, no matter how big or small. Sometimes, these sections were actually prepared by the Party museum in Bucharest and then exported as such to the local museums.¹⁵¹ Begun in the 1950s, it was in the

¹⁵¹ On May 13th, 1961 a section dedicated to the history of the workers' movement was inaugurated at the Regional History Museum in Galați. The whole section, 800 exhibits, had been in fact prepared by the employees of the Party Museum in Bucharest and then sent to Galați. "Manifestari Ale Institutului de Istorie a Partidului Pe Pe Langa CC Al PMR in Legatura Cu Aniversarea a 40 de Ani de La Crearea Partidului Comunist Din Romania (Actions of the Institute of Party History of CC of RWP Related to

1970s and 1980s though that uniformity was almost achieved in Romanian museums by the imposition of the “complete tour”¹⁵² and the ubiquitous sections of building Socialism.

It is certainly interesting to study one of contemporary museologies’ mantras, the inclusion of contemporary issues in the museum, making the museum relevant for the present not only for the past, in the context when such a definite stand on the present was imposed and sometimes prevalent in Romanian museums of the 1950s. If the Party museum, the model for historical museums all over Romania, dedicated half of its exhibition space to the last 15 years as compared to the same space dedicated to the century preceding these 15 years, smaller museums could only strive to equal the performance. The initiative was again not national, but of Soviet inspiration as similar incentives are to be seen in museums all over the Socialist bloc.¹⁵³

Exhibiting the present also meant that the exhibition was constantly updated and added to. In the Party Museum, new halls were added every few years to include the achievements of the current five-year plan.¹⁵⁴ This was possible after the Lenin-Stalin museum was silently dismantled (1966) and the Party museum practically

the 40th Anniversary of the Creation of the Communist Party in Romania),” *Analele Institutului de Istorie a Partidului de Pe Langa C.C. Al P.M.R.* VII, no. 3 (1961): 141–143.

¹⁵² The “complete tour” is term introduced in the 70s and 80s in the museum profession as an expression of the obligation of every historical museum to present the history of the Romanian nation from prehistory to the present day. It meant that even an archaeological museum had to add special rooms dedicated to the Communist achievements and also that regional museums should abandon regional history and present Romanian history in the national narrative specific to the 1980s national communism. See Anghel Pavel, “Incotro, Muzeele de Istorie? (History Museums, Where To?),” *Revista Muzeelor* no. 8–10 (1990): 44–48.

¹⁵³ “I would argue that since the birth of the Museum in general there had been no such attempt to address contemporaneity in museum presentations. The general associative thinking usually defines the Museum through the concept of and attitude to the Past. ‘Socialist construction’ departments and museums in Bulgaria used to refer to political and economic actions in the recent past or immediately happening here and now, integrating itself into the Party’s ideas about the future. The opening of such museum departments and exhibitions supposedly changed the essence of the museum institution without depriving it from its didactic functions.” Radostina Sharenkova, “Forget-me(-not): Visitors and Museum Presentations About Communism Before 1989,” 64.

¹⁵⁴ “Manifestari Ale Institutului de Istorie a Partidului.”

doubled its exhibition space. But the same performance was expected of smaller museums whose space, personnel and expertise was not so generous.

One of the preferred metaphors of those working in and writing about museums in the 1950s was the history book. The museum was supposed to be a history book that the visitor reads in a shorter, more concise and more convincing manner. It had to combine the authority of the book, the written text with the museums' ability to create emotions. However, as the regime gained in stability, museums leaned all the more towards become history books than towards stirring emotions. The texts written about the exhibitions of the Party museum, at its opening in 1948 and at its re-opening in 1958 differ greatly from this point of view. If the narrative visits in 1948 urged the visitor to feel, see, touch and fear,¹⁵⁵ the 1958 reviews are written as a resume of the history book seen or read in/as the museum. Ion Ardeleanu, future deputy director of the museum, writes a lengthy 30 page description of the museum in the review of the Institute of Party History. He ends his detailed review, which is, to be sure, less of a museum review and more resume of the history of the workers' movement as approved by the RWP at that moment, with the words: "Through its exhibits – documents, objects, graphics, models, sculptures and paintings – the History museum of the Romanian Workers' Party constitutes a living book of our people's fight, under the leadership of its heroic party."¹⁵⁶

A review published next year in the prestigious historical journal *Studii*, opens with a similar statement: "As a living book opened to the visitor, the museum halls portray the most significant events in the history of the workers' movement in our

¹⁵⁵ Victor Nămolaru, "In Fata Celulei H Dela Doftana (In Front of the H Cell in Doftana)"; Victor Nămolaru, "Un Muzeu Despre Istoria Adevărată."

¹⁵⁶ Ardeleanu, Ion T., "Muzeul de Istorie a Partidului Muncitoresc Roman (The History Museum of RWP)," 56.

country.”¹⁵⁷ As if to strengthen this interpretation of the museum, or maybe for lack of metaphors, ten pages later, the review ends similarly: “Exhibiting, as if in an open book in front of whose pages one walks, sipping precious knowledge and wisdom from the glorious past of the working class, from the fighting history of the party, the History Museum of the Romanian Workers’ Party constitutes an efficient support for working people in raising their ideological level, in strengthening their revolutionary combativeness.”¹⁵⁸

The metaphor of the history book is certainly related to the abundance of text in this permanent exhibition. Text is not only present in the form of explanatory text but also as an artifact: newspapers, documents, printed or handwritten text is framed as an artifact in the 1958 Party museum. Objects are rarely displayed in the exhibition halls while the predominant exhibits are documents, photographs and paintings produced for the museum, depicting historical subjects. The fact that the artifacts are mainly bi-dimensional exhibits greatly influences the display which indeed looks like a book display, where text and images are typeset in a linear, coherent narrative.

¹⁵⁷ L. Ștefănescu, “Muzeul de Istorie a Partidului Muncitoresc Român (History Museum of the RWP),” *Studii. Revistă de Istorie* XII, no. 4 (1959): 365.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 375.

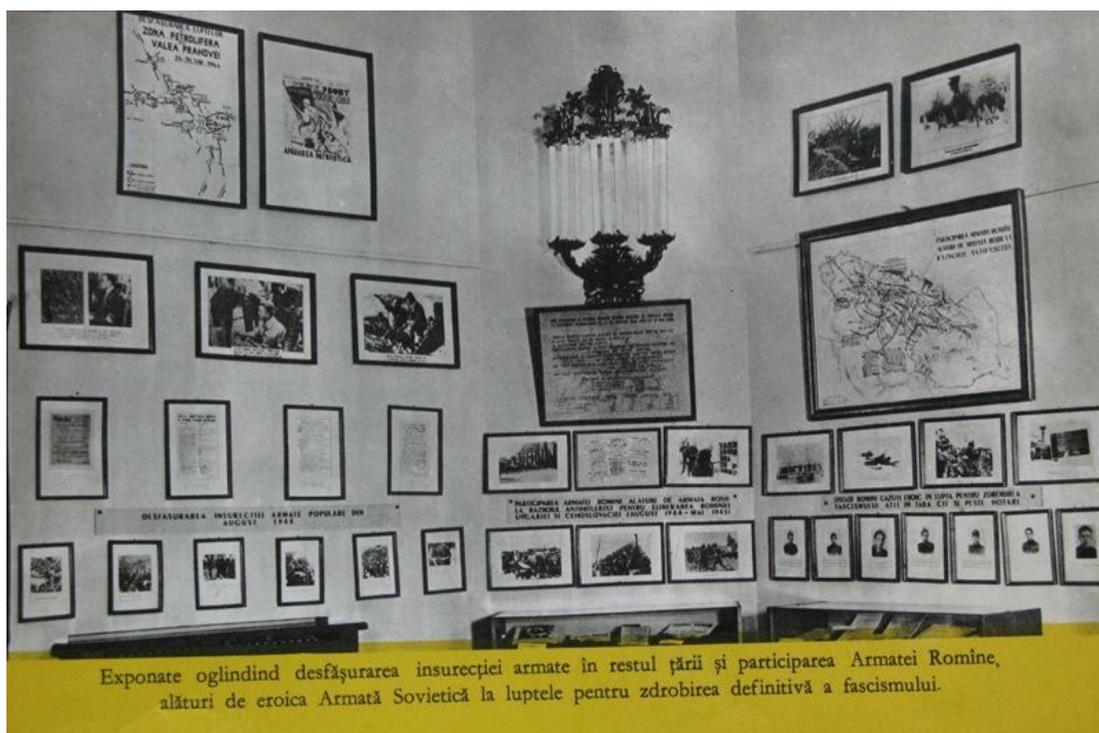


Fig. 2.6. Framed texts, images and maps as exhibits at the Party Museum in 1958. From the album *Muzeul de Istorie a Partidului Muncitoresc Român (History Museum of the Romanian Workers' Party)*. Bucharest, 1960.

The insistence on bi-dimensional exhibits, especially paper exhibits is going to become a landmark of Romanian museography up until 1989, while of its museums were unofficially deemed “paper museums.” And arguments were made in the 1970s on the importance of paper when exhibiting contemporary history: “No matter how much we would argue and want to exhibit three-dimensional pieces, the efficient solution to the problem can only come from paper (meaning documents, printed press and other prints, photographs)[...] Compared to the object of a politician or of a leader of proletarian movement, we prefer the paper on which a law was written, a manifesto, a calling [...] The big social, economic, political problems that tormented the epoch in question are truly and fully mirrored on paper.”¹⁵⁹ An appeal to creativity

¹⁵⁹ Constantin Cloșcă, “Cîteva Probleme Legate de Prezentarea Muzeistică a Istoriei Contemporane Locale (Some Problems Related to the Museology of Local Contemporary History),” *Revista Muzeelor* no. 1 (1972): 35.

is made in a subsequent issue of *Revista Muzeelor* yet also starting from the acknowledgment that paper is the exhibit of contemporary history. “Admitting that the paper-document, in its multiple forms, constitutes the main exhibit in illustrating the contemporary era, we have the obligation, as specialist museographers, to valorize it in the most diverse ways.”¹⁶⁰

In the 1958 new permanent exhibition of the Party Museum, some of the most powerful artifacts from the 1948 exhibition are preserved. For example, the recreation of a Doftana cell can also be seen in the 1958 exhibition, although in 1948 there were three recreated cells. By the 1970s this recreated cell will be symbolically reduced to a cell door, exhibited on the museum walls as if reducing even the prison cell to a bi-dimensional exhibit. In the reviews however, the recreated cells no longer seem to provide an emotional climax of the exhibition. On the contrary, the narrator-visitor seems to be more impressed by the diorama of the 1933 Grivița strikes than by the cell and torture objects.¹⁶¹ As if to confirm losing the spotlight in the museum scenography, the recreated Doftana cell is not even to be seen in the richly illustrated guidebook of the museum printed in 1960.

¹⁶⁰ Anghel Pavel, “Considerații Privitoare La Organizarea Expozițiilor de Istorie Contemporană (Considerations on Organizing Contemporary History Exhibitions),” *Revista Muzeelor* no. 4 (1972): 308.

¹⁶¹ L. Ștefănescu, “Muzeul de Istorie a Partidului Muncitoresc Român (History Museum of the RWP),” 370–371.

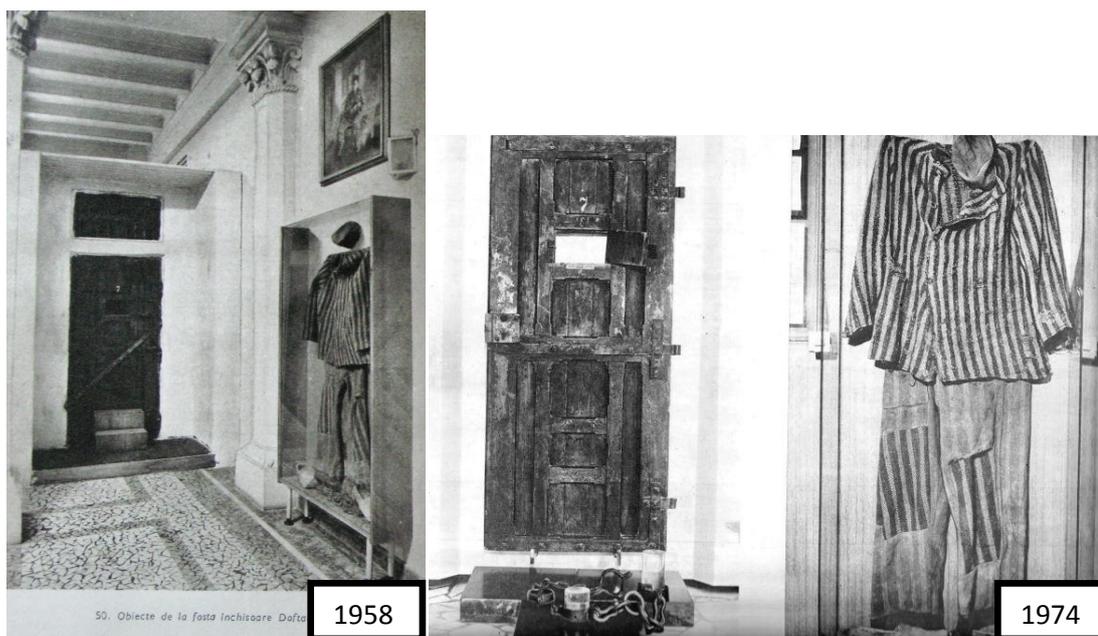


Fig. 2.7. From tridimensional to bi-dimensional exhibit, the Doftana cell as displayed in the Party Museum. Images from Marin Mihalache. *Muzeele Din București*. Bucharest: Meridiane, 1960 and Ioan Lupescu. *Întâlnire Cu Istoria (Meeting History)*. Bucharest: Arta Grafică, 1974.

Although beyond the time frame of this dissertation, it is important to note that the Party Museum was again reorganized in 1966 while its name changed to its longest and longest lasting designation, History Museum of the Communist Party, of the Revolutionary and Democratic Movement of Romania. The rather uncommon occurrence of having a comma in the title of the museum was the outcome of quite intense discussions at the highest level of the RCP.¹⁶² Besides the title, the other important change in the new 1966 exhibition was the starting point of the narrative, no longer the 19th century, but prehistory and the first proofs of human life on Romanian soil. Slowly, as Romanian communism entered its nationalist period, Party history blended with national history. One of the last decisions of Nicolae Ceaușescu was the merger of the Party Museum with the History Museum of the Romanian

¹⁶² Document published by Cornel Constantin Ilie, “Regimul Comunist Si Muzeele de Istorie Din Romania (The Communist Regime and History Museums in Romania),” 126–127.

Socialist Republic. The decree was supposed to be signed in January 1990,¹⁶³ but by then the Romanian Communist Party, along with its leader Nicolae Ceausescu, was already history. Yet the projected fusion was taking place in spite of its initiators' demise. The history of the Romanian Communist Party was finally becoming national history, not in the manner envisaged by the last Romanian dictator, as a fusion of party history and national history, but as an unwanted relic that national history had to accommodate.

2.4. Ephemeral Museums: the Romanian-Russian Museum and the Lenin-Stalin Museum

Museums of clear Soviet influence were the first to be inaugurated in post-war Romania and the first to be dismantled and forgotten as if they had never existed. Museums are meant to inspire stability and to ensure longevity; yet sometime museums can be as ephemeral as the regimes that established them. The Romanian-Russian Museum and the Lenin-Stalin Museum were both inaugurated in Bucharest with great ceremony, in 1947 and respectively 1955 while their central location and impressive display was proof of their importance for a regime that was establishing its political and cultural power. However, when Romanian socialism started its very own de-Sovietization, in the early 1960s, these museums silently disappeared; their dismantling was organized in subtle ways such as merger with other institutions or sudden change of building destination. One must admit that it not easy to make a museum disappear. If museums of communism are largely forgotten in East-Central

¹⁶³ According to Radu Coroamă, former director of the National History Museum, quoted in Surcel, "Țăranul Român a Cucerit 'templul' Fantasmelor Comuniste (The Romanian Peasant Conquered 'the Temple' of Communist Ghosts)". The information is confirmed by Cornel Constantin Ilie, researcher at the National History Museum (personal conversation).

Europe as they were hurriedly closed down after 1989, these museums of communism that fell in disgrace while communism was still in power seem to be under a double seal of silence. Their archives are nowhere to be found; their names can surprise one in touristic guidebooks of the 1950s while their end can only be dated by the sudden silence that engulfs the documents of the era. The last trace of the Romanian-Russian Museum is its 1963 publication on early-modern prince Dimitrie Cantemir¹⁶⁴ while the Lenin-Stalin Museum, already renamed Marx-Engels-Lenin is not even mentioned in 1966 when it is practically swollen by its former neighbor on no. 3 Kiseleff Boulevard, the new History Museum of the Communist Party, of the Revolutionary and Democratic Movement of Romania.

2.4.1. The Romanian-Russian Museum. 1947-1963.

The sometimes called Museum of Romanian-Russian Friendship, or the Romanian-Soviet Friendship Museum, The Romanian-Russian Museum was definitely one of those museums built according to a Soviet recipe. Museums of friendship with the Soviet Union were built all over the Socialist camp and they mainly consisted in rewriting the national histories of the occupied countries by emphasizing peaceful and friendly collaboration with the Eastern neighbor.¹⁶⁵ The efforts made by Romanian historians, led by Mihail Roller, to re-narrate the history of Romanian-Russian relationship as a history of friendship was most of all hindered by

¹⁶⁴ Scarlat Calimachi, Vladimir Block, and Elena Georgescu-Ionescu, *Dimitrie Cantemir. Viata Si Opera in Imagini (Dimitrie Cantemir. Life and Death in Images)* (Bucharest: Muzeul Romîno-Rus, 1963).

¹⁶⁵ The Museum of Bulgarian-Soviet friendship was inaugurated in 1953. Ignatova and I. Gancheva, "The Attitude of Museums to Socialism in the Period of Bulgarian Transition to Democracy," 26.

the very recent memory of the Romanian and Soviet Army facing each other during the long winters of the Second World War.

The Romanian-Russian museum was the first museum to be inaugurated in post-war Bucharest but RCP graciously denied having the initiative for such a museum. Instead, it claimed to have received the request for such a museum from a group of initiators comprised of lawyers, architects and professors but also workers, peasants and housewives.¹⁶⁶ It curiously benefited from two inaugurations, one year apart from each other. The first inauguration took place in March 1947 in the presence of Romanian and Soviet officials. The inauguration was recorded in *Scânteia* as the museum was praised for holding “15.000 original historical documents proving the constant support shown by the peoples from the East towards our country.”¹⁶⁷ On the front page photograph, Petru Groza, Ana Pauker and S.I. Kavtaradze, the USSR ambassador in Romania, among others, are “researching the documents”¹⁶⁸ in the museum.

The museum was not open for visitors though until November 1948, during the week of Romanian-Soviet Friendship, and this remained the official birth date of the birth of the museum. The next year, the museum received the Romanian Academy Prize for outstanding achievements in the field of historical and philosophical sciences. An illustrated bilingual Romanian-Russian album of the museum’s narrative is printed on this occasion (and reprinted in 1950),¹⁶⁹ the only source currently available to reconstruct the appearance and discourse of the museum. The museum brought, by exhibiting documents, photographs and collages of both, “a precious

¹⁶⁶ Cornel Constantin Ilie, “Regimul Comunist Si Muzeele de Istorie Din Romania (The Communist Regime and History Museums in Romania),” 50.

¹⁶⁷ “Eri S-a Deschis Muzeul Romîno-Sovietic (The Romanian-Soviet Museum Inaugurated Yesterday),” *Scânteia*, March 28, 1947, 3.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁶⁹ Institutul de Studii Romîno-Sovietic, *Muzeul Romîno-Rus*, 1st ed (Bucharest: Cartea Rusă, 1949).

contribution to the knowledge of Romanian-Russian relations, establishing the historical truth hidden in the past or bluntly falsified by the historians of the dominant classes, which hated The Country of Socialism.”¹⁷⁰ The permanent exhibition attempted to demonstrate that “ever since the oldest times, a civilization community existed among the people living on the current territories of USSR and RPR.”¹⁷¹

The museum was housed in a beautiful neo-classical building from the early 19th century¹⁷² on Fundației Street no. 4 (nowadays Dacia Blvd.), a building also known as the Kretzulescu building, after the name of one its owners; it became state property in the second half of the 19th century and was transformed into a girls’ school and the library of the German Embassy.¹⁷³



Fig. 2.8. The Romanian-Russian Museum in Bucharest in the 1950s.

¹⁷⁰ Marin Mihalache, *Muzeele Din București* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1960), 95.

¹⁷¹ Institutul de Studii Româno-Sovietic, *Muzeul Româno-Rus*, 9.

¹⁷² Marin Mihalache, *Muzeele Din București*, 93.

¹⁷³ Information retrieved from the site of the Museum of Romanian Literature, the current resident of the Kretzulescu building since 1967. http://www.mlr.ro/ro-despre_muzeu-casa_scarlat_kretzulescu.html, accessed August 13, 2013.

The museum was led all through its fifteen years lifespan by an interesting character, Scarlat Callimachi (1896-1975) whom everyone called *The Red Prince*. He was indeed a prince, a descendant of an old Moldavian boyar family that gave two rulers to the Romanian provinces and the first civil code ever to be used in Moldavia, the Callimachi Code (initiated in 1817 by the homonymous prince Scarlat Callimachi). According to his official RCP autobiography, Scarlat Callimachi studied literature in Paris in the early 1920s and that is where he became a Socialist and a critique of bourgeois society. He came back to Romania to become a radical journalist who, although in contact with Communist circles never joined the already illegal RCP. Because of his outspoken leftist views he was interned in 1940 in the Târgu Jiu, Caracal and Craiova internment camps and afterwards put in house arrest.¹⁷⁴ Despite his numerous attempts to have his pre-war Communist activities recognized after the war the RCP Control Commission that established the length of Party membership¹⁷⁵ never extends the acknowledgement of his activity beyond 1944. He is however constantly verified by the party Control Commission to establish whether his aristocratic background has been overcome or hinders his activity as a director of the Romanian-Russian Museum. In these verifications, his employees, researchers and cleaning personnel alike accuse him of not being critical enough, only formally participating in work meetings and trying to be nice to everyone, which was “not at all a just and consistent position according to Party guidance.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Scarlat Callimachi, “Autobiografie”, ANR, Collection 53, dossier C6, f. 10-12.

¹⁷⁵ Because of the illegality of the Communist Party before 1944, the length of the membership in the Party was highly disputed and a special commission had to be set up to investigate the many requests to extend the number of years of one’s membership.

¹⁷⁶ “Reference on comrade Scarlat Callimachi,” September 23, 1963, ANR, Collection 53, dossier C6, f. 92.



Fig. 2.9. Scarlat Callimachi in 1937

Apart from the prize-winning permanent exhibition, the museum organizes temporary exhibitions testifying to its interest in researching and promoting not only Russian culture but also Romanian characters that suddenly gained recognition for their connections with Tsarist Russia. One of these characters is Dimitrie Cantemir, the early 18th century ruler of Moldavia and erudite scholar about which an exhibition was inaugurated in 1962¹⁷⁷ and a book published in 1963.¹⁷⁸ These exhibitions were then itinerated in factories, cultural clubs and provincial museums.¹⁷⁹

I could not retrieve the formal decision for closing the Romanian-Russian Museum and the year itself is under question mark. 1963 as a final year for the

¹⁷⁷ Scânteia, November 17 1962

¹⁷⁸ Scarlat Calimachi, Vladimir Block, and Elena Georgescu-Ionescu, *Dimitrie Cantemir. Viata Si Opera in Imagini (Dimitrie Cantemir. Life and Death in Images)*.

¹⁷⁹ *Informația Bucureștiului*, October 2, 1961.

Romanian-Russian museum seems to gather acceptance. Historian Vlad Georgescu who started his career at the Romanian-Russian Museum and then fled the country, confirms the year¹⁸⁰ as well as historian Cornel Ilie in his doctoral dissertation: "Starting April 1962, the museum is closed for renovation, the next year sanctioning the cease of activity."¹⁸¹

The Romanian-Russian museum is one of the experiments of the 1950s that did not survive the Romanian type of de-Sovietization without de-Stalinization.¹⁸² The museum was conceived not just as a cluster of documents and proofs but it became a proof in itself. "The Romanian-Russian Museum constitutes yet another proof of the friendship that lasts over the centuries between our country and our Eastern neighbor,"¹⁸³ a 1962 newspaper article ends its report just as the museum was on the verge of mysteriously disappearing. It seems that the more communists insisted on the power of museums to act as living proofs of the discourses they were narrating, the fragility of the institutions increased, undermining the very credibility they were striving to create. Great exhibitions and museums were organized practically overnight testifying to the important energies RCP was able to set in motion in both creating and dismantling museums. Their drive was no less powerful when destroying former "bourgeois" museum like the Museum of National Art on no.3 Kiseleff Blvd, than when dealing with their own creations, like the Lenin-Stalin museum on the same no.3 Kiseleff Blvd. building.

¹⁸⁰ Vlad Georgescu, *Politics and History*, 53.

¹⁸¹ Cornel Constantin Ilie, "Regimul Comunist Si Muzeele de Istorie Din Romania (The Communist Regime and History Museums in Romania)," 52.

¹⁸² Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons*.

¹⁸³ Gabriela Bucur, "Muzeul Romîno-Rus," *Informația Bucureștiului*, October 26, 1962.

2.4.2. The Lenin – Stalin Museum in Bucharest

In the summer of 1990, when the newly created Peasant Museum started to occupy the building on no.3 Kiseleff Blvd. the storage rooms in the basement were full of artifacts that had not been exhibited for decades. The curators of the Peasant Museum kept those who could not be transported to the National History Museum and unofficially named the storage the “Room of horrors.”¹⁸⁴ Most of these artifacts were inherited not from the Party Museum but from the Lenin-Stalin museum engulfed by the Party Museum in 1966. Most of these objects had been staying in the basement of the museum since 1966 when they were taken out of the permanent exhibition. The huge and numerous portraits and busts of Lenin, Stalin and other Soviet propaganda artifacts of the 1950s were certainly a “room of horrors,” of the un-exhibitable even in the 1970s and 80s, though certainly the name is a post-1989 coining.

¹⁸⁴ Ioana Popescu, Interview, taperecorder, April 26, 2004, personal archive.



Fig. 2.10. “Room of horrors” at the Romanian Peasant Museum in 1990. AMȚR (Archive of the Romanian Peasant Museum), Visual archive, Tz 891.

What could be then so proudly exhibited for a decade in one of the most beautiful museum buildings in central Bucharest and afterwards hidden in basement storages as shameful heritage? The V. I. Lenin – I.V. Stalin Museum was inaugurated in Bucharest on February 12, 1955,¹⁸⁵ continuing the I.V. Stalin permanent exhibition that was set up since 1952 in the building confiscated from the Museum of National Art.¹⁸⁶ Right from the beginning the support of the Central Lenin museum in Moscow is acknowledged and sometimes even framed in terms of branching: “We propose to have a close work community and an equally close connection to the Central Moscow

¹⁸⁵ “Deschiderea Muzeului Lenin-Stalin (The Opening of Lenin-Stalin Museum),” *Scânteia*, February 13, 1955.

¹⁸⁶ For a detailed history of the building and the spectacular series of museum that inhabited it see subchapter on the Romanian Peasant Museum.

Museum, for we cannot be disconnected, for we are actually a branch of theirs,”¹⁸⁷ the director of the museum Petre Grosu¹⁸⁸ stated in 1954. At the 1955 inauguration, the director of the Lenin Central Museum in Moscow was supposed to be present¹⁸⁹ but his presence is not mentioned in the official *Scânteia* review of the event. However, the “precious help” of the Lenin Museum was officially acknowledged during the opening ceremony.¹⁹⁰

The Lenin Museum in Moscow was inaugurated in 1924 as annex of the Lenin Institute and re-inaugurated in 1936 as Central Lenin Museum. In 1980, it occupied three floors and 34 museum halls. It exhibited 12 500 objects, most of which were produced after Lenin’s death: gifts from the proletariat, works of art dedicated to Lenin and so on. Lenin Museum did not end its narrative with Lenin’s death but continued to tell the story of Lenin’s post-mortem achievements in the victory of socialism worldwide.¹⁹¹ The 1980 guide upon which this information is based also lists the network of Lenin museums spread around the world (besides the 500 Lenin museums in USSR): one in Leipzig, six in Poland, two in Czechoslovakia, two in Finland, one in France and so on. It even maps the one in Bucharest which had already been closed for fourteen years, a fact which makes the list less reliable. However, even if some of the museum listed by the Moscow guide had already been closed by 1980, most of

¹⁸⁷ *Minutes of the meeting on October 7, 1954 with the leadership of the Lenin Stalin Museum*, ANR, fond CC al PCR – Propaganda si Agitatie (Propaganda and Agitation), dossier 53/1954, f. 241

¹⁸⁸ Petre Grosu (1900 - 1980) was born in Chişinău, Bessarabia as a Romanian Jew named Kimberg Zelman (he used this name until 1945). His membership to the party had been acknowledged as of 1920, an unusual achievement considering that the RCP was organized only in 1921. He was active in the underground communist movement in Bessarabia and arrested several times. In the 1930s he graduated from the Party School in Moscow and was then sent to France. He joined the war in the French army but was soon captured. He spent most of the war in German POW camps and returned to Romania in 1945 where he quickly became professor at the Romanian Party School “Ştefan Gheorghiu” and director of the Lenin-Stalin museum until its dismantling which happily coincided with Grosu’s own retirement. ANR, Collection 53, dossier G154, vol. 1 and 2.

¹⁸⁹ *Report*, January 28, 1955, ANR, fond CC al PCR – Propaganda si Agitatie (Propaganda and Agitation), dossier 12/1955, f. 2.

¹⁹⁰ “Deschiderea Muzeului Lenin-Stalin (The Opening of Lenin-Stalin Museum).”

¹⁹¹ *Musée Central Lénine. Guide* (Moscow: Editions du progres, 1980), 7–8.

them where surely inaugurated and fully functional in the 1950s. In 1993, the Lenin museum itself is closed and subsequently dismantled.



Fig. 2.11. Dismantling the Central Lenin Museum in Moscow. 1994. © Ria Novosti, photographer Ilya Pitalev, photo # 753757.

Due to the hasty disappearance of this museum, its archives were not given to the National Archives, as if the institution never existed. Some of its files may have been kept in the archives of the Party museum and given to the national archives after 1989 together with what is now the un-archived, and thus unavailable for research fond of the former Party Museum. For this reason, the degree to which the Romanian Lenin-Stalin museum was but a smaller replica of the central museum in Moscow can only be accessed through random remarks. For example, in the above-quoted 1954 staff meeting, just before the inauguration of the museum, director Petre Grosu mentions a scheme, a graphic they were supposed to follow: “Changes were made, but not essential ones, we strictly kept to the scheme but we had nowhere to put things

so we made some changes.”¹⁹² Access to Soviet directives is also subject of discontent and criticism as the deputy director, comrade Șoimu complains that director Grosu would not let anyone else see the material that was sent to them from USSR.¹⁹³ Just as the Party Museum was preparing in 1961 an entire exhibition for the museum in Galati,¹⁹⁴ the Lenin Museum in Moscow sent to Bucharest an exhibition that had only to be assembled. The artifacts were, by necessity, mainly reproductions. The museum had on display, in ten rooms, “copies of manuscripts and printed texts, original newspapers and brochures, photographs, maps, graphics, paintings, sculptures and small-size models of important buildings (machete).”¹⁹⁵ According to its director, the museum mainly exhibited “graphics, manuscripts, documents and models (*machete*).”¹⁹⁶



Fig. 2.12. First exhibition hall in the Lenin-Stalin Museum. Source: National Office for Tourism. *Muzeele Orașului București (Museums of Bucharest)*. Bucharest, n.d.

¹⁹² Ibid., 246.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 242

¹⁹⁴ “Manifestari Ale Institutului de Istorie a Partidului.”

¹⁹⁵ National Office for Tourism, *Muzeele Orașului București (Museums of Bucharest)* (Bucharest, n.d.), 32.

¹⁹⁶ Petre Grosu, “Muzeul „V.I. Lenin – I.V. Stalin” Din Bucuresti,” *Analele Institutului de Istorie a Partidului de Pe Langa C.C. Al P.M.R.* no. 1–2 (1955): 124.

The replica and reproduction gained such a preeminent place in the museums of the 1950s that a competition seemed to exist between Socialist museums as to which one had more reproductions of Soviet paintings. As noted by historian of Socialist realism, Antoine Baudin, the Romanian museum seemed to be a champion at acquiring Soviet reproductions: “But only the Bucharest museum seemed to have a collection of replicas of exemplary Soviet paintings (by Alexander Gherasimov, Boris Joganson, Semyon Chuinov, and Fyodor Surpin, among others) Whether the works were originals, replicas or reproductions, their positions would be unified in any case by the ritualized use to which they were put.”¹⁹⁷ Exhibiting the Soviet originals was, of course, out of the question except for the rare travelling exhibitions organized by the Soviets themselves.¹⁹⁸

The status of the Lenin-Stalin museum as a branch of the Lenin Museum in Moscow is confirmed by the personnel scheme of the museum. On average, 30 to 40 people were employed constantly in the museum in the years 1956 to 1958 (the only payroll files kept in the archive of the Romanian Peasant Museum).¹⁹⁹ Out of these people, only 10 to 15 were museum professionals, while the rest were administrative personnel (dealing with finances, security, cleaning). Even more, among what I call museum professionals, two were the director, Petre Grosu, deputy director, Ana Șoimu while the rest (five to twelve, depending on year) were lecturers (*lectori*) giving guided tours and lectures on museum-related topics. The museum did not have a department dealing with the collection (preservation and acquisitions), nor did they have a research department or curators for organizing new exhibitions. It becomes

¹⁹⁷ Antoine Baudin, “<<Why Is Soviet Painting Hidden from Us?>> Zhdanov and Its International Relations and Fallout, 1947-1953,” in Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko (eds.), *Socialist Realism Without Shores* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 236.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ *Payrolls*, AMȚR (Archive of the Romanian Peasant Museum), Administrative archive, dossiers 1/1956, 1/1957 and 1/1958.

clear from the organizational scheme that the employees were managing an existing exhibition without performing the other traditional museum activities, conservation, research and curatorship. For comparison, the Party Museum had in the same years, and while sharing the building, a double number of personnel, with a separate research department and a dedicated person for the collections.²⁰⁰ This is due to the fact that the Party museum, although under the decisive influence of Soviet museology, was actually curating its own exhibitions and collections.



52. Muzeul Lenin-Stalin (interior)

Fig. 2.13 Visiting the Lenin-Stalin Museum, 1960. Source: Marin Mihalache. *Muzeele Din București*. Bucharest: Meridiane, 1960.

²⁰⁰ Cornel Constantin Ilie, “Regimul Comunist Si Muzeele de Istorie Din Romania (The Communist Regime and History Museums in Romania),” 56.

The museum was basically a visual reading of Lenin's life and revolutionary activities, beginning with a model of the house in which Lenin was born and ending with his mortuary mask. Except for the few paintings of Lenin made by Romanian artists all the artifacts were imported from the USSR. The concept of the museum seems to be, just like in the Party museum, the history book. "It is as if you would browse through the pages of a wonderful book – the book of the communists' great battles and sacrifices for peoples' happiness. It is from this book that you read [...] The first page... In April 1870, a child was born [...]"²⁰¹

The "reading" ends with Lenin's death, while the promise of continuing the ten exhibition halls with more halls on Stalin's activity is never fulfilled: "the halls which will contain the 1924-1954 exhibits are currently in preparation"²⁰² writes director Petre Grosu in 1955. Even more Stalin's name is soon deleted from the title of the museum. In 1962, the museum appears in Bucharest guides as the Marx-Engels-Lenin Museum. No reorganization of the exhibition has been made since "the halls consecrated to the lives and activity of K.Marx and Fr. Engles will be opened later."²⁰³ Similar to the halls dedicated to Stalin, these new halls were never inaugurated. In fact, the Communist leadership was already looking for a solution to get rid of this uncomfortable museum, reminding one of the still too tight relationships with the USSR.

The occasion came in May 1966 with the reorganization of the Party Museum by a decision of the Executive Committee of CC of RCP. Historian Bogdan Iacob claims that the Lenin-Stalin and Party Museum had been administratively merged as

²⁰¹ V. Bîrlădeanu, "Prin Muzeul Lenin-Stalin."

²⁰² Petre Grosu, "Muzeul „V.I. Lenin – I.V. Stalin” Din Bucuresti," 171.

²⁰³ Dan

Berindei et al., *București Ghid* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1962).

early as 1958 when the Party Museum moved in the Kiseleff building.²⁰⁴ Even if this is so, it was only in 1966 that the Lenin museum actually closed its doors under the guise of a reorganization of the Party museum. Most of its artifacts were never seen again in exhibition halls until 1997 when the newly re-inaugurated Peasant Museum opened an exhibition called Red Plague. The same artifacts used to praise Soviet achievements were now framed to tell an absolutely opposite story.

2.5. Failed musealisation: the Museum of the Illegal Printing House

The Soviet museum system had a surprising variety of museum-types to be replicated. Alongside the revolutionary museum, the museum of friendship with the Soviets, the museum of the illegal printing house was also among the well disseminated museum in USSR and the post-war satellite countries. The RCP attempted to build such a museum in Bucharest concomitantly, and with the same people in charge, as the Doftana museum. The Museum of the Illegal Printing House (MIPH) was never inaugurated. Its plans survived, as a ghost, in the files of planning, rebuilding and inaugurating the Doftana museum.

A Museum of the Underground Printing House of 1905-1906 was inaugurated in Moscow in 1924 and it is still open to the public to this day. The underground printing activities in Moscow were apparently covered by the legit business of a fruit shop and never discovered by the Tsarist Ohranka. As currently described on its official site, “the restored interior of the basement with the entrance to the printing house looks like a storage room for boxes with fruits and cheese. Stacks of illegal newspapers and leaflets were kept at the bottom of the boxes. One could come from

²⁰⁴ Bogdan Cristian Iacob, “Stalinism, Historians, and the Nation: History-production Under Communism in Romania (1955-1966),” 226.

the salesroom with old glass-cases, a counter and a writing desk to the basement and to the inhabitable premises which were used not only as a disguise of secret activities of the shop owners but also as furnished accommodations for the pressmen.”²⁰⁵ The museum is located on 55 Lesnaya Street and functions as a section of the State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia, the former Museum of the Revolution, renamed so in September 1998.²⁰⁶

Other museums of underground printing were inaugurated in the 20th century, all over the Soviet space, both inside and outside the borders of the Soviet Union. Interesting enough, some of them are still functioning museums. One was the *Nina* house-museum in Baku, Azerbaijan where *Iskra* (The Spark) was printed between 1901 and 1905,²⁰⁷ another in Perm, Russia inaugurated in 1968, and still open to the public nowadays,²⁰⁸ one in Chişinău, Moldavian SSR inaugurated in 1960, and yet another museum of the revolutionary press functioning in the 1950s in Vrutyky, Czechoslovakia.²⁰⁹ In Belgrade, although already outside Soviet influence, a homologue museum was inaugurated in 1950 and was kept open until 2000.²¹⁰

The preparations for the organization and opening of the MIPH in Bucharest were made in all responsibility. Un undated document (probably autumn 1949) issued by the Central Committee of the National Federation of Former Antifascist Political Prisoners and Inmates (FIAP) drafts the “action plan” for November 10, 1949 the commemoration of Doftana’s earthquake destruction. The first action of the action-plan is however the inauguration of another museum, not in Doftana but in Bucharest: “Between November 6 and November 10 the inauguration of the Museum of RCP’s

²⁰⁵ <http://eng.sovr.ru/contact/typography/>, accessed April 10th, 2013.

²⁰⁶ <http://eng.sovr.ru/museum/history/>, accessed April 10th, 2013.

²⁰⁷ <http://visualrian.ru/ru/site/gallery/#744802>, accessed April 10th, 2013

²⁰⁸ <http://www.visitperm.ru/en/tourists/attractions/museums/perm/861>, accessed April 10, 2013.

²⁰⁹ P. Reiman, “On the Activity of the Party History Institute of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and the Preparation of the New Party History Manual.”

²¹⁰ <http://spomenikulture.mi.sanu.ac.rs/spomenik.php?id=536>, accessed May 15th, 2013.

Illegal Printing House will take place (Școala Floreasca Street no. 34).”²¹¹ One hundred comrades would be invited and a speaker should be designated by the AgitProp section of the RWP, the document stipulates.

As the event approaches, without any trace of such a decision in the files, the inauguration of the MIPH is abandoned and the action-plan for November 10 is amended by simply deleting this first activity on the list. How far went the preparations for the opening of the museum? Why was the opening abandoned? How did the museum look like just before its supposed inauguration?

The MIPH was organized in 1948-1949 by the same National Federation of Former Antifascist Political Prisoners and Inmates (FIAP) that was in charge of reconstructing Doftana and organizing it as a museum. The two concomitant assignments were not accidental and much of the working meetings were organized simultaneously for both museums. The two museums were to tell different sides of the same story, the story of the communist fight during its illegality years, the story of the underground. The illegal printing house was the underground which the communists were forced into even while enjoying freedom while Doftana was the inexorable outcome of their illegal activities, of their accepted fate as underground people, the darkest and most terrible prison of the country.

During their deliberations for obtaining and organizing the objects for the museum, the necessity to use objects from one museum in the other is specified. Specifically, objects from the MIPH related to underground printing activities were to be used in Doftana also.²¹² The new museum already had a detailed catalogue of its collections. Beside the printing machines and printing materials such as ink, letters

²¹¹ FIAP, (probably 1949), ”Action –plan for November 10, 1949. Doftana Commemoration”, AMNIR, fond Muzeul Partidului, file i2501 (*Comemorare Doftana 1948 si 1949*), no page numbers.

²¹² FIAP, (probably 1949), ”Plan for arranging Doftana Museum”, AMNIR, fond Muzeul Partidului, file i2501 (*Comemorare Doftana 1948 si 1949*), no page numbers.

(cast metal type), different types of paper, an interesting section of the collection comprised fake identity papers and the means to produce them. The fake identity cards were ranging from birth and marriage certificates, both civil and religious, nationality certificates and exemptions from the army, to medical certificates, proofs of changed domicile, train passes and even bicycle permits.²¹³ Some of these cards were unfinished, left in the making or made in preparation for a future use that was not needed anymore due to the arrival of the Red Army in August 1944. Their exhibit caused problems to the curators and they sought the approval of the RWP's Central Committee as they were afraid "they might provide teaching [on how to fake IDs, my note]."²¹⁴

Unlike the Doftana museum who was confronted with a scarcity of objects, for the MIPH many original objects were available, about 300 printing press objects and 250 furniture items and other original objects from the time when the illegal printing house was actually functioning in the building.²¹⁵ Yet just like in Doftana's case, most of these artifacts could not be exhibited as they were: "all materials from the war need to be made into a photomontage since there are some things that need to be hidden."²¹⁶ All these issues are discussed in a meeting taking place on October 21, 1949 just two weeks prior to the scheduled opening of the MIPH. The discussions mention November 3rd as a deadline, when a commission from the Central Committee would come to review the museum.²¹⁷ Is that the visit that canceled the opening?

²¹³ FIAP, (probably 1949), "Inventory. Printed material." AMNIR, fond Muzeul Partidului, file i2501 (*Comemorare Doftana 1948 si 1949*), no page numbers, p. 7-8 of the document.

²¹⁴ "Transcript of the meeting on October 21, 1949" AMNIR, fond Muzeul Partidului, file i2501 (*Comemorare Doftana 1948 si 1949*), no page numbers, p. 6 of the document.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid, p. 7 of the document



Fig. 2.14 The house on 34 Scoala Floreasca Street, Bucharest, location of the Museum of the Illegal Printing House, in the 1950s or 1960s. The marble plaque is visible on its façade. Source: ANR, *fond ISISP- Fototeca*, Memorial Houses sub-fond, I260.

Another plan, undated but which can be dated 1948 according to documents bound next to it, describes the contents of the future MIPH: “The main room, the guest room shall remain intact, with a banner: <<This room remained intact. It was supposed to overcome the vigilance of the bourgeois regime>>”²¹⁸ The former bedroom was to be transformed into an exhibition space for the printed material produced during the war: the originals in glass cases, the photocopies on panels on the wall. The third room was a reconstruction of the actual printing press room as close as possible to how it used to look. The printing press would look as if it were printing the last issue of *Romania Liberă* in illegality. The visitor would feel as (s)he would have just stepped in on the communist typographers on the morning of August 23,

²¹⁸ “Work plan for arranging the printing house” AMNIR, fond Muzeul Partidului, file i2501 (*Comemorare Doftana 1948 si 1949*), no page numbers.

1944. In the kitchen, a staircase would be added which was supposed to be used for fleeing in case of danger; the courtyard should be left as it is, while the dog, used for protection during illegality, is to be chained. The wooden shelter in the backyard was reconstructed and arranged to appear as inhabited. On the house's façade a marble plaque will be placed stating: "In the hardest years of fascist terror, in this house there was the illegal printing house of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party."



Fig. 2.15. The wooden shelter in the backyard of 34 Scoala Floreasca Street, reconstructed for the projected Museum of the Illegal Printing House. Source: ANR, *fond ISISP- Fototeca*, Memorial Houses sub-fond, I77.

Of all these plans, it seems that only the marble plaque, visible in the photograph, became reality. The house on 34 Școala Floreasca Street was counted among the memorial houses listed by the Institute for Historical and Socio-Political Studies of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party (ISISP) and its

photographs kept in the photographic archive of ISISP, but the possibility of opening it as a museum was never again discussed. As the new communist leadership spent most of World War Two either in Romanian prisons or in Moscow, the illegal printing was either a marginal activity or, if it was at all pursued, the people who were involved never made it to the high ranks of the party. The benefits of such a museum were low for the leaders of the RWP and for the USSR. The museal efforts were thus directed towards other museums of perceived greater importance: the Romanian-Russian Museum and the Lenin-Stalin museum.

The irony of praising underground and illegal activities in a time when the newly established popular republic was fiercely fighting precisely underground activities directed at sabotaging its legitimacy and monopoly on power did not escape the organizing team of the museum. The necessity to obtain approval for exhibiting the forgery equipment, techniques and outcomes of the RWP's illegal printing press appears several times in the not so many written documents that trace the planning of this museum. Since no document records the reasons behind suddenly abandoning the inauguration of the museum, in the two weeks prior to the event (in the same sudden and unexpected manner in which the Târgu Jiu camp museum would be abandoned twenty years later) speculation can be made around the potentially dangerous and subversive collections that the museum would exhibit.

2.5.1 Post scriptum. Living in the museum

In 2013 Bucharest, the former illegal printing house is easily identifiable by its 1950s picture. It looks almost the same, with the exception of the marble plaque

which was removed at some point after 1989. A short field research on Școala Floreasca Street revealed that the children who grew up on that street, now in their fifties maintain that the house used to be a museum, just before they were born. They remember the marble plaque and a guardian's kiosk by the fence (although with no guardian in it in the late 1950s).

The house was actually inhabited from the mid 50s by the Ungureanu family, both employees of the Museum of Party History/ ISISP. As recalled by their son Dan Ungureanu, in a telephone conversation, the museum-house was given to them because of the huge residential problems in 1950s Bucharest.²¹⁹ He remembers most of the people he knew in those days lived together, the whole family, in only one room. He thinks that this is the reason why the Museum of the Illegal Printing House became residential. His parents, though, paid rent all their lives to the private owner of the house, Mr. Bardo whose property was thus not nationalized, not even when the intention to make the house a museum was firm.²²⁰

Dan Ungureanu remembers the old furniture of the house, especially the one in the living-room, a room they barely used, as inherited from the museum. It is highly probable that it was the same furniture kept for the museum room that was supposed to remain intact “to overcome the vigilance of the bourgeois regime.>>”²²¹ The memorial house was included in the touristic tour of Bucharest in the 1960s. Dan Ungureanu remembers frequent buses stopping in front of their house while twenty to thirty people descended to look or photograph his house. These touristic buses

²¹⁹ Dan Ungureanu, telephone conversation with Simina Bădică on May 20, 2013.

²²⁰ Mr. Bardo was also not allowed to live in this house, whose three rooms were considered too much for a 2-person family.

²²¹ “Work plan for arranging the printing house” AMNIR, fond Muzeul Partidului, file i2501 (*Comemorare Doftana 1948 si 1949*), no page numbers.

became less frequent in the 1970s when finally they had to move out of the house as the owner, Mr. Bardo had finally managed to sell the house to an Army officer.

Besides being a glorious page of the pre-1944 history of Romanian communist movement, the illegal printing activities continued to be a concern of the communist parties all over Eastern Europe, all through the existence of their regimes.²²² After 1989, the memorialisation of the communist regime has been organized under the same underground paradigm,²²³ extending a version of history that the communist movement designed to glorify their interwar and World War Two antifascist fight into a paradigm explaining and thus delegitimizing all the decades of communist rule. The communists, one Romanian writer-tuned-historian claims, “have run the country for decades from the underground that they never actually left. They remained hidden in a bunker, far away, alien to society, continuously conspiring against it. They never managed to come to the surface, to gain legitimacy, not even for one day in the almost half-century during which they were running the Romanian world. They remained condemned to their condition of eternal creatures of darkness.”²²⁴

²²² A post-communist museum of an underground printing house can now be visited in Lithuania. The printing house functioned between 1979 and 1990 and it issued publication, mainly religious, directed against the communist regime and soviet occupation. After 1990, the former underground printing house became a museum.
http://kariomene.kam.lt/en/military_insignia/vytautas_the_great_war_museum/underground_printing_house_ab.html, accessed April 10th, 2013.

²²³ Simina Radu-Bucurenci (Bădică) and Gabriela Cristea (Nicolescu), “Raising the Cross. Exorcising Romania’s Communist Past in Museums, Memorials and Monuments,” in *Oksana Sarkisova and Peter Apor (eds.), Past for the Eyes. East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2008), 273–303; and Rév, *Retroactive Justice*.

²²⁴ Tănase, *Clienții Lu’ Tanti Varvara. Istoriei Clandestine (Aunt Varvara’s Clients. Clandestine Histories)*.

Chapter 3. Communism in museums after 1989

3.1. Memorial context of the 1990s: the black hole paradigm

In the early 1990s, Romania's communist past was a subject of heated public and private debate in which the historian's voice was rarely heard. It was the time when metaphorical accounts of the country's difficult past were more fashionable than academic analysis. It was in the 1990s that the 1945-1989 timeframe came to be described as "a black hole" in Romania's history, as a time when Romanians were "out of history." My argument is that post-communist Romanian exhibitions on communism have taken up this metaphor and, although academic accounts of Romania's recent past are currently more nuanced, the practice of curating communism has remained confined to these dichotomies and to what I describe as *the black hole paradigm*.

This chapter will mainly deal with two important museums, the only ones that had the determination and courage to establish, in the troubled 1990s, permanent exhibitions dealing with the country's communist past. The Sighet Memorial Museum and the Romanian Peasant Museum are to this day still the only museum institutions that exhibit communism every day from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Yet they were constructed in a specific memorial context whose influence is visible in the curatorial concept of the exhibitions, in their usage of space and architecture, in the basic argument they strive to convey about the communist past.

3.1.1. Welcome back, history!

The political context of the early 1990s, with a neo-Communist power in charge of establishing democracy in Romania, turned the debate about the legacy of the Communist regime into a crucial, contemporary matter with immediate effects on political, cultural and academic life. Briefly put, the neo-Communist established power actively discouraged any initiative at uncovering or at least opening the debate on the communist past of the country, thus establishing what Vladimir Tismăneanu calls a “politics of amnesia.”¹ The result was, in my view, a radicalization in the position of those who felt the need for such a historical, political and even moral investigation. It is my argument that the constant denial of access to “the real story” of Romanian Communism pushed Romanian anti-Communism into a radical realm of focusing mainly on Communist crimes and describing the whole era as a criminal era.²

Romanian post-communism has attracted the attention of scholars who have written comprehensively about post-communism’s relation to the communism past. In fact, following Boris Buden’s observation, the very name of post-communism suggests that it is a period defined by its relationship to the communist regime.³

¹ Vladimir Tismăneanu, “Democracy and Memory: Romania Confronts Its Communist Past,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* no. 617 (May 2008): 168.

² An excellent overview of the memory struggles over de-communization in Romania and Eastern Europe is offered in Lavinia Stan’s writings. The myths surrounding de-communisation are analyzed in Lavinia Stan, “The Vanishing Truth? Politics and Memory in Post-Communist Europe,” *East European Quarterly* XL, no. 4 (December 2006): 383–408; For a slightly different story of the “process of communism” in Romania, see Florin Abraham, “Raportul Comisiei Tismăneanu: Analiză Istoriografică (Tismaneanu Commission Report: An Historiographical Analysis),” in Vasile Ernu, Costi Rogozanu (eds.), *Iluzia Anticomunismului. Lecturi Critice Ale Raportului Tismaneanu* (Chișinău: Cartier, 2008), 9–13.

³ Boris Buden, “In Ghetele Comunismului. Despre Critica Discursului Postcomunist (In the Boots of Communism. On the Critique of Postcommunist Discourse),” in Adrian T. Sîrbu, Alexandru Polgar

Although still a controversial statement, the argument that post-communist historiography is defined by a rather unsophisticated anti-communism is gradually gaining supporters.⁴ As historian Florin Abraham bluntly states that “Anti-communism has become the founding ideology of the <<new historiography>> on the 1945-1989 period,”⁵ other historians contextualize the anti-communist discourse as belonging only to the post-communist opposition while also admitting that it has indeed become the “hegemonic public representation of Romanian communism.”⁶ My analysis agrees with the afore-mentioned authors in considering anti-communism a defining trait of narrating Communist after 1989,⁷ however I am trying here to refine the understanding of anti-communism in the Romanian context. I am arguing that Romanian anti-communism is essentially an a-historical paradigm which, although based on a deep concern with the past, it aims at deleting that particular past from history (but not from history writing). I am also arguing that this particular characteristic of the anti-communist discourse had an important impact on Romanian museums as the attempts to present the history of communist Romania in an a-historical perspective have given birth to interesting and innovative museal solutions. This perspective may also account for the fact that museum representations of

(eds.), *Genealogii Ale Postcomunismului, (Genealogies of Post-communism)* (Cluj: Idea Design & Print, 2009), 59–76.

⁴ See Vasile Ernu and Costi Rogozanu, eds., *Iluzia Anticomunismului. Lecturi Critice Ale Raportului Tismăneanu (The Illusion of Anticommunism. Critical Readings of the Tismăneanu Report)* (Chișinău: Cartier, 2008); Péter Apor, “Master Narratives of Contemporary History in Eastern European National Museums,” in Dominique Poulot, Felicity Bodenstern, José María Lanzarote Guiral (eds.) *Great Narratives of the Past. Traditions and Revisions in National Museums Conference Proceedings from EuNaMus, European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, Paris 29 June – 1 July & 25-26 November 2011*. (Linköping University Electronic Press: http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=078, 2011), 569–585.

⁵ Florin Abraham, “Istoriografie Și Memorie Socială În România După 1989 (Historiography and Social Memory in Romania after 1989),” *Yearbook of the Institute of History "George Barițiu" Series HISTORICA* no. LI (2012): 154.

⁶ Dragoș Petrescu and Cristina Petrescu, “The Pitești Syndrome: A Romanian Vergangenheitsbewältigung?,” in Stefan Troebst (ed.), *Postdiktatorische Geschichtskulturen Im Süden Und Osten Europas* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2010), 509–526.

⁷ See my co-written article from 2008, Simina Radu-Bucurenci (Bădică) and Gabriela Cristea (Nicolescu), “Raising the Cross.”

Communism have not been curated by historians in history museum; it was actually artists, ethnologists and writers that could operate within this a-historical paradigm and also visually narrate it in exhibition halls.

In the enthusiastic months following the Romanian 1989 revolutionary events, several civic groups were formed, among which the Group for Social Dialogue (GDS) was one the most influential for the emerging Romanian civil society. Quoting from the opening statements of their Declaration of Principles,

“The Group for Social Dialogue has been set up as an independent group, legally operating, from December 31, 1989. It aims to represent the moral conscience of our humiliated and destroyed society. We want to contribute to overcome the disaster and to regenerate our country. The Group for Social Dialogue is an independent and strictly informal group, it is not subordinated to any political party, and rejects any cooperation with anybody connected with the old regime. The group does not wish to be a centre of power, but a centre of influence. Each member of the group has the right to hold his own views and political opinions and this will not affect in any way the status and the orientation of the group.”⁸

The GDS has been publishing the prominent *Revista 22* since January 1990 and has been reuniting, in writing and public action, the most visible Romanian intellectuals with a clear anti-communist leaning.⁹ Their view on the last half a century of Communist regime is clearly stated in the editorial of the first issue of *Revista 22*: “There was half a century when history ceased to exist.”¹⁰ In the second issue of the journal, Bogdan Ghiu happily writes: “Welcome back, history!”¹¹ and a big reportage is hosted on two pages “Should history restart where it stopped?”¹² This

⁸ Declaration of Principles of the Group for Social Dialogue. <http://www.gds.org.ro/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Declaratia-de-constituire-GDS-limba-engleza.pdf> (accessed August 15, 2013).

⁹ More on GDS in Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu, *Intelectualii în câmpul puterii: morfologii și traiectorii sociale (Intellectuals in the realm of power: morphologies and social trajectories)* (Iași: Polirom, 2007), 338–343.

¹⁰ “Editorial 22,” *Revista 22* 1, no. 1 (January 20, 1990): 1.

¹¹ Bogdan Ghiu, “Pasi Catre Un Dialog Interior (Steps Towards an Inner Dialogue),” *Revista 22* 1, no. 2 (January 27, 1990): 5.

¹² “Istoria Se Reia de Unde S-a Oprit? (Should History Restart Where It Stopped?),” *Revista 22* 1, no. 2 (January 27, 1990): 18–19.

type of arguments became paradigmatic for GDS' position, and the political opposition, on the communist past: Romanian history unfolded progressively until the end of the Second World War when suddenly history stopped, Romania entering "a black hole" of which it was miraculously delivered in 1989. Ironically, this view is congruent with the Communists' own theory on history. They also aimed to bring about the end of history, but in a positive way, ending the chain of exploitation and entering the final, paradisiacal stage of history. Even more, Romanian intelligentsia was celebrating the return of history just at the moment when Western intellectuals were debating Francis Fukuyama's famous description of "the end of history."¹³

The metaphor of an out-of-history communist Romania was used even by those critical historians in the business of myth-braking. Among them, Lucian Boia was bitterly attacked in the 1990s for de-mythologizing Romanian history.¹⁴ The book that stirred the nationalistic attacks starts however with this argument: "Communism simply took Romania out of its normal course of evolution, overturning all structures and values. The construction it attempted failed which compels us, at the end of half a century of exiting history, to reedit the efforts made one hundred and fifty years ago."¹⁵ Irina Nicolau, ethnographer and one of the creators of the Romanian Peasant Museum, of which this chapter shall have much more to say in subsequent pages, was writing in the early 90s: "There is in Romania a huge emptiness that one has to fill with its own body, in order to build upon. Or maybe it is better to build a bridge over

¹³ Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?," *The National Interest* (Summer 1989).

¹⁴ In 2013, he is one of Romania's best-selling authors, and probably even its best-selling historian.

¹⁵ Lucian Boia, *Istorie Și Mit În Conștiința Românească (History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness)* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1997), 11.

it, with one pillar in Samurçaş¹⁶ times and the other in the place where the future starts. But are we wise enough to make that bridge? Are we working fast enough?”¹⁷

Foreign informed observers of Romanian reality were puzzled by these maneuvers of amnesia and included questions of dealing with the past in their research. American anthropologist Katherine Verdery was writing as early as 1994: “How did it happen that Romania is partly resuscitating the past in this way, seeking to lift out whole chunks of the Communist period as if it had never occurred?”¹⁸ More recently, in 2005, cultural and art critic Boris Groys points out towards the same a-historical vision on the communist past, still vivid in Eastern Europe: “In the East, as well as in the West, there is some consensus that the communism would have been a time of erasure and oppression of the national culture, for Russians but also Ukrainians, Romanians and Hungarians... It was a kind of gap, it was a non-historical, anti-historical period that would have been only characterized by oppression and suppression of something.”¹⁹ Recently this paradigm was officially sanctioned in the 2006 presidential discourse condemning communism as criminal regime. President Traian Băsescu then proclaimed in front of the Parliament: “It was an oppressive regime, which deprived the Romanian people of five decades of modern history.”²⁰

¹⁶ Al. Tzigara-Samurçaş was the director of the pre-1945 National Art Museum whose building was occupied after the war by the Lenin-Stalin and Party museums.

¹⁷ Irina Nicolau and Carmen Hulață, *Dosar Sentimental*, 54.

¹⁸ Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 136.

¹⁹ Boris Groys, “<<Utopia Înseamnă Investire În Artificial>> O Conversație Cu Boris Groys Despre Condiția Postcomunistă (<<Utopia Is Investment In The Artificial>> A Conversation with Boris Groys About the Post-communist Condition),” *Idea Arts+Society Magazine* no. 21 (2005).

²⁰ Speech by Romania’s President, Traian Băsescu, on the Occasion of Presenting the Report of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of Communist Dictatorship in Romania (Romanian Parliament, December 18th 2006). Available at http://www.presidency.ro/?_RID=det&tb=date&id=8288&_PRID accessed August 10th, 2013.

However, in the early 1990s, the dilemma concerning an evaluation of the Communist past was even more urgently faced by historians;²¹ those historians working in schools and museums for example had to come up with an immediate practical solution for their everyday work. Once again, history stopped in 1945 with history teachers desperately confessing they don't know what to tell their students about the post-1945 period.²² A history manual published in 1942 by P.P. Panaitescu²³ was re-edited by the Didactic Publishing House²⁴ and used as a basis for teaching history in primary and secondary school. The unfolding of Romanian history naturally ended, in this manual, in the interwar period.

3.1.2. Museological silence of the 1990s

Equally clueless about the necessary changes and the new narrative of Romanian history were museum professionals. In most cases, the contemporary history sections in museums were simply closed down under heavy locks, and it is essential to note that not even 20 years after the 1989 events, has anything been conceived of to replace those empty rooms. With notable exceptions, like the Regional Museum in Alexandria hosting a permanent exhibition on collectivization in Teleorman, Romanian museums, central or regional, have been keeping a perplexed silence on the country's communist past ever since 1990.

²¹ For an overview on Romanian historiographical struggles and development in post-communism, including the debates over the communist past see Cristina Petrescu and Dragoș Petrescu, "Mastering Vs. Coming to Terms with the Past: A Critical Analysis of Post-Communist Romanian Historiography."

²² Unfortunately I am not aware of any studies concerning the changes in history teaching in the early 1990s, so these considerations are based on my own memories of schooling in the 1990s, while I was a secondary and high school student.

²³ The editors chose to ignore the fact that P.P. Panaitescu (1900-1967) was a preeminent figure of the interwar Romanian fascist movement, the Iron Guard.

²⁴ Petre P. Panaitescu, *Istoria Românilor (History of Romanians)* (Bucharest: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1990).

“Almost a year after the 1989 December Revolution, the situation of historical exhibitions in most museums is the same: the contemporary history section is completely closed, the <<precious quotations>> were eliminated and the texts were revised and most of the copies of objects were removed from the show-cases.”²⁵ This statement is part of the first text published in *Revista Muzeelor* (Museums’ Review) in 1990 that actively engages with the transformations museums were undergoing as a result of the general political and societal transition. It was published in the August-October 1990 issue of the journal, as the first issues of 1990 show no sign of the immense change in Romanian society and politics. Apart from the decree organizing the Commission for Museums and Collections signed by Ion Iliescu on February 5, 1990 there is nothing in these early 1990 issues of the *Revista Muzeelor* that might hint to the transformations museums were going through or were preparing to go through.

In this article, Anghel Pavel attempts an honest evaluation of the last 15 years of Romanian museology trying to hint to the causes of the crisis museums found themselves into. He points to the heavy political involvement in the museums discourse, the excessive centralization and the obligation of having in every museum “the complete tour” (circuitul complet).²⁶ It is only the last issue of 1990 that opens the debate on the necessary transformations in museums, with the publication of a *Frame-Program* (program-cadru) for museal development. The program is the result of the meeting held on October 1st 1990 by the Commission for Museums and Collections. The main objective of this program is “restructuring of the museum

²⁵ Anghel Pavel, “Incotro, Muzeele de Istorie? (History Museums, Where To?),” 45.

²⁶ The complete tour is term introduced in the 70s and 80s in the museum profession to define the obligation of every historical museum to present the history of the Romanian nation from prehistory to the present day. Anghel Pavel argues for abandoning this concept and thus allowing regional museums to focus on their original specializations and not be forced to deal with subjects who exceed their competences (like exhibiting the history of the communist regime, for example). Anghel Pavel, “Incotro, Muzeele de Istorie? (History Museums, Where To?).”

network [...] with special attention to revising, completing and thematically remaking of history and archaeology museums [...] including some themes deliberately excluded in the past (reflection of personalities, of religious development, political realities, etc.).”²⁷ The deadline for this part of the program was 1993-1994; it is to this day largely unaccomplished. Another point of the program is concerned with the establishing of new museums with a bewildering range of topics: Sports Museum, Automobile museum, Cinematography Museum, Aviation Museum, Hunting Museum or Museum of Commerce! The program also proposes acquisitions of contemporary art through an ethnographic expedition in four African countries, voyage scheduled for 1991-1992.²⁸ On the issue of dealing with and representing the recent past, the long-awaited program keeps silent; it only alludes to the necessity of “revising, completing and thematically remaking of history and archaeology museums” but the main museological effort in Romanian museums seems to be directed towards very different topics: from hunting museums to African expeditions.

It is no wonder that, in this context, the courage and initiative of creatively dealing with the past did not come from museum professionals. Two museums, established in the early 1990s by professionals coming from outside the museum sphere, were the ones who assumed a discourse on the communist past, boldly engaged with the communist heritage, societal and museal, and managed to at least open a debate on the necessity of dealing with the past in the museum space. These institutions were the Romanian Peasant Museum, established by state initiative in February 1990 under the direction of artist Horia Bernea and the Sighet Memorial, established by private initiative in 1993 as a result of the efforts of the Civic Academy

²⁷ Gavrilă Sarafoleanu, “Program-cadru de Dezvoltare Muzeala (Frame-Program for Museal Development),” *Revista Muzeelor* no. 11–12 (1990): 117.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 118.

Foundation and especially of writers Ana Blandiana and her husband Romulus Rusan, yet partially supported with state subsidy ever since 1997. Although intellectually very connected to the above-mentioned group promoting a *black hole* view on the communist past, these two museums initiatives were determined to uncover unknown dimensions of the past, insisting however on a criminalizing perspective specific to the radical anticommunism of the period.

3.2. Exorcising Communism. The Romanian Peasant Museum.

The Romanian Peasant Museum is probably one of the most well-known and internationally acclaimed Romanian museums. Although a young museum, established in 1990, it claims a history of more than a century and it is one of the rare Romanian museums that engages with its history in its own exhibitions halls.²⁹ This is even more unusual since this institutional history also includes almost 40 years of the building being used by the most important propaganda museum of Socialist Romania, the Museum of Party History. This chapter unravels the fascinating history of this museum while arguing that it is precisely its complicated history that shaped its museologic discourse. I am analyzing its discourse while emphasizing its relationship to its communist and pre-communist past. It is important to place this story in the context provided by the previous chapters of this dissertation. The Peasant Museum was not only a new museum (while being old at the same time) but it also proposed a new museology who fiercely opposed the Soviet museology so far described. The surprising outcome, even for the curators, was that their discourse was revolutionary

²⁹ After working with the museum as a volunteer during my undergraduate studies (1999-2003), I joined the researched department of the Romanian Peasant Museum in 2006.

not only by East-European standards but it was also pertinently innovative by European standards. In 1997, the Romanian Peasant Museum received the European Museum of the Year Award, a prestigious prize that put Romanian museology again on the European and international map.

The Romanian Peasant Museum was re-established in 1990, on February 5th, barely one month after the demise of the Romanian Communist regime. The Romanian Peasant Museum was to construct its identity as a continuator of the interwar National Museum and in sharp contrast with its predecessor, the Museum of Communist Party History. It was not only a question of institutional succession; the distance to be established was between two eras, two worlds, two regimes. The team at the Peasant Museum chose to establish this distance in a very peculiar way. On a museographical level, the basic concepts in dealing with the heritage of the old museum were fakery and truth. The former communist museum was considered a “fake museum”; therefore its objects were “fake objects”. The new museum was built through a dialogue with the objects, but this very dialogue was denied to the communist objects. On a discursive level, the distance taken was even sharper: the old museum was a “ghost” still haunting the building of the Peasant Museum, which needed to be exorcised. Andrei Pleșu, the minister of culture at that moment, explained his decision: “The idea of re-establishing a museum of ethnography in the building on the boulevard was not the result of an effort of imagination, but of memory. That building was designed by Ghika-Budești especially to be an ethnography museum.... It seemed symbolically useful to exorcise the ghosts of a fake museum such as the Museum of the Romanian Communist Party with a museum belonging to the local tradition.”³⁰

³⁰ Irina Nicolau and Carmen Hulață, *Dosar Sentimental*, 39.

The Peasant Museum was to be the bridge Irina Nicolau talked about, the bridge between the interwar period and present days; under the bridge – communism.³¹ The choice for the director of this both new and old museum would prove spectacular. Horia Bernea, a painter who had never been anything more than an admirer and keen visitor of museums, managed to make the Peasant Museum his last work of art, his last installation. He was appointed in 1990 and only left the museum upon his death in 2000.

3.2.1 The National Art Museum 1906-1952

The Romanian Peasant (National) Museum was established in 1990 in the building whose foundational stone had been laid in 1912 for the National Museum. The National Museum of the early 20th century, as projected by Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcaș and supported by the royal family, was meant to be a national art museum, where national art included prehistoric and roman vestiges, religious art and peasant objects. This exhibition project was never actually installed in the building (except for the ethnographic section) as the building was only finished in 1938; when the Communist party took control of state politics after the Second World War it evacuated the National Museum and replaced it with the Lenin-Stalin Museum. The establishment in 1990 of the Romanian Peasant Museum in the same building was thus understood as “the result of a memory effort.”³²

At the beginning of the 20th century, Romania, a new but vivid state on the European map had almost all the institutions a modern state required: Parliament, Academy of Sciences, University and of course, a National Museum. The National

³¹ Ibid., 54.

³² Andrei Pleșu quoted in *ibid.*, 39.

Museum, established in 1834 by boyar Mihalache Ghica, was to be found in the University building, in a few rooms crowded with “old Romanian jewels, contemporary objects, paintings and reproductions of famous paintings, weapons and cult objects from South America, Chinese pottery, Romanian folk costumes and rescued Church frescoes, music instruments and Egyptian mummies.”³³ The principle behind the collections of this museum was the already out-of-fashion idea that collecting internationally might be a sign of national greatness.

Alexandru Tzigara-Samurçaş (1872-1952), an art historian from a Romanian-Albanian family of small boyars and friend of the royal family, was one the successful promoters of a new kind of national museum, a museum that exhibits national greatness with national productions. He wrote extensively on the subject at the turn of the century, in publications and memorandums to those in the position to support the project. In 1906, for example, his memorandum to the ministry of Culture argues:

“The lack of a National Museum is a shame of which we are all aware. The establishment of such an institution is urgently needed. Our national pride does not allow us to remain in obvious inferiority in this matter also towards our younger neighbors, even more recently entered among civilized states. Sadly we must acknowledge that Bulgarians have surpassed us in this cultural activity. In less than ten years they put together an admirable antiquities museum and a no less precious museum of ethnography and national art. The Serbs are well ahead us also. Not to speak of Hungarian museums with which we can barely hope of ever catching up.”³⁴

The examples of Romania’s neighbors were meant to put the problem on the state’s priority list. And he was successful, for in the same year, on October 1st 1906, Alexandru Tzigara-Samurçaş becomes director of what will be initially called the Ethnographic Museum of National, Decorative and Industrial Art.³⁵ The long and

³³ Alexandru Tzigara-Samurçaş, *Muzeografie Românească (Romanian Museography)* (Bucuresti: Imprimeria Nationala, 1936), 3.

³⁴ Al. Tzigara-Samurçaş quoted in Petru Popovăţ, “Muzeul de La Şosea(The Museum by the Boulevard),” 39.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

heavy title will be shortened in 1915 to the National Museum *Carol I*.³⁶ Apparently state officials gave up on the first national museum, built around national and international antiquities and curiosities and were striving to construct a new national museum, which would include the antiquities in a larger concept of national art.

The never realized project for the National Museum *Carol I* was to reunite under the same roof existing but separated museums, making them sections of the National Museum: prehistoric art and migration period, Dacian and Greek-roman art, medieval and religious art, Romanian peasant art, modern and contemporary arts, minor arts and donations.³⁷ This vision of the National Museum never became reality, mainly because of the complicated history of the building that was supposed to host the National Museum. Out of all these projected sections it was only the Romanian peasant art section that started to gather collections and exhibit them under the close scrutiny of Tzigara-Samurcaș himself.

The building of the museum also has a complicated history of glorious plans that hardly ever reached finality. The building that nowadays hosts the Romanian Peasant Museum was designed in the neo-Romanian style by architect Nicolae Ghika-Budești. The neo-Romanian style was born at the end of the 19th century out of a desire to include old Romanian architectural elements in imposing, urban buildings; this is the only Romanian national architectural style and it was thus natural that the National Museum should be housed in a national style building.

The foundational stone of the building was laid in 1912 by King Carol I himself in a sumptuous ceremony. The foundational act signed by the king on the occasion stated that the building will host the National Museum. In fact, in the initial plans of the edifice <<NATIONAL MUSEUM>> was to be carved in stone on the

³⁶ Ibid., 66.

³⁷ Ibid., 96.

frontispiece of the museum, but this is one architectural detail that was finally omitted. Apparently, Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcaș was so involved with the museum he created that he engaged in numerous disputes even with the architect,³⁸ thus greatly changing the architectural plans at his own will. Started with enthusiasm in 1912, the construction works are stopped in 1914, leaving an unfinished building with practically no roof. The works restarted after the end of the war and on October 1st 1930, the south wing of the new building is opened for visitors with the ethnographic exhibition curated by Tzigara-Samurcaș. The rest of the building was still under construction which was only resumed in 1934 and finished in 1938. The damaged building suffered a lot from earthquakes (1940) and Allied bombings (1944).

The communist regime finds the National Museum *Carol I* in a beautiful, central building exhibiting and interesting ethnographic collection whose value was not so much appreciated by the new communist rulers. The building though seemed much more appealing as the perfect place to establish a new, communist museum, the V.I. Lenin – I.V. Stalin Museum (described in the previous chapter).

The first step towards the gradual disappearance of the National Museum *Carol I* was changing its name, in 1948, immediately after the monarchy was abolished, into National Museum of Art and Archaeology and the forceful resignation of its director Tzigara-Samurcaș.³⁹ The name is soon to be changed again in National Museum of Popular Art, then into Popular Art Museum of the Romanian Socialist Republic. In 1952 it is chased away from its building, making room for two Communist propaganda museums, the V.I. Lenin – I.V. Stalin Museum and the

³⁸ Ibid., 67.

³⁹ The communists were not the first to make Tzigara-Samurcaș resign from his position. In 1940, during the short-lived National-Legionnaire state he was also dismissed. Mihai Pelin, *Deceniul Prabusirilor (1940-1950). Vietile Pictorilor, Sculptorilor Si Arhitecilor Romani Intre Legionari Si Stalinisti (A Decade of Downfalls 1940-1950. The Lives of Romanian Painters, Sculptors and Architects Between Legionnaires and Stalinists)* (Bucharest: Compania, 2005), 251.

History Museum of the Romanian Workers' Party. In 1978, the Popular Art Museum is united with the Village Museum; practically, this meant the disappearance of the Popular Art Museum, the former National Museum *Carol I*, and taking over of its collection by the Village Museum. If not for the "memory effort" performed in 1990 by Minister of Culture Andrei Pleșu, the National Museum *Carol I* would have remained just another piece of museum history.

3.2.2. Fake walls and fake objects. 1990.

The links connecting the Romanian Peasant Museum and the former Party Museum were more powerful than just inheriting/re-occupying the building. The museum inherited the exhibitions, the collections, the library and, not least important, the staff of the communist museum. The story of the Peasant Museum is told by the new staff as the story of a struggle: a physical struggle with the transformations that the building underwent as a communist museum and with all the objects that had lost any purpose or meaning, and a spiritual struggle with the ghosts of Communism. The physical fight did not take that long: only a few months for dismantling, cleaning the exhibition rooms and transferring the objects to other institutions. Ioana Popescu, head of the research department and a visual anthropologist at the museum since 1990, told me in an interview the story of the rediscovery of the exhibition rooms: "On the outside, the building has arches in neo-Romanian style. On the inside, we were surprised to discover no cupolas, no arches. There were long rooms, some square-ish, some like wide halls that you walked through, with straight walls on each

side. Then we realized that the walls were not real: they were only fake walls hiding the splendid interior architecture.”⁴⁰

The same company that had designed and installed the former exhibitions, *Decorativa* was hired to dismantle them. They discovered that the panels and the fake walls were so solidly made that it took an enormous amount of time, money and work to dismantle them. The researchers of the museum actively participated in this process. “We float in the red works of Ceaușescu and in the blue volumes of the Soviet Encyclopedia. The panels of the former exhibitions are deeply embedded in the walls, meant to last for eternity. They leave holes like craters after they have been removed.”⁴¹

Another part of the physical struggle was against the old collections, which were considered “trash” by the researchers and museographers of the new museum.

“At first, we wanted to throw everything away. Then we realized that we couldn’t do that because we could be attacked when it was noticed that we had thrown away communist books. The political moment was still not very clear.... So we discussed it with the Museum of National History and with the State Archives and we tried to throw over to them most of this trash, what we called <<trash.>> What nobody wanted to take, we put in the basement, in a room that we still call the Chamber of Horrors. Later, we received offers from abroad, from private persons or institutions that wanted to buy communist objects from us. But they were no longer here so we answered with dignity that we would not sell our country.”⁴²

Irina Nicolau has different memories of how the difficult heritage of the Communist Party Museum was handled. She recalls that they treated the collections of the old museum carefully since they were a part of recent history and they did not want to do what the communists had done: to erase the past. However, most of the exhibits of the former museum were not even regarded as objects with any

⁴⁰ Ioana Popescu, Interview.

⁴¹ Irina Nicolau and Carmen Huluiță, *Dosar Sentimental*, 50.

⁴² Ioana Popescu, Interview.

patrimonial value. The History Museum of the Communist Party was thought of as a museum of fake photographs and fake objects. However, among the inherited collections interesting items were discovered, preserved and became the focus of research. This was the case with the collections of interwar photographs by Iosif Berman,⁴³ curated and researched by Ioana Popescu herself.⁴⁴

The metaphor of exorcising the communist ghosts is a recurrent theme in the narrative of the museum, and also of post-communist Romanian society at large.⁴⁵ “Exorcism” became more than a metaphor when Horia Bernea decided, in the spring of 1991, to call on priests to chase away these spirits in a religious ceremony.



Fig. 3.1. Priests are sprinkling holy water inside the former History Museum of the Communist Party (1991). © Visual Archive of the Romanian Peasant Museum (cTz 886)

⁴³ Iosif Berman (1892 -1941) was a Romanian photographer of Jewish origin, known for his social reportage photography but also as the last “photographer of the Royal Court.” He has recently been rediscovered by Romanian scholarship and became the subject of several articles and books. See Anca Ciuciu, “Nostalgia Unei Lumi Pierdute. Simbolismul Reportajelor Despre Sighet Și București (1929/1930-1939) de F. BruneaFox Și Ilustrate de Iosif Berman (The Nostalgia of a Lost World. The Symbolism of the Reports on Sighet and Bucharest (1929/1930-1939) by F. BruneaFox and Illustrated by Iosif Berman),” *Holocaust. Studii Și Cercetări* 4 (2011): 197–212.

⁴⁴ Ioana Popescu, *Iosif Berman: A Photo - Album. Supplement to Martor. The Anthropology Review of the Museum of the Romanian Peasant* 3/1998, 1998.

⁴⁵ The art group SubREAL (Călin Dan, Dan Mihălianu, Iosif Király) was founded in the summer of 1990 to “exorcise the residue of the decades of communist oppression.” <http://cimam.org/exhibition/3443/>, accessed August 30, 2013. The 2006 presidential condemnation of the communist regime was covered by the press as an “exorcism.” Laura Gafencu and Anca Simina, “Exorcising an Era,” *Evenimentul Zilei*, December 19, 2006; Lia Bejan and Luminița Castali, “The Solemn Meeting to Condemn Communism Has Been Transformed into a Cheap Circus Reminiscent of Group Exorcism,” *Gardianul*, December 19, 2006.

“While the dismantling took place, Horia Bernea had the idea that we needed to clean the space not only of fake walls and fake objects, but also of the bad spirits that must have sneaked in and lived among us.... He brought some prelates who came to sprinkle the holy water (*aghiasmă*), to clean the whole museum. They entered every storage room, every little corner; we have pictures of that. And it is interesting to see that we were all there. We were all there because we all had to be sprinkled with holy water.... And the priests who came with huge buckets of holy water were sprinkling with all the strength in their muscles. It seemed that their arms were going to break off their shoulders when they were sprinkling. They flooded everything in holy water. When they found themselves in front of that famous sculpture of the heads of Marx, Engels and Lenin - there was one in almost every room - they were throwing, flooding it with water as if by this they would destroy it. One of these triple busts ended up in the interior courtyard of the museum. It was huge so we couldn't send it anywhere, we had no money for special transport so finally it was dragged to the museum's courtyard and it is still there now among the rubbish and the remains of the dismantling, surrounded by a square metal fence.”⁴⁶

Conquering the space of the museum was thus one of the first tasks of the team gathered around Horia Bernea and Irina Nicolau. In the early period, they were not even allowed to enter the museum, the exhibition halls. They felt surrounded by a hostile environment, which included not only the building and the “fake objects” of the communist collection, but also the staff of the former museum: “They received us with a clearly stated, declared hatred. We finally managed to greet each other but it was clear that we were taking their place and they would have to leave, one way or another. That they would not find their place in the framework we were thinking of for our museum. It was very hard for us to get to know them by name.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Ioana Popescu, Interview.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

3.2.3. The healing museum: a victory over communism

The Peasant Museum began to organize temporary exhibitions as early as its first year of existence, 1990. The first one was “Clay Toys” followed by several displays of icons, painted Easter eggs, “Chairs,” all experimental and daring in terms of exhibiting techniques. Their stated aim was to rehabilitate the Romanian peasant, whose image had been severely abused by Communist propaganda; the claim on national identity was more implicit than clearly stated. Romanians had always considered themselves a rural nation, a nation of peasants, at least before the Second World War, and thus a statement on the Romanian peasant was always read as a statement on the Romanian nation.⁴⁸ Even if the Romanian Peasant Museum added the national tag to its name only in 2007, Horia Bernea was talking about it as a national museum as early as 1993: “Understandably, a country which takes so much pride in the only civilization which can effectively protect it in the eyes of Europe, must have a museum of anthropology in its capital, a national museum about what this traditional man was and is, while also serving as a testimonial for the future. The museum is a basic landmark for anyone who would try to understand this nation.”⁴⁹

The museum began to organize events and exhibitions, to produce unconventional little booklets, most of them hand-made, to establish its reputation as an innovative museum, which takes patrimony objects outside the museum and hires traditional music bands (*lăutari*) to play on the streets of Bucharest. They began to think of the permanent exhibition, searching for a theme that would give meaning to the new name of the museum. The outcome would have to be both a “healing

⁴⁸ Vintilă Mihăilescu, “The Romanian Peasant Museum and the Authentic Man,” *Martor. The Museum of the Romanian Peasant Anthropology Review* no. 11 (2006): 15–29.

⁴⁹ Horia Bernea quoted in *ibid.*, 16.

museum” (*muzeu vindecător*) as Irina Nicolau wanted it and a “testifying museum” (*muzeu mărturisitor*) as Horia Bernea wished. And it did become, in my view, both a healing and disturbing museum, thought-provoking, annoying and beautiful, fundamentalist and delicate.

The “healing” component of the museum was obviously aimed at the traumatic memory of the Communist regime. Paradoxically, the initial reaction to this past, as reflected in the first permanent exhibition, was an apparent indifference to it, a deliberate refusal to make any reference to recent history. The first exhibition, entitled *The Cross*, was inaugurated on April 19, 1993; the French anthropologist and friend of the museum, Gérard Althabe observed that the exhibition probably spoke more about the communist past by its total lack of reference to it.⁵⁰ Actually, it rather spoke of how the communist past was viewed in the early 1990s by Romanian intelligentsia: as a black hole that had to be forgotten, put into brackets, in order to reach more easily back to the interwar period where “real” Romanian history and identity was supposed to be found.

After cleaning the museum and removing the traces of the communist past, it seemed necessary to the new staff to reinstall a sense of normality and truthfulness in the previously abused image of the peasant. And this normality could only be reached by keeping silent, for a time, about everything that had been mystified and altered under communist rule. As Ioana Popescu remembers, “We started with the idea that the discourse on the cross must not be a vindictive discourse. Horia Bernea did not want, by *The Cross*, either to cover the horrors of Communism, or to use it as a weapon. He simply wanted to try to induce certain normality, a normality that he could not imagine in the Romanian world in the absence of the cross. A cross that he

⁵⁰ Gérard Althabe, “Une Exposition Ethnographique: Du Plaisir Esthétique, Une Leçon Politique,” *Martor. The Museum of the Romanian Peasant Anthropology Review* no. 2 (n.d.): 144–158.

saw as an element of balance and order.... So he started by wanting to make peace. A calm and normal speech. We did not think for a moment that in the exhibition The Cross there should be the victory of the cross over Communism.”⁵¹



Fig. 3.2. Entrance to the hall Holy Relics (*Moaşte*). © Romanian Peasant Museum.

However, there is an idea of implicit victory that Ioana Popescu speaks about. There is one example that both Ioana Popescu and Gérard Althabe use when describing this implicit victory. On one of the museum’s facades a huge Socialist realist mosaic has remained. The museum staff was not allowed to take it down because it was considered a work of art. Their first solution was to cover it with a wooden structure. After a small, old wooden church was assembled in the courtyard they suddenly realized that the church became the main point of interest, making the mosaic invisible. So the covering was removed and the mosaic with its happy workers

⁵¹ Ioana Popescu, Interview.

and socialist mothers surrounded by happy children is still there. Ioana Popescu claims that, even though it is there, you no longer see it. Gérard Althabe considers this “the mise en scène of the victorious resistance of Christianity over Communism.”⁵²

In an article published with Gabriela Cristea (Nicolescu) in 2008 we show, through analyzing monuments dedicated to the victims of Communism in Romania, how the Christian cross was a typical symbol of anti-Communism in the 1990s.⁵³ However, it would be an over-simplification to say that this is the reason why the cross became the organizing principle of the museum. Vintilă Mihăilescu, sociologist and director of the museum (2005-2010), wrote about what he terms the “conservative revolution” that the Romanian Peasant Museum proposed in the 1990s. He explains the choice of the cross as an attempt to put the Romanian peasant on a European Christian map, to transform nationalism into Eurocentrism. The museum, in this view, is not a museum of the peasant and much less of the Romanian peasant; it is a museum of the “traditional man”, of the “real Christian”, the one before the Great Schism.⁵⁴ Christianity and its symbols are thus much more than anti-communism. They may be very well fit into the anti-communist discourse of the 1990s but the rationale behind choosing them went beyond a quarrel of recent history.

⁵² Gérard Althabe, “Une Exposition Ethnographique: Du Plaisir Esthétique, Une Leçon Politique,” 155.

⁵³ Simina Radu-Bucurenci (Bădică) and Gabriela Cristea (Nicolescu), “Raising the Cross.”

⁵⁴ Vintilă Mihăilescu, “The Romanian Peasant Museum and the Authentic Man.”



Fig. 3.3. *Splendor* hall from the *Christian Law* thematic ground floor. © Romanian Peasant Museum.

One must also not underestimate personal choices. Horia Bernea had a life-long commitment to the symbol of the cross. As he remembers in an interview, in the 1970s he was dreaming of designing a huge cross over the Carpathians that would be visible from the Moon (together with the Chinese Wall, the only human-made constructions visible from the Earth's satellite). "Through an act of megalomania, I wanted to affirm the Cross. Again the Cross! Only now do I realize that It has always followed me."⁵⁵ Horia Bernea's father, Ernest Bernea (1905-1990) was active in the interwar period as an ethnologist in Dimitrie Gusti's sociological school of Bucharest. He wrote extensively on Romanian peasantry, its views on time, space and causality.⁵⁶ He was equally an Iron Guard ideologue, the popular fascist movement of interwar Romania, which he joined in 1935. His name is not often mentioned in connection with the discourse of the museum, however, his ideas about the peasant world are there. One example is *rânduiala*: approximately translated as "order," it

⁵⁵ Horia Bernea interviewed by Mihai Sârbulescu in Mihai Sârbulescu, *Despre Ucenicie (On Apprenticeship)* (Bucharest: Anastasia, 2002), 120.

⁵⁶ Ernest Bernea, *Spatiu, Timp Si Cauzalitate La Poporul Roman (Space, Time and Causality for the Romanian People)* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2005).

refers to a special, traditional way of relating to life and nature, in which everything has its place as the “good” cannot be achieved outside of it. Horia Bernea proposed it as the unifying concept of the permanent exhibition in the first floor and uses it in explaining his museology (“Organic museography seeks *rânduiala*, not order”⁵⁷). But *rânduiala* had also been an important concept for his father Ernest Bernea who edited for three years, 1935 to 1938, an Iron-Guard cultural publication named *Rânduiala*.

The Christian dimension that was suddenly re-discovered in the Romanian peasant can thus be traced to an interwar (extreme) right-wing tradition.⁵⁸ However, the discourse that the Peasant Museum was proposing, at least at the time of the inauguration of *The Cross*, was very much a-historical. Time stood still in the halls of the museum, while its space expanded beyond Romanian borders. It is a museum about the European traditional man, “profoundly Christian, formed in continuation of ancient civilizations, organically bound to the Mediterranean world, to civilizations that can be traced back from India to Bretagne,”⁵⁹ as Horia Bernea explained.

What could make this timeless, profoundly European and Christian peasant, “a relic of European Middle Ages elsewhere lost”⁶⁰ step back into history? The visual discourse of the Romanian Peasant Museum answers very clearly: it was communism. Quite contrary to the *black hole paradigm* previously described, claiming that the socialist regime was a step out of history for these countries, the Romanian Peasant Museum tells a different story. The timeless existence of the peasant, in perfect

⁵⁷ Horia Bernea, *Câteva Cuvinte Despre Muzeu, Cantitați, Materialitate Și Încrucșare (Few Thoughts on Museum, Quantities, Materiality and Crossings)* (Bucharest: Liternet, 2003), 17.

⁵⁸ Some of the ultra-nationalist/fascist writers of the interwar period were rehabilitated during Romania’s national-communist period. Most of these writers, like Ernest Bernea or Constatin Noica, were reedited in the 70s and 80s. However, the Christian dimension was carefully deleted from any such reedited books. Their vision would be fully rehabilitated, Christianity included, after 1989. See Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu’s Romania*, Societies and Culture in East-Central Europe 7 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

⁵⁹ Horia Bernea, *Câteva Cuvinte Despre Muzeu, Cantitați, Materialitate Și Încrucșare (Few Thoughts on Museum, Quantities, Materiality and Crossings)*, 6.

⁶⁰ Irina Nicolau and Carmen Hulață, *Dosar Sentimental*, 105.

harmony with God and nature, was abruptly pushed into history through the establishment of the communist regimes. The only rooms in the Romanian Peasant Museum where the time component is very present are the ones concerned with the collectivization process.⁶¹

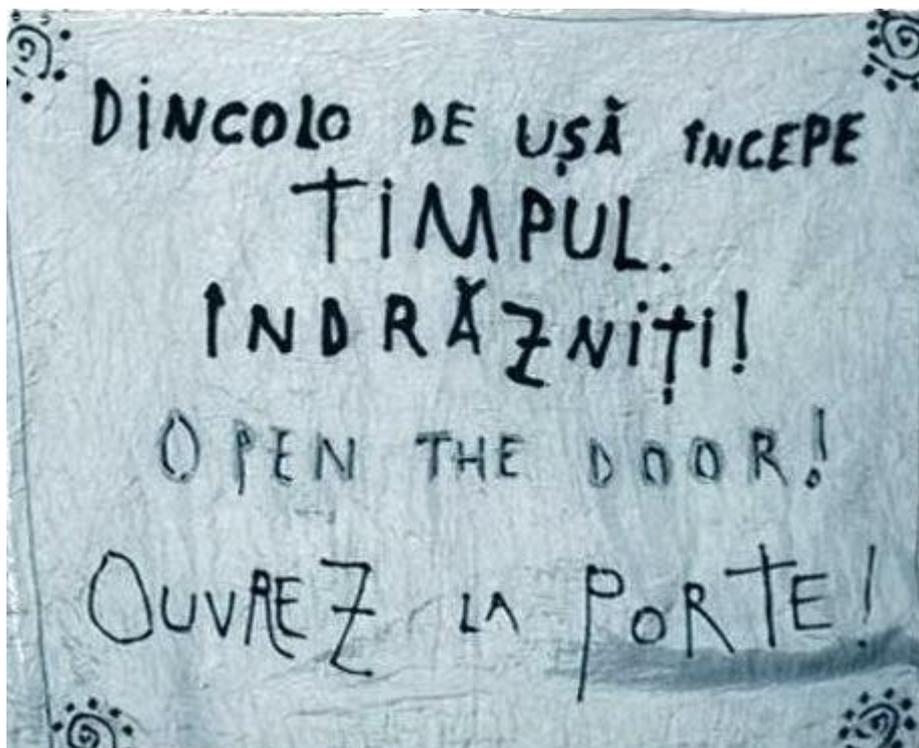


Fig. 3.4. Entrance to the exhibition hall *Time* at the Romanian Peasant Museum. It reads: “Behind this door, time begins. Dare! Open the door!” © Romanian Peasant Museum

3.2.4. The Red Plague: a discourse on ugliness

It seemed more urgent for Horia Bernea’s team, in the early 1990s, to bring into the museum what was beautiful and harmonious about the Romanian peasant, what was timeless about him. Only after the permanent display was more or less finished, did the need for a discourse on ugliness become urgent. The museum that they had composed was “a serene museum, a museum of peasant balance, in which you didn’t

⁶¹ Notwithstanding the little room called *Time*, which thematizes the peasant understanding of (cyclical) time and is as timeless as the rest of the permanent exhibition.

notice that you were in fact walking on bones, walking on dead people, dead peasants who had everything taken away from them.”⁶² From this point of view, it was itself becoming fake and misleading and it needed, Irina Nicolau thought, a counter-balance to all its serenity. This counter-balance was going to be *The Plague*, a room in the basement dedicated to communist crimes during collectivization. Inaugurated in 1997, it is to this day the only permanent exhibition on communism in any Bucharest museum.

Irina Nicolau was thinking about it as early as 1990. “I was dreaming of an exhibition set up in the technical basement, where we could isolate four small, damp rooms and a former bathroom with broken tiles, a steamy mirror and a dirty bath-tube. I imagined the bath-tube filled with water in which old newspapers would float among the sunken bronze busts of Lenin, Stalin and Gheorghiu-Dej.”⁶³ The existing exhibition, *The Plague*, is not very far from what Irina Nicolau imagined in 1990.

The Plague – Political Installation was opened for public in 1997 and it is to this day, in 2013, part of the permanent exhibition. It is a small room in the basement, just before one reaches the toilets. The only explanation given to the visitor is on the small notice at the entrance: “A memorial of the pain and suffering collectivization caused to the peasant world”. The upper part of the walls of the room are painted with red hammers and sickles, “painted in oil on a strip of blue, they still look like blood drops”⁶⁴ while the lower part is covered with issues of the communist newspaper *Scântea*, bearing lists of peasants imprisoned for resisting collectivization. Numerous busts of Lenin and Stalin facing each other or the walls or corners of the room, large pictures of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej are squeezed in very close on the same red-

⁶² Ioana Popescu, Interview.

⁶³ Irina Nicolau and Carmen Huluiță, *Dosar Sentimental*, 72.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 132.

painted wall. The center of the room is occupied by a huge porcelain vase with the inscription: “To comrade I.V. Stalin, a sign of love and gratitude from the Romanian Association for Tightening Relations with the Soviet Union”. To be able to read the inscription, one has to tour the room four times. Four huge ashtrays support the cord that surrounds the vase. A green board entitled “The collectivization class from child to adult” features poems and short compositions that children were forced to learn and write about the benefits of collectivization and hatred towards the kulaks (*chiaburi*). The exhibition was accompanied by a booklet, *The Red Ox*, consisting of the testimonies of peasants who suffered through the collectivization process. Most of the objects used in this installation came from the collections of the Lenin-Stalin museum dismantled in 1966 and kept ever since in the basement of the Party museum.



Fig. 3.5. Lenin facing himself. The Plague (1997) exhibition hall at the Romanian Peasant Museum. © Romanian Peasant Museum and Roald Aron.

The contrast between this room and the rest of the museum could not be sharper. While everything in the museum was meant to breathe harmony and beauty, *The Plague* is immediately striking in its ugliness. Walking through it the visitor is assaulted by the strong, violent colors and the “fake objects” on display. One of the

slogans of the Romanian Peasant Museum is “a real museum is one that you come back to.” *The Plague* seems to contradict this by making you want to climb back up the stairs, to get out of that basement.

One of the strongest points of the new museographic discourse proposed by the Peasant Museum was dialogue with the objects: letting the objects speak for themselves, letting them conquer the space and find their most appropriate place in the display. Horia Bernea claims that “The Romanian Peasant Museum was born out of dialogue with the objects, an accepted, provoked, always attentive dialogue, without any preconceptions.”⁶⁵ In the case of *The Plague* exhibition, he confessed, they totally ignored this freedom of the object. The objects in this exhibition used to be exhibited in the Communist Party Museum. They were, by necessity, objects of a fake past, of an unreal reality. “As opposed to the dialogue with the patrimonial objects, where I forbade myself any preconceived ideas, here we absolutely need a political bias. As we couldn’t exhibit the lies of the regime, we tried to exhibit its ugliness.”⁶⁶

The troubling thing about the “political installation” of *The Plague* is that it is not necessarily only about collectivization. It is a discourse on the years of Communism, on the ugliness, absurdity and fakeness as defining attributes of the first decades of communist rule in Romania. In a published conversation between Irina Nicolau and Horia Bernea, about this exhibition, the main theme is representing Communism, not collectivization: “Pasternak said that a talented writer should describe those years such that the blood of the readers freezes and their hair stands on end. This is the reaction we should have aimed for, but we obviously did not succeed.

⁶⁵ Horia Bernea and Irina Nicolau, “L’installation. Exposer Des Objets Au Musée Du Paysan Roumain,” *Martor. The Museum of the Romanian Peasant Anthropology Review* no. 3 (1998): 225.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

We could have obtained it only if we had closed visitors into the exhibition room among the objects which are all aggressively ugly and kept them there locked up without water, food or hygiene for a week.”⁶⁷



Fig. 3.6. The Plague (1997) exhibition hall. © Romanian Peasant Museum.

A little sheet of paper kept and later published by Irina Nicolau makes the intentions behind the display even clearer. It contains a list of possible names for the exhibition on collectivization imagined by Horia Bernea. *The Plague* could as well have been entitled “the breaking of the silence”, “essay on death”, “essay on murder” or “the Plague - the breaking of the silence.”⁶⁸

To talk about Communism in 1997 was indeed “breaking the silence.” To this end Horia Bernea used harsh metaphors in the booklet accompanying the exhibition:

⁶⁷ Ibid., 224–225. The idea of keeping the visitor “prisoner” for a while, in order to make him not only understand but feel, has in the meantime been realised. The Terror House in Budapest keeps visitors for three long minutes in a slowly descending elevator, watching and listening to stories about how people were hanged in that very building. .

⁶⁸ Irina Nicolau and Carmen Huluiță, *Dosar Sentimental*, 134.

“Communism is a disease of society and soul; it is opposed to the life-giving convention; an <<ideal>> stupidity, totally oriented against life; a destructive “atheist sect”; orientation against the spirit, comfortable to the lower parts of man; the exaltation of shameful evil; absolute hatred, affirmed with no reservations; an attempt to destroy the multi-millennial attempt at spiritualization; a sinister utopia.”⁶⁹

3.2.5. The antidote museum. Irina Nicolau.

The story of the Romanian Peasant Museum is one of the rare success stories of Romanian transition, a Romanian miracle as some already put it. If the story is indeed seducing one must not forget that the experience of the Peasant Museum is quite singular and the situation in the vast majority of Romanian museums was immovability, perplexed silence and low-quality uncontroversial exhibitions. Theories and debates on museum practice were practically non-existent in 1990s Romania. One of the rare examples of a polemic text that engages with the challenges and difficulties of Romanian museums in post-communism also comes from the team of the Peasant Museum in Bucharest. Irina Nicolau’s *Me and the Museums of the World: The History of a Museum Experience in an East European Country* (published in French) was written in 1994 when Nicolau was a fellow of New Europe College, the recently organized institute for advanced studies in Bucharest, initiated and led by the same Andrei Pleșu who re-established the Peasant Museum four years before.

Irina Nicolau (1946-2002) had been an ethnographer all her professional life, mainly concerned with the history and ethnography of the Aromanians (herself half Aromanian, half Greek), up to 1990 when Horia Bernea summoned her to help build

⁶⁹ Ibid.

the Peasant Museum. Reluctant to take the job because of her lack of experience with museums, she finally agreed and thus made way for a decade of innovative museology and research.⁷⁰ In her last decade of activity she became interested in creating exhibitions and, unlike her fellow museologists, she also brought fresh arguments on what museums are, how they can function in different cultural contexts and how they can bring about change and healing in difficult times, such as the Romanian 1990s.



Fig. 3.7. Irina Nicolau in her office at the Peasant Museum in 2000. Personal archive.

⁷⁰ Upon her untimely death, she left behind not only books, original exhibitions and new museological concepts (such as the antidote museum) but also a group of young people, myself amongst them who had been involved in some of her projects and could learn first-hand how curiosity, an ability to ignore the beaten track, ask unconventional questions and working in a team with like-minded people can lead to either epic failures or great achievements such as the Peasant Museum was.

Nicolau develops in this text the oppositional concepts of mother-museum and father-museum: “As opposed to mother-museums, where you meet unknown objects – appropriated although remaining unknown – the father-museums give explanations, produce reasoning, educate...The mother-style is an antidote to the hyper-amnesia towards which the father museums push us, together with all our society.” The mother-museum is the prototype of the museum as “A place where you see objects that you like.”⁷¹ It is probably the lack of training in formal museology and even more her lack of experience in museum work before 1989 that led Nicolau to perceive and pinpoint this fundamental problem of Romanian museums: the lack of objects in museums and the overwhelming didactic tone of the same object-free museums. As explained in the previous chapter, the legacy of “Stalin’s talking museums”⁷² could still be seen in Romanian museums of the 1980s in the abundance of explanatory texts and a certain reluctance to exhibit the artifact, when available, without the framing of excessive, didactic text. Putting into practice these early ideas of Irina Nicolau, the Peasant Museum became famous for its no-label policy and a very creative use of text, a text which does not explain the object but rather adds questions to those already present in the mind of the visitor.

However, the text does not pinpoint Soviet museology as the source of problems in current Romanian museology. Providing a broader context, Nicolau explains that “the Romanian museum is in a double crisis, provoked by the consequences of Communist ideology and by the danger of badly appropriated occidental museology.”⁷³

⁷¹ Irina Nicolau, “Moi et Le Musees Du Monde. L’histoire D’une Experience Museale Dans Un Pays de L’est,” in *New Europe College Yearbook 1994* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1996), 18.

⁷² Jolles, “Stalin’s Talking Museums.”

⁷³ Irina Nicolau, “Moi et Le Musees Du Monde. L’histoire D’une Experience Museale Dans Un Pays de L’est,” 37.

But perhaps the most interesting, because polemic, concept developed by Nicolau in this text is *the antidote museum*. Without explicitly defining the antidote-museum, Nicolau composes a *Decalogue of the antidote-museum*:

1. “The antidote-museum is recommended in moments of cultural, social and political convalescence (transition periods).
2. The antidote-museum does not admit recipes. Its success I based on diversity and mobility.
3. One doesn’t go to the antidote-museum as one would go to a church, neither to a school, a tribunal, nor a hospital or a cemetery.
4. The antidote-museum is the museum of <<Look at that! >> Its exhibitions free the object of any stereotyped interpretations.
5. One comes to the antidote-museum to see the objects. To discover them or to see them again.
6. In the antidote-museum the visitor only has one right: the right to see.
7. The antidote-museum does not want to seduce, sell memories, feed or pamper. The antidote-museum tires.
8. The antidote-museum shows, but also hides. It is for people willing to invest imagination and time.
9. The antidote-museum cure can last from one to three years.
10. After the illness’ <<remission>>, the antidote-museum must be rehearsed from time to time to prevent the blasé museum syndrome.”⁷⁴

Nicolau correctly identified the institutions to which the museum, in different times of its existence resembled (the church, the school, the cemetery) and she also correctly identified the period of convalescence Romanian museum experienced after the fall of socialism. Without a direct anti-communist, resentful argument, Nicolau managed to conceive of a museum that would be unlike any Romanian museum, not only in the story it told or the object it exhibited but in the non-didactic and inquisitive way it spoke and communicated with the visitor and the special attention and even freedom granted to patrimonial objects. What makes Irina Nicolau’s 1994 text so important is that every single point of its *Decalogue of the antidote-museum* would be achieved in the years to come by the Peasant Museum.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 38.

3.2.6. Experimenting with communist objects 20 years after

I am not an outsider to this story of emerging museologies. I was one of the young people who considered Irina Nicolau their mentor and who were fortunate enough to spent time with her and be involved in her projects. In 2006, even if Irina Nicolau and Horia Bernea were no longer there, the Romanian Peasant Museum still seemed like the only institution in Bucharest where you could breathe and be given the opportunity to try, fail and maybe innovate in both research and curatorship. And thus I joined its research department and tried to explore my ideas on museums, ghosts and dangerous objects by curating an exhibition on the museum's communist heritage.

In February 2010, on the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Romanian Peasant Museum, and thus also the 20th anniversary of the dismantling of the Party Museum, a one-week experimental exhibition was offered to the visitors alongside the free entrance to the museum. Some of the Communist objects that had been so hastily taken away from the exhibition halls twenty years before were brought back in the permanent exhibition, among the peasant objects, creating contrast or, on the contrary, imitating the display of the permanent exhibition and thus actually hiding while in plain view.⁷⁵ One object was inserted into every room of the permanent exhibition, according to the theme of the room, thus summing up to 20 objects to be discovered by the visitor. The pottery section was most enjoyed by

⁷⁵ I curated this exhibition, in close collaboration with Cosmin Manolache and Ioana Popescu, with the strong support of director Vintila Mihailescu. Although not the concern of this article, it is perhaps important to note that the experiment was overtly spoken against by some of museum staff that called the event a *profanation* of Horia Bernea's original exhibition. The idea of inserting clues of the communist history of the building in the current permanent display of the Romanian Peasant Museum was first suggested to me by Prof. István Rév during the early years of my PhD studies at Central European University.

visitors while the icons section triggered overt disapproval from museum researchers and curators caught unaware by the experiment.



Fig. 3.8. Communist pottery (Long live the Romanian Popular Republic) inserted among peasant pottery. *In between Reconstructions* at the Romanian Peasant Museum, February 2010. Photograph by Simina Bădică.

The chosen opening moment of the exhibition was not only anniversary but also a milestone in the future of the museum as an important reconstruction work was supposed to start in 2010, forcing the dismantling of the Bernea exhibition and thus posing questions on the future of this award winning exhibition (the reconstruction was in the meantime postponed due to financial reasons). The experiment entitled *Între Șantiere (In-between Reconstructions)* was thus not only an invitation to reflect on the communist past of the building and Romanian society in general, but also on the history of museums and the necessary succession of exhibitions, on the importance of the context a museum artifact is placed into and the fate of the object taken in and out of the visitors' gaze.



Fig. 3.9. A photocopied postcard with Rosa Luxemburg inserted among photocopied portraits of Virgin Mary. *In between Reconstructions* at the Romanian Peasant Museum, February 2010. Photograph by Simina Bădică.

In 1987, Michael Fehr was appointed director of the Karl Ernst Osthaus art museum in Hagen, Germany. He chose to inaugurate his directorship by an exhibition called *Silence*. Just as in John Cage's famous *4 minutes 30 seconds*, he wanted to hear the noises the museum made when it was emptied of all its artifacts, of "anything having the character of an image." Highly controversial, the exhibition has made Fehr conclude that "the memory of the museum literally crept out of its walls or was projected onto them by the participants in the event."⁷⁶ The Karl Ernst Osthaus museum, just as the Romanian Peasant Museum, had a long and troubled history congruent with the troubled history of the community served by the museum. As much as the community would have wanted to forget the troubling past, the museum as such, its building, precisely when being silent was a memory trigger for the visitors.

⁷⁶ Michael Fehr, "A Museum and Its Memory. The Art of Recovering History."

This 2010 temporary exhibition used the same collections as the 1997 permanent *Plague* exhibition, objects that were denied the transfer to the National History Museum in the 1990s. Unwanted heritage objects forgotten in inaccessible basements made it back into the spotlight of the permanent exhibition, this time not for a “discourse on ugliness” but for a memory exercise and a reminder of the fact that, even if these objects, or other remnants of our communist past, have their place in most institutions and even in our private houses and lives, they are either forgotten down in the basement or hidden in plain view between other benign, ideologically neutral everyday objects.

The chosen objects were diverse in their materiality yet they shared a common feature: they were all created within the propaganda system, they were all meant to function as promoters of communist values and truths: a star-shaped *We want peace* metal / wood mold, a typographic mold with the inscription *The fascist government is kaput!*, a 1914 *Work Calendar* (Calendarul Muncei) with Holy Days and Saints alongside socialist commemorations. These were all (supposedly) created before 1945, collected and displayed afterwards in museums as proofs and documents of the new, communist version of history.

Most of the objects inserted in the exhibition were however created post-1945: plates and pottery imitating ethnographic forms but including political messages like *Glory to comrade Stalin*, a photocopied postcard with Rosa Luxemburg’s portrait, a lithography of a communist strike, a bust of Lenin, a small sculpture of a worker, a photograph of women dancing in national costumes on the stage of the *Song to Romania* festival, a painting depicting the success of collectivization, a photograph of women sowing the fields after the liberation by the Red Army.

The objects in the exhibition were not easily identifiable by the visitor. On the contrary, instead of being highlighted by labels, spotlights and showcases they were scattered among other objects in the museum. The visitor only knew they were "communist objects" and one of the stakes of the exhibition was to invite reflection on what makes an object a "communist object", what is after all *communism* and what were its objects and images? The exhibition had an online component on the museum's blog,⁷⁷ where *Clues* on the objects were given daily in the form of images and additional information on the object to be found inserted in the exhibition.

Visitors were invited to find at least five "Party objects hidden among peasant things" with the promise of a prize when exiting the museum. The quest was a success with more than half of the visitors reporting to have identified the objects inserted into the exhibition. Most of the identifications were correct, with objects such as a bust of Lenin, photographs of Nicolae Ceaușescu and propaganda pottery being among the most common identified "communist objects." Quite the opposite, Rosa Luxemburg's picture was rarely mentioned by visitors although placed in a contrasting context (see Fig. 3.9.). There were also objects belonging both to the permanent exhibition (not included in the experiment-exhibition) and to the communist era that were also identified as having "hid among peasant objects." An old radio, an alarm clock, kitchenware used before 1989 they were all identified as "party objects" by some of the visitors.

The variety of responses to this exhibition points to a still very diverse and personal relationship to the communist past in Romania. Although "communism" as ideology and political regime has been condemned as criminal in Romania (2006), the condemnation has not been internalized by Romanian citizens who still consider

⁷⁷ <http://muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/blog/?cat=21>, accessed August 24, 2013.

communism their living past. Identifying everyday objects such as alarm clocks as “communist” objects testifies to the reluctance of the Romanian public to relegate communism to the political and criminal sphere and attempt to keep it as a part of their lives and out of the criminalised sphere.

Inserting exhibitions/objects into permanent exhibitions is a museological exercise especially suited for difficult themes, subjects that some might consider impossible to exhibit. Creating layers of narration in an exhibition does not only engage the visitor in a personal quest through the museum hall, but also makes a statement about re-appropriating one’s recent past even outside the museum walls. Discourses on the communist regime fail to meet their purpose if constructed in a didactic manner, with the authoritative voice of the museum curator speaking through labels and showcases. A more profitable discourse on the communist past, profitable in terms of triggering reflection and recognition, could be constructed through a dialogue between the museum and the visitor, both of which are owners and creators of complementary discourses on the same, elusive communist past.

3.3. Prison-museums after 1989: Sighet and Râmnicu Sărat

The troubles of introducing communist history in national museums are still considerable in Central and Eastern Europe. The solution seems to have been, in many places in the former Socialist bloc, to establish separate museums of Communism, some of them state national museums, others private initiatives. The introduction to this chapter has shown how the separation of the communist (hi)story from national history was operated while this subchapter deals with the institutionalization of this separation by establishing separate museums that deal exclusively with the Communist past. These museums are established in distant places, in former prisons located outside major cities; their discourse, I argue, is actually a synecdoche, using the repressive system, the penitentiary system as a signifier for the whole communist regime.⁷⁸

The post-communist prison-museums exhibiting communism usually define themselves as memorial-museums. The core of their discourse is the representation of the communist repressive system organized in that very prison and the memorialisation of the victims of this system. Just as the Doftana museum half a century before, the stakes of this memorializing discourse are always much broader. The prison and the repressive system, be it the bourgeois or the communist regimes', become the pretext for a discourse that puts the repressive system at the center of a historical narrative about the recent past. This chapter analyzes the Sighet Memorial-Museum to the Victims of Communism and to the Resistance, a civic initiative

⁷⁸ The synecdoche is a figure of speech but writing history and writing fiction have always been intertwined genres. See Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

inaugurated in 1997 in northern Romania and the projected prison-museum in Râmnicu Sărat, a state initiative of the 21st century that seeks to both imitate and distance itself from its predecessor, the Sighet Memorial.

In the chapter on Doftana prison-museum, I define memorial museums as a form of museum evolved from the memorial, exhibiting a specific event with the purpose of keeping the memory of that event alive. Most often the event memorialized in the memorial-museum is a traumatic one (war, genocide, imprisonment, torture) and the memorial-museum is itself one of the sites where the event occurred. The term acquired this meaning only towards the end of the 20th century; for the rest of the 20th century, at least in the Soviet taxonomy of museums, memorial museums were those museums dedicated to a specific personality or event, usually organized in the house that belonged to the personality or housed the event. Most often, these memorial-museums had nothing of the traumatic and disturbing narrative displayed in contemporary memorial museums.

Memorial museums are a post-Second World War reality all over Europe; their creation is a phenomenon that grew in intensity throughout the decades, reaching a peak in the 1990s and 2000s.⁷⁹ The 1980s saw an upsurge in Holocaust memorials all over the world⁸⁰ followed by a boom in memorials dedicated to all sorts of mass suffering. The connection is not only chronological and causal, it also includes a model, the Holocaust memorial genre,⁸¹ to be transmitted, reproduced and eventually challenged among all these memorials and memorial-museums.

However, while this might be the case on a global scale, particular case-studies can show interesting derogations from these models, with inspiration and

⁷⁹ Williams, *Memorial Museums*, 9.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸¹ Marcuse, "Holocaust Memorials."

patterns coming from very different eras and memorial contexts. To be more precise, as the Sighet Memorial-Museum to the Victims of Communism and to the Resistance seems to have been born in the mind of its creator, Ana Blandiana after a visit to the Auschwitz memorial,⁸² I claim that the Doftana museum, a Romanian memorial-museum established in 1949 to commemorate the suffering and death of communist political inmates in that very former prison, might have been an equally inspirational model as many features and types of commemorating and memorializing are to be found in both Sighet and Doftana. To be sure, the creators of the overtly anti-communist Sighet Memorial would never acknowledge such a model; yet, my claim is not on the historical accuracy of the facts narrated (which can be questioned in both cases) but on the museologic/curatorial and memorial model both institutions seem to share.

3.3.1. Memory in the museum: a contested relationship

The memorial function of the museum has been intensely contested especially in connection with traumatic memory. It is precisely the traumatic memory of events in the 20th century that has turned museums into counter-museums and memorials into counter-memorials⁸³ in order to properly represent and remember what is sometimes considered un-representable or unmemorable.⁸⁴

⁸² Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, "Fascism and Communism in Romania. The Comparative Stakes and Uses," in Henry Rousso (ed.) *Stalinism and Nazism: History and Memory Compared* (University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 174.

⁸³ James E. Young, "The Counter-Monument: Memory Against Itself in Germany Today," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 267–296.

⁸⁴ Nikolai Voukov, "The Unmemorable and the Unforgettable. Museumizing the Socialist Past in Post-1989 Bulgaria," in Oksana Sarkisova and Peter Apor (eds.), *Past for the Eyes. East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2007), 307–334.

One of the central issues concerning museums of communism is their supposed capacity of reminding us what we have forgotten, acting as repositories of a memory repressed, faked or even consciously put aside. Museums of communism are considered by their supporters and initiators as necessary in a post-communist world too eager to depart from its past. And yet, as Boris Buden put it, “if there is something to be called post-communism, its essential element – from where the name comes - is its relation with the communist past,” and the best place for an analysis of this relation is the museum of communism, “an institution in which the post-communist attitude towards the communist past is programmatically constructed and exposed.”⁸⁵ If Buden is right, the idea that post-communism might push the delete button on the memory of communism folder is at least improbable. On the contrary, post-communism constructs its identity in relation to the communist past and accordingly imagines the communist past in relation to what post-communism hopes (not) to be. In this view, museums of communism are relevant not (only) for their memorial function but as an important component of post-communist identity. As the national building process invented national museums, the post-communism building process constructed museums of communism. These museums seem to be there reminding the post-communist man what s/he is never to become again.

Most museums of communism, especially memorial-museums make intensive use of the discourse on memory, justifying their existence by pointing to the moral duty of keeping alive the memory of communism, of communist crimes, of the fight against communism, “for it never to happen again.” Ana Blandiana, Romanian poet and civic activist, founder of the Sighet Memorial for the Victims of Communism and Resistance clearly states in the presentation of her successful project: “The Memorial

⁸⁵ Boris Buden, “In Ghetele Comunismului. Despre Critica Discursului Postcomunist (In the Boots of Communism. On the Critique of Postcommunist Discourse),” 59.

of the Victims of Communism and Resistance in Romania is a convincing affirmative answer to the question <<Can memory be relearned?>>”⁸⁶

One of the common places of the discourse on communism in Eastern Europe is the much used, abused and paraphrased sentence that “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”⁸⁷ An equally common place when discussing exhibitions on communism is that they function as a mnemonic tool that might help prevent communism as a social and political system to be established ever again in this part of the world. Exhibitions on communism are never just historical exhibitions. They always carry the extra-burden of having to be anti-communist and thus educate the post-communist citizen in what is “never to happen again.” On the occasion of the opening of one such exhibition (2007, “The Golden Era. Between Propaganda and Reality” at the National History Museum) the minister of Culture at the time, Adrian Iorgulescu spelled out this desire: “Romania doesn’t need a museum of Communism, but a museum of the fight against Communism.”

Museum and memory have established a connection so strong, especially in the second half of the 20th century, which gave birth to a specific kind of museum, the memorial-museum. And yet growing stronger are the voices that claim museums do not bring the past closer to people, do not trigger memory but rather replace it and thus weaken it. As Susan Crane considers museums as “externalizing the mental function of remembering,”⁸⁸ archeologist Kevin Walsh does not consider it a benign externalization. On the contrary, he claims “Museums should shoulder at least some of the blame for a superficial, unquestioning portrayal of the past which ultimately

⁸⁶ <http://www.memorialsighet.ro/> (accessed August 15, 2013)

⁸⁷ Apparently the phrase was originally written by philosopher George Santayana (1863 -1952) but it is highly probably the most of the people who use the phrase have never heard the name of Santayana.

⁸⁸ Susan A. Crane, “The Conundrum of Ephemerality: Time, Memory, and Museums,” in Sharon Macdonald (ed.), *A Companion to Museum Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 102.

separates people from an understanding of their economic, political and cultural present. As the past is presented as a complete package, it loses all relevance in our daily lives.”⁸⁹

These considerations seem all the more relevant when the past in question is a personal past not some distant narrative of one’s nation’s deeds. The Gordian knot of representing communism in the museum consists of the impossibility to replace the living memory of those who survived state socialism with some general narrative, usually highly traumatic, that most of the times contradict the visitor’s own lived experience. Thus the museum experience most often succeeds in alienating the visitor from the museum and from further attempts at understanding and reflecting upon one’s own and the country’s communist past.

Even for educated visitors, *museumizing* is a pejorative word. The objects and eras to be placed in museums are considered long gone and their presence in the museum is only one more confirmation of their officially registered death. As much as museum professionals would like to think that they are “bringing the past to life” in museum displays, the general public perception leans towards equating museumification with mummification. One of the recommendations of the 2006 official condemnation of the communist regime by the Romanian state was the establishment of a Museum of Communist Dictatorship which “like the Holocaust Memorial in Washington, would be both a place of memory and an affirmation of the values of the open society.”⁹⁰ The reactions were soon to be heard; political scientist Daniel Barbu (and Romanian ministry of culture in 2013) analyzed this proposal as an attempt to distance the communist past and its implications in the post-communist

⁸⁹ Kevin Walsh, *The Representation of the Past. Museums and Heritage in the Post-modern World* (London: Routledge, 1992), cover page.

⁹⁰ *Report of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of Communist Dictatorship in Romania*, p. 639. http://www.presidency.ro/?_RID=htm&id=83 (accessed July 30, 2013).

present: “Romanian Communism is thus thought of as a restricted object with limited access, controlled, organized and regulated, with authorized guides and curators, which can be exhibited and contemplated but which, once immobilized in the museum, is no longer part of the present.”⁹¹

The difficult relationship between the museum and its artifacts/ its subject becomes almost impossible when the subject is communism. The conundrum is thus: museums claim to grant the exhibited object eternal life. The object in the museum thus becomes part of national memory and official representations, it is seen by thousands of people, and it is labeled, explained, categorized, and framed. And yet by these very actions, the exhibited object is extracted from the context where it was alive, the milieu that constructed its meaning. The same argument goes for a wooden spoon or the communist society. Their life, once they become museum object, is very much the same. This chapter will analyze the difficulties of exhibiting communism in a post-communist country bearing in mind that these difficulties are symptomatic, on the one hand, for museum representations in general and on the other hand, for any public discourse on communism in the afore-mentioned context.

3.3.2. Functioning prisons and early musealisation attempts: Doftana, Sighet, Râmnicu Sărat

All three prison-museums under scrutiny, Doftana, Sighet and Râmnicu Sărat have been built as model prisons at the end of the 19th century. All three have been

⁹¹ Daniel Barbu, “O Istorie Naturala a Comunismului Romanesc (A Natural History of Romanian Communism),” in *Vasile Ernu, Costi Rogozanu (eds.), Iluzia Anticomunismului. Lecturi Critice Ale Raportului Tismaneanu* (Chişinău: Cartier, 2008), 79.

designed on the cellular system meant to morally reform the inmate by separating him from other inmates and let education, plus silence and loneliness induce a new moral attitude to the former criminal. Even today, their contemporary birth moment can be grasped in the specific architectural plan that makes them look so similar even now, more than a century after their construction, a century during which they all served purposes so diverse from their original assignment.

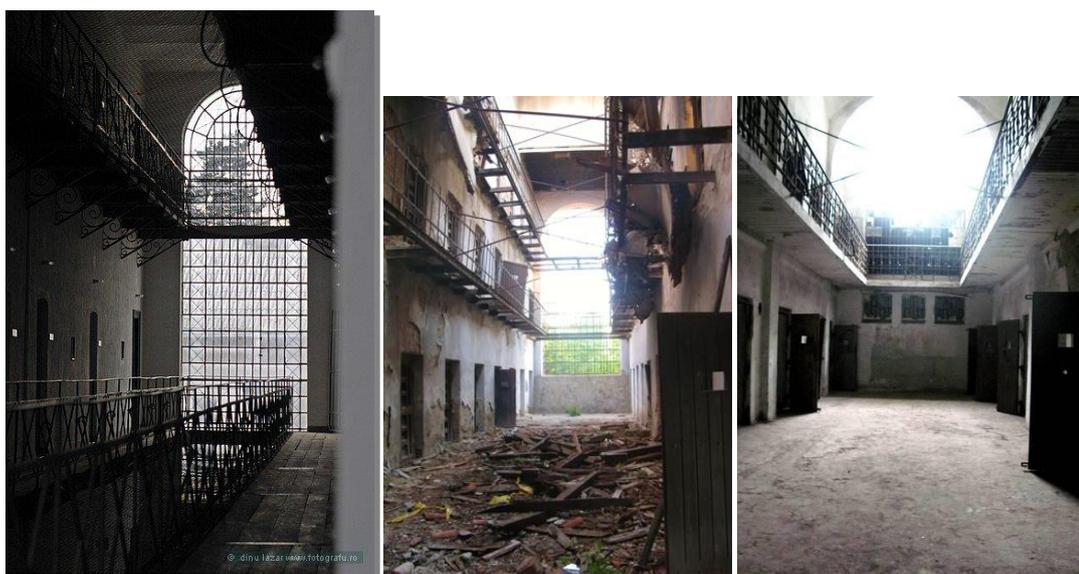


Fig. 3.10. The individual cells sections in Sighet prison (right © Dinu Lazar), Doftana (center photo by author) and Râmnicu Sărat (left photo by author). All are contemporary images.

All three prisons have been musealized (or are about to be musealized in the case of Râmnicu Sărat) as “elite prisons,” whose inmates were not only victims of a particular regime but the elite of those victims, the best of those that the regime sought to eliminate. I would argue that the reasons why these particular prisons were chosen for musealisation was their ability to be narrated as elite prisons with at least some prominent characters amongst their inmates. For Doftana, these inmates were Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and Ilie Pintilie as the prison was described in 1949 as being “built by the bourgeois regime with the purpose to destroy and exterminate the

leaders of the ever stronger revolutionary movement.”⁹² The Sighet prison is described on the memorial’s site as “an extermination site for the country’s elites,”⁹³ while the former politicians imprisoned in Râmnicu Sărat are equally described as the elite of the National Peasantist Party.⁹⁴ As it will be shown further down, musealising the “elite prisons” also involved musealising specific prison cells of the most prominent former detainees.

The Sighet prison was built in 1896-1897 by the Hungarian authorities on the anniversary of the Hungarian Millennium.⁹⁵ The building was T-shaped with 108 cells, out of which 36 were individual cells. It was designed to house 120 inmates. After 1918, when Sighetu Marmăției became part of Romania the prison was used for common law criminals with small convictions (six months to two years).⁹⁶

Râmnicu Sărat prison was also built at the end of the 19th century though it has been impossible even for those involved in musealising it to find the exact year of its inauguration or other details of its construction. The first documentary proof of its existence, mentioned in the *Dictionary of Penitentiaries*, is the royal visit of Carol I in 1901 during which he also reprieved three inmates. This prison is the smallest of the ones analyzed in this chapter: it was composed of 35 individual cells, deployed on two levels (as compared to three levels for Doftana and Sighet) and 6 big cells for as many as 130 inmates. From its inauguration up to 1938 it was a common law prison

⁹² Eva Szabo, “9 Ani de La Prăbusirea Doftanei (9 Years Since Doftana’s Collapse),” *Scântea*, November 9, 1949. As detailed in the first chapter of the dissertation, this was simply not true as the prison was built as a modern prison for hard labor and not political inmates.

⁹³ http://www.memorialsighet.ro/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=51&Itemid=93&lang=ro accessed September 3rd, 2013.

⁹⁴ <http://www.memorialulramnicusarat.ro/istoric> accessed September 3rd, 2013.

⁹⁵ The project belongs to architect Wagner Gyula. Andrea Fürtös, “Personalul Administrativ Al Penitenciarului Sighet (1950-1955). Profiluri Umane (Administrative Personal of the Sighet Penitentiary 1950-1955. Human Profiles),” *Yearbook of the Institute of History „George Barițiu” Series HISTORICA* no. XLVI (2007): 401, f.1.

⁹⁶ Clara Mareș, Dumitru Lăcătușu, and Cristina Roman, *Dictionarul Penitenciarelor Din România Comunistă: 1945-1967 (Dictionary of Penitentiaries in Communist Romania: 1945-1967)* (Iasi: Polirom, 2008), 459–463.

for convicts with small detention periods, from six months to two years, just as the Sighet prison.⁹⁷

As detailed in the first chapter of this dissertation, Doftana prison was also built in the last decade of the 19th century, designed to be the most modern prison of the country. It was considerably larger than Sighet and Râmnicu Sărat, with 397 individual cells and it was meant for hard labor convicts. In the 1930s it will also become a political prison, together with Râmnicu Sărat and other Romanian prisons. Sighet though, has never been mentioned as detention place for political offences in the interwar period.

The transformation of both Doftana and Râmnicu Sărat in political prisons makes their histories similar for a while. Although the 1929 law of penitentiaries assigned political detention to only two functioning prisons, Doftana for men and Dumbrăveni for women, the reality was that those convicted for their political beliefs and actions, mainly communists but also Iron guard members after 1938, were also serving their sentence in prisons such as Râmnicu Sărat, Mislea, Caransebeș, Văcărești or Jilava. Râmnicu Sărat acquired national notoriety after the 1938 imprisonment and murder of the charismatic leader of the Iron Guard Movement, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu together with other thirteen legionnaires. A transfer to Jilava prison was organized in the night of 28/29 November 1938, during which an escape attempt was simulated and all fourteen inmates murdered by the prison guards. One year later, on the night of 21/22 September 1939 another thirteen Iron Guard detainees were killed on prison premises.

Râmnicu Sărat prison thus quickly came to be perceived as a place of martyrdom for the growing Iron Guard movement. The first attempt to transform

⁹⁷ Ibid., 439–442.

Râmnicu Sărat into a museum dates back before the Second World War, during the short-lived National-Legionnaire state (September 1940 – January 1941). A letter written by the families of the legionnaires killed in Râmnicu Sărat, prominently beginning with Elena Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, addressed to general Ion Antonescu, is published on October 6, 1940 in the Iron Guard newspaper *Buna Vestire*. The group asks that:

- “1. The special penitentiary Râmnicu Sărat should be declared a historical monument and become a legionnaire museum.
2. The reconstruction of the nights of 28/29 November 1938 and 21/22 September 1939 should be done in the presence of our representative.
3. A documentary film should be made of the Râmnicu Sărat prison and the Braşov Military Hospital, a film that should not only show the walls but the soul that suffered there [...] We ask that the script should be written by someone who was there inside with them and suffered with them.

Beside this, we ask that the photographs and films that are made must not be a business and must not trivialize a cliché which, when projected, should shake Romanian consciences.

For the internal organization of the museum, the reconstruction of the nights when the crimes took place and the writing of the script for the documentary film, we ask that you accept as representatives of our thoughts prof. Ion Ionică and dr. Şerban Milcoveanu.

Besides this, please allow a request of the soul: We want Legionnaire Romania to grant all due respect to the human being as well as to any sincere belief. We want no more political prisoners among Romanians, and those who are foreigners to be sent to their countries. On our country's soil there should be no more suffering for ideas, and those arrested should be isolated from society but in no way tortured.”⁹⁸

The irony of the situation has it that, at the very moment this letter was written and published, there were political prisoners, communists, in the prison that was to become a legionnaire museum. The new administration took the request seriously and a few measures were taken to prepare the organization of the museum. In October 1940, some women prisoners convicted for communist activity had already been detained in Râmnicu Sărat for a few months; among them, and the leader of the group, Ana Pauker, the future informal leader of Communist Romania. A pilgrimage

⁹⁸ *Buna Vestire*, October 6, 1940.

by Iron Guard members to Râmnicu Sărat in the fall of 1940 is confirmed by Ana Pauker's most recent and complete biography. Marc Levy has interviewed fellow prisoners of Ana Pauker who recall the fear they felt but also the peaceful character of this legionnaire pilgrimage to their imprisonment place.

“In the fall of 1940, soon after the king's ouster, some 2,000 Legionaries embarked on a pilgrimage to Râmnicu-Sărat, where many had been jailed by the former regime. When they arrived at the prison dressed in their green uniforms, the women were terrified. Immediately upon entering, the Legionaries sought out Ana Pauker's cell, but to the astonishment of all, they intended only to engage in a political discussion, respectfully referring to her as the captain of the Communists. At one point, one of the Legionaries suddenly entered the cell of twentythree-year-old Vilma Kajesco, but instead of a gun he held a camera, to photograph the hovel where he had spent five years of his life. <<After [he] left,>> she related, <<another one came to my cell and opened the peephole. He asked me: ‘Were you a Communist?’ I answered: ‘I was, I am and I will be.’ To which he retorted: ‘Bravo.’ . . . You should know that, to my surprise, they did not behave badly at all. On the contrary, they were quite nice.>>”⁹⁹

Soon afterwards the prisoners were transferred to other prisons in order to make way for the envisaged museum. The information is confirmed by Robert Levy, who notes that “Having resolved to turn Râmnicu-Sărat into an Iron Guard museum, the Legionaries transferred the women to Caransebeș,”¹⁰⁰ and by post-1945 prison recollections of former Communist inmates.¹⁰¹ The short-lived legionnaire government never had the time to develop the plan into a real memorial museum, a museum which would have probably been an interesting precursor to the Doftana and Sighet prison-museums.

It is also Ana Pauker's biographer that provides information on prison life in Râmnicu Sărat, considered much worse than other places of political imprisonment in

⁹⁹ Levy, *Ana Pauker*, 52–53.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁰¹“When the legionnaires came to power, they wanted to make a museum in Râmnicu Sărat and thus moved the women political inmates to Caransebeș.” Stela Moghioroș, “The fight of our comrades from women's prisons, their solidarity with the antifascists political inmates in Doftana,” AMNIR, Fond Muzeul Partidului, Comemorarea Doftanei 1948, i2500, f. 94.

1930s Romania. The women were put in “strict solitary confinement in cells two and a half steps long and wide enough to fit only a small cot. Pauker was put in a windowless corner cell away from the others. The food was inedible, and the prisoners were denied books or writing materials. <<We were terrorized . . . ,>> a woman jailed with Pauker recalled. <<We were allowed to go out only one hour a day. There were five separate yards, and each one of us was taken out individually. . . We almost never saw the daylight.>>”¹⁰²

In the first years after the war and before the inauguration of the Doftana prison-museum, the memorialisation of the antifascist fight was quite diverse and several prisons seemed to be competing, narratively, for the most terrible terror and suffering inflicted upon communist inmates. Owing to the presence of Ana Pauker among the leaders of the party, numerous texts were written discussing separately the fate of women as political prisoners. Râmnicu Sărat was among the prisons that were most often mentioned: “Râmnicu Sărat was the first cellular prison for antifascist women political inmates. The reactionary government had no peace as long as our comrades were staying together in Dumbrăveni, 20 to 25 in one room. They thought their life was thus too good. They thought that the cellular regime would bring demoralization and destruction and would destroy the collective spirit of our women political detainees, that the love of one comrade for the other will disappear.”¹⁰³

Râmnicu Sărat prison was never actually musealized during the communist regime as it continued to function as one of the most terrible political prisons in the country. However, parts of Râmnicu Sărat were musealized in the late 1940s by reproduction/translation in other museum spaces. When the Revolutionary museum

¹⁰² Levy, *Ana Pauker*, 52.

¹⁰³ Nesia Petre, “Inchisoarea Ramnicul-Sarat,” *Buletinul Federației Naționale a Foștilor Deținuți Și Internați Politici Antifasciști* no. 6 (February 1950): 25.

was inaugurated in Bucharest in 1948 (see previous chapter for details) three prison cells were reproduced and exhibited inside the museum: one of them was Ana Pauker's cell in Râmnicu Sărat. Ten years later, in the next permanent exhibition of the same museum, the Râmnicu Sărat cell had already disappeared, while only one Doftana cell was recreated. The fact was due to focusing the antifascist struggle discourse on the already musealized Doftana (the reasons for choosing Doftana among other prisons are discussed in the chapter dedicated to it) but also to the highly relevant disappearance of Ana Pauker from the high ranks of the Party and the growing personality cult of Gheorghiu-Dej.

As Râmnicu-Sărat had only been Pauker's site of suffering, and not Dej's, it gradually disappeared from museal and historical representations. The fact that Râmnicu-Sărat was also still a functioning prison, with preeminent interwar political figures imprisoned there just as it was being musealized in the Revolutionary museum, surely added to the reluctance of mentioning it further in the 1950s. These early musealisation attempts, dating back to the interwar and post-war years actually make Râmnicu Sărat one of the few places in Romania, and certainly the only prison, whose musealisation has been envisaged by three consequent regimes (the Legionnaire state, the socialist regime and post-communist democracy).

Doftana, a functioning prison up to 1940, shares equally complex interwar stories. Even though the post-war musealisation insisted on re-signifying it as a place of communist martyrdom, during the interwar years it was surely inhabited by inmates of very different political opinions, including Iron Guard members. Among

them, Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu spent a few months in Doftana¹⁰⁴ just before he was sent to Râmnicu-Sărat where his assassination was to be organized.

The controversial part in the existence of the Sighet prison is located towards the end of the Second World War. Recent international publications claim it was a “deportation center for Jews and antifascists en route to German and Polish concentration camps,”¹⁰⁵ or “a transportation center for Transylvanian Jews being taken to Auschwitz.”¹⁰⁶ They deduce that the lack of any mentioning of the building’s use during the Holocaust was a deliberate omission on the part of the curators: “the complete absence of information about the site’s connection to the Holocaust suggested that the curators understood all too well the power that such an alternative history had to undermine their appeal to the suffering of the victims of Communism.”¹⁰⁷

There is however no evidence so far that the prison had been used as transportation center during the Holocaust. The town itself, Sighet, was indeed a Holocaust site with almost 13.000 Jews deported to Auschwitz in the spring of 1944. The ghettos to which they were confined and from which they were deported did not however include the Sighet prison.¹⁰⁸ The most famous survivor of the otherwise destroyed Sighet Jewry is the Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel. In *Night*, his most celebrated book of memoirs he recalls the incredibly speedy deportation of all Jews in the town of Sighet in April 1944. His book also confirms the organization of two ghettos, a large one and a small one, created in Jewish urban streets and homes;

¹⁰⁴ The transfer from Jilava to Doftana is recalled by Zelea Codreanu himself in Zelea Codreanu, *Însemnări de La Jilava*; and documents of his stay in Doftana are published in Vlad, *Procesele Lui Corneliu Zelea Codreanu 1938*.

¹⁰⁵ Williams, *Memorial Museums*, 15.

¹⁰⁶ Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution*, 67.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁰⁸ On the Jewish ghettos in Sighet in 1944 see Hannah Berliner Fischthal, “Jewish Ghettos in Sighet and Dąbrowa Górnicza,” *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 31, no. 2 (2012): 149–165.

he does not mention the Sighet prison. “Then came the ghettos. Two ghettos were created in Sighet. A large one in the center of town occupied four streets, and another smaller one extended over several alleyways on the outskirts of town. The street we lived on, Serpent Street, was in the first ghetto. We therefore could remain in our house.”¹⁰⁹

The confusion was probably created in international scholarship between the name of the town and the name of the prison. The article cited by James Mark to substantiate this claim is entitled “Sighet, Preamble to the Holocaust, Central Point of the Gulag” but the author, Robert Fürtös is referring to the town of Sighet in the first part of his article and to the Sighet prison in the second half. It can though still be argued that the lack of any mentioning of the Holocaust in a prison-museum located in the center of a town that lost almost its entire Jewish population in a few months of Spring 1944 is at least conspicuous and bound to raise questions as to the functions of the prison during the war.¹¹⁰

3.3.3 Râmnicu Sărat, prison of silence

The complex histories of these prisons turned into museums do not usually find any representation in the final museal concept. On the contrary the curators seem to define ever more strictly the exact time frame that they are musealising. In the case of the most recent project discussed here, Râmnicu Sărat, the curators called their concept: *Prison of silence (1945-1963)*. While the chosen period might have been the

¹⁰⁹ Elie Wiesel, *Night* (Macmillan, 2012), 11.

¹¹⁰ Although some of the lectures of the summer schools organised yearly by the Sighet Memorial are dedicated to the faith of Romanian Jews. Andrei Oișteanu, “Sighet – Capitala Holocaustului Și a Gulagului Din România (Sighet – The Capital of the Holocaust and of the Gulag in Romania),” *Caietele Echinox* no. 13 (2007): 201.

most dramatic one in the history of the prison, the reasons for obscuring previous and alternative histories lies in the context in which the prison became of interest to the curators. The Institute for Investigating Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Exile (IICCMER) was given by Government decision on June 6, 2007 the administration of the former prison (not functional since 1963) with the purpose of transforming it into a Memorial Museum for the Victims of Communism.¹¹¹ The decision followed by a few months the late 2006 official condemnation of the communist regime as “illegitimate and criminal”¹¹² by the Romanian president. The final recommendations of the Report of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of Communist Dictatorship in Romania included the creation of a Museum of Communist Dictatorship that “like the Holocaust Memorial in Washington, would be both a place of memory and an affirmation of the values of the open society.”¹¹³ The Râmnicu Sărat prison was thus not chosen for its rich history but for its potential for becoming a Museum of Communist Dictatorship despite its rich history.

Even within the time frame chosen for musealisation, it is only the eight years following 1955 that provide the bulk of the narrative. Starting in 1955 (just as the Sighet prison was re-functionalized as common law prison), a large part of the elite of the former National Peasantist Party, already with heavy condemnations were brought to Râmnicu Sărat.¹¹⁴ A harsh regime of solitude, silence, hunger and cold was applied to these mostly elderly people until most of them died. After Ion Mihalache, former

¹¹¹ http://www.iiccr.ro/ro/proiecte/proiecte_muzeale, accessed August 20, 2013.

¹¹² Speech by Romania’s President, Traian Băsescu, on the Occasion of Presenting the Report of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of Communist Dictatorship in Romania (Romanian Parliament, December 18th 2006), available at http://www.presidency.ro/?_RID=det&tb=date&id=8288&_PRID accessed August 20, 2013.

¹¹³ Comisia Prezidentiala pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din Romania, *Report Final*, 639.

¹¹⁴ Among them Ion Mihalache, Ilie Lazăr, Victor Rădulescu Pogoneanu, Nicolae Adamescu, Victor Anca, Corneliu Coposu, Mihai Balica, Jenică Arnăutu, Ioan Barbuș, Ion Ovidiu Borcea, Mălin Boșca, Alexandru Bratu, Ion Diaconescu, Constantin Hagea, Ion Puiu, Cornel Velțeanu, Augustin Vișa, Ion Lugoșianu.

leader of the Peasantist Party died in 1963, aged 81, the prison itself was closed. Another group that does not figure so prominently in the musealising concept is composed of the members of the Antonescu government, condemned for war crimes in 1946. The leader of the former Social-Democrat Party (a fellow-traveler of the communists), Constantin Titel Petrescu, was also imprisoned here, together with doctor Gheorghe Plăcinteanu, framed, condemned and killed in detention for the crime of having an extra conjugal affair with Gheorghiu-Dej's daughter.¹¹⁵ Other prisoners that will be hard to accommodate in a memorial to the victims of communism are high members of the Communist Party, fallen in disgrace in the Romanian variant of the Stalinist show-trials, like Vasile Luca.

The overarching concept for musealising the prison is Prison of Silence, borrowing a name that has already been given to the prison by former political inmates. One famous former political prisoner, Corneliu Coposu is said to have spent eight years in the Râmnicu Sărat prison without uttering a word to anyone. The curators describe the silence regime as atrocious: even the guardians were forbidden to talk to the inmates as communication between the detainees or even eye - contact was harshly punished.¹¹⁶ The silence regime was however not an invention of the communist administration of the prison. It had been functioning even in 1940, when communist inmates, such as Ana Pauker were imprisoned in Râmnicu Sărat¹¹⁷ and it was one of the official, accepted punishments in early 20th century Romanian prisons. One of the few historians of the Romanian penitentiary system, Bruno Ștefan actually argues that the communist prison is only a continuation and exaggeration of the

¹¹⁵ <http://www.memorialulramnicusarat.ro/gheorghe-placinteanu>, accessed August 20, 2013.

¹¹⁶ <http://www.memorialulramnicusarat.ro/comunicarea-intre-detinuti>, accessed August 20, 2013.

¹¹⁷ Petre, "Inchisoarea Ramnicul-Sarat."

penitentiary system imagined by Dodun de Perrier, the creator of the modern Romanian penitentiary system in the second half of the 19th century.¹¹⁸

Promising to inaugurate the memorial in 2016, IICCMER did not yet present the design of the new museum. However, the already inaugurated site of the memorial (<http://www.memorialulramnicusarat.ro/>) and available virtual tour of the prison (<http://ramnicusarat.iiccr.ro/>) point to the narrow representation of the site's complex history. In the 2011 exhibition organized in the center of Bucharest by IICCMER on Râmnicu Sărat, the focus is even tighter: not victims of communism in general, but the national-peasantist victims of communism. As the scientific director of the museum, Mihail Neamțu, was introducing the exhibition, "IICCMER wishes to sensitize the general public to the relevance of the Râmnicu Sărat prison for the democratic education of young generations. Without models, every society loses its compass. For us all, strong or weak, young or old, Romanians or Europeans, the cell of every national-peasantist imprisoned in Râmnicu-Sărat indicates the North of moral consciousness."¹¹⁹

3.3.4. Sighet Memorial Museum

The Sighet Memorial Museum is a paradigmatic case for exhibiting Communism in Eastern Europe and it is the only museum, from the ones discussed in this dissertation that has captured the attention of current scholarship. Analyzes of the Sighet Memorial have been integrated in the wider concern for the upsurge in

¹¹⁸ Stefan, *Mediul Penitenciar Romanesc. Cultura Si Civilizatie Carcerala (Romanian Penitentiary Realm. Prison Culture and Civilisation)*, 221.

¹¹⁹ Introductory text to the exhibition "Râmnicu Sărat: Prison of Silence (1945-1963)" at the History Museum of Bucharest, June 2011.

memorials around the globe and more focused, in has been analyzed as one of the earliest museums of communism built in the former Socialist states.

The corpus of texts that have been written on Sighet come from various disciplines. It is not mainly historians that are concerned with the representation of communism in museums, but also anthropologists, cultural critics, museum studies scholars and even scholars of communication and rhetorical studies. The Sighet Memorial is equally praised and criticized in these articles. However, a distinction can be made between the texts that commend it which are mostly journalistic texts¹²⁰ and scholarly articles which are critically analyzing various aspects of the visual discourse in Sighet: its functioning as a cultural courtroom of communism,¹²¹ its selective authenticity silencing the Jewish trauma preceding the Communist one,¹²² its claims on national martyrdom and usage of Christian symbolism¹²³ and also its gendered representation of political action under the communist regime and marginalizing women's suffering.¹²⁴ A divergent voice is that of historians Dragoș and Cristina Petrescu who consider Sighet a “necessary place in a post-dictatorial society,” while they claim that “it is not and it aims not to be a museum of communism in Romania.”¹²⁵ This final statement will be challenged in this chapter as I argue that the curators of Sighet do attempt to transform it into a comprehensive museum of communism. I also argue that the creators of Sighet have capitalized on a museology

¹²⁰ Such as Ioana Diaconescu, “Muzeul Comunismului Din România (The Museum of Communism in Romania),” *România Literară* no. 33 (August 19, 2011); Vladimir Tismăneanu, “Memorialul de La Sighet - 20 de Ani de La Înființare (Sighet Memorial - 20 Years Since Establishment)” (Radio Free Europe, July 16, 2013).

¹²¹ Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution*, 67–69.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 67–71.

¹²³ Simina Radu-Bucurenci (Bădică) and Gabriela Cristea (Nicolescu), “Raising the Cross.”

¹²⁴ Alina Haliliuc, “Who Is a Victim of Communism? Gender and Public Memory in the Sighet Museum, Romania,” *Aspasia* 7 (2013): 108–131.

¹²⁵ Dragoș Petrescu and Cristina Petrescu, “The Pitești Syndrome: A Romanian Vergangenheitsbewältigung?,” 563.

of the prison-museum which not only fits the Holocaust genre¹²⁶ but also puts Sighet in a genealogy of musealising prisons which started in Romania with the communist Doftana museum.

The Sighet Memorial-Museum to the Victims of Communism and to the Resistance is probably the only major Romanian museum established by civil society, more precisely the Civic Academy Foundation and, even though it has in the meantime been recognized as a *site of national importance* and subsidized accordingly ever since, it is still civil society controlled. It is certain that the subject matter of the museum, the Communist regime in Romania is one that most state museums elegantly avoid dealing with even now, well into the 21st century.

The Sighet Memorial is situated in the far north of the country, close to the Ukrainian and Hungarian borders. The narrative of the memorial-museum makes a strong claim on Romanian national identity, providing a narrative of victimhood and sacrifice/resistance. Such narrative might have seemed marginal in the early 1990s, when the museum was established but it has recently risen to the level of state official narrative on the communist past, with the official condemnation of Communism in 2006. The contribution of the Sighet Museum and the Civic Academy Foundation to this official act of the Romanian state was of great importance; it is probably a unique case of a museum imposing its narrative on the political, and not the other way around as it is most usually the case.

The Sighet prison ceased to be a common law prison at the end of the Second World War when it was used for the repatriation of war prisoners from the USSR. In was only starting in May 1950 that an important group of political prisoners was brought to Sighet, around one hundred and fifty former politicians, military and high

¹²⁶ Marcuse, "Holocaust Memorials."

clergy. Sighet then became a prison of the country's former elite. Arguments have been made that the prison was chosen due to its proximity to the USSR border.¹²⁷ Most of the inmates were over 60 years of age and some lost their lives in the harsh detention regime at Sighet. As former director of the prison, Vasile Ciolpan remembers the beginning of May 1950, "83 people were brought. Old, weak, sick, scared. Shadows."¹²⁸ Among those who lost their lives in this prison, the most notorious and currently a symbol of the Sighet memorial was Iuliu Maniu, the leader of the National-Peasantist Party (alongside Ion Mihalache who will die in Râmnicu Sărat a decade later).

The prison was never an exclusively political prison. Between 1950 and 1955 two institutions functioned in the same building: the Principal Sighet Penitentiary, which housed political inmates and the Regional (County) Sighet Penitentiary which housed common law detainees.¹²⁹ Unfortunately, the difference between the two prisons cannot be grasped in the current museological display. The whole building is memorialized as being the former political prison. The political prison was closed in 1955, while the building continued to function as a common law prison until 1977. Again, the time span that is being memorialized and represented in Sighet is even shorter than in Râmnicu Sărat. The five years, 1950 to 1955 when the prison housed these important interwar political, religious and even intellectual leaders are the basis of the museological project. As it will be shown further down, the narrative did expand from the five year focus but not in the direction of revealing the site's own history but of encompassing more and more the history of the Romanian and East

¹²⁷

http://www.memorialsighet.ro/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=51&Itemid=93&lang=ro, accessed August 24th, 2013.

¹²⁸ Andrea Fürtös, "Personalul Administrativ Al Penitenciarului Sighet (1950-1955). Profiluri Umane (Administrative Personnel of the Sighet Penitentiary 1950-1955. Human Profiles)," 401, f.3.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 401, f.2.

European Communist regimes. The prison cell thus becomes the scenography, the stage on which quite distant and amalgamated aspects of life during state socialism are exhibited.



Fig. 3.11. Entrance to the Sighet Memorial in 2011. The black frame is a recent addition reminding one of the entrance to the Budapest Terror Háza. © Sighet Memorial Museum

Exhibiting Communism in a prison is part of a deliberate choice which grounds the idea that the whole of Romania was a huge prison during the communist regime. The Sighet Memorial has two distinct phases of existence. The museum inaugurated in 1997 was mainly a museum of the Sighet prison, a memorial to the victims of communism with a special focus on the victims who lost their freedom and even their lives inside the walls of the Sighet prison. The second stage of the

museum's development, the current permanent exhibition, proposes a global discourse on Romanian communism, a proper museum of Communism and not merely a prison-museum. Starting in 2000, Sighet is no more a fragment of the story of Romanian communism, a tragic account of the lives lost while establishing the Communist regime in Romania, Sighet has become Romanian Communism as such, the black hole of Romanian history to be looked at through prison bars.¹³⁰

In 1997, the museum was still very connected to the actual history of the building: acquired in 1993 by the Civic Academy Foundation it has undergone serious restoration, its inside walls were painted in white and some of the cells were transformed into museum rooms exhibiting prison furniture and the personal histories of famous interwar political figures, like Iuliu Maniu and Gheorghe I. Brătianu, who were exterminated in the prison in the 1950s. The effect of the improvised museum, at that time, was devastating, precisely because of the lack of public debate on the legacy of the communist regime and the museum's simple and straightforward manner of telling stories of resistance and repression. 1997 was not only the year of the official opening of the museum, on June 20th, but also the year when the Romanian state finally recognized the Memorial as a *site of national importance*¹³¹ and started subsidizing its functioning; up until 1997, the Sighet Memorial had been entirely privately financed.¹³²

¹³⁰ I visited the Sighet prison-museum in 1997, in the first stage of its development; my analysis is thus fragmented between first-hand impressions from my visit, recent virtual visits on the 3D virtual museum made available on DVD by the curators and secondary literature. Fundatia Academia Civica, *Take-Away Museum*, DVD, 2008.

¹³¹ Law no. 95, June 10, 1997.

¹³² A part of the funding necessary for reconstruction was granted by the Council of Europe but private donations, especially from Romanian Diaspora, were also substantial.



Fig. 3.12. “The cell where Iulia Maniu died” (room 9) at the Sighet Memorial. © Dinu Lazăr and Liternet



Fig. 3.13. The cell where Gheorghe Brătianu died (room 73). The memorial’s site describes it as “in situ reconstruction. Together with the cell in which Iuliu Maniu died it was preserved as it was and as it was described by the witnesses of the death of the great historian.”

Ever since 1997, the museum has been striving to encompass more and more aspects of the history of Romanian and East-European Communism, with exhibition halls (actually, cells) on subjects as diverse as everyday life during communism, the Solidarnosc movement, the Hungarian 1956 revolution or demolitions in the 1980s. Although the initial focus on repression, and especially repression in the Sighet prison, has been kept (with exhibition-cells dedicated to the victims of the prison), the prison has actually become a synecdoche for communism, a paradigm for telling the story of international communism. As a proper museum of communism lacked in 1997 Romania and it is still lacking today, pressures have been made even from the outside to transform the Sighet Memorial into a Romanian Museum of Communism. See for example, museum historian Ioan Opreș writing in 2000 that the Sighet Memorial should encompass more of what communism meant for Romania, not only the repression system, and in a museologically more vivid and impressive way.¹³³ After 2006, when the Romanian president mentioned the need to establish a Museum of Communism in Romania, the friends of the Sighet memorial argued that there is no need for such a museum since Sighet is the Romanian museum of communism.¹³⁴

¹³³ Ioan Opreș, “O Luminare La Memorialul Victimelor Si Al Rezistentei Dela Sighet (A Candle at the Sighet Memorial),” *Revista Muzeelor* no. 1–3 (2000): 10–13.

¹³⁴ Ioana Diaconescu, “Muzeul Comunismului Din România (The Museum of Communism in Romania).”



Fig. 3.14. “Do you want to understand nowadays Romania? Visit the Sighet Memorial-Museum to the Victims of Communism and to the Resistance.”

The official poster of the Sighet Memorial is thus very telling: two children are curiously looking through the window of a prison cell while the text wonders *Do you want to understand nowadays Romania?* The reading of this image presupposes two shared assumptions: that one cannot understand contemporary Romania without understanding communist Romania and that the only valid point of view for understanding the Romanian communist past is the prison cell window.

This reading is congruent with the vision of the creators of the memorial, among whom poet and civic activist Ana Blandiana is the most prominent. In 2011, 18 years after the creation of the memorial, Ana Blandiana writes, “What makes the Memorial’s loneliness in nowadays Romania is the capacity of this institution of memory to speak not only of the past, but also of the present. The Memorial disturbs not only, and not mainly, by unveiling and analyzing communist crimes but also – and especially – by way of pointing the conclusions of this analysis towards their residues

in the society of an euro-Atlantic integrated country. The current relevance of the Memorial is the plausible explanation for the wall of silence that is being built around it to isolate it and inoculate its loneliness.”¹³⁵

The Sighet Memorial-Museum is built around a dearth of objects, yet the main claim that the museum constructs is delivering authenticity,¹³⁶ and proofs of the criminality of the communist regime. Although the curators have tried to collect and bring to the prison cells turned into exhibition halls original objects, the main object that the memorial displays is the building itself, which provides the only appropriate setting and scenography for the type of anti-communist discourse proposed by the museum’s initiators. Taking into account the above-mentioned difficulties of dealing with Communist objects inherited in museum collections, it might be the case that the Sighet Memorial-Museum was actually fortunate to start from zero and build its collections with the appropriate objects, objects that serve its discourse and do not challenge it, objects that are obedient and speak the message they are meant to speak.

Thus, even everyday objects collected and displayed in rooms such as room 76 *Everyday Life* are framed in the prison paradigm and looked at through prison bars. The “residual power” of Communist objects was a problem for museums all over the former Socialist bloc: “After 1989, the choice of space in which the Communist past was exhibited was crucial for those seeking to condemn it. Founders of new memorial sites feared not only the residual power of Communism but were also afraid of the attraction that objects belonging to the pre-1989 era might still hold [...] They were

¹³⁵ Ana Blandiana, “Memorialul Sighet La Majorat. Vreti Sa Intelegeti Romania de Astazi? (The Sighet Memorial Turning 18. Do You Want to Understand Nowadays Romania?),” *Revista 22. Supliment* no. 314 (February 8, 2011).

¹³⁶ Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution*, 61–92.

concerned that the physical remnants of Communism should be displayed in places where their power could be contained.”¹³⁷

Notwithstanding this concern, what is troubling in the Sighet Memorial Museum is the residual power not of Communist objects, but of Communist museology. The next subchapter will analyze the museological artifacts and techniques shared by prison-museums representing communism before and after 1989.

3.3.5. Residual power of museology: reconstructed prison cells

The manuals of Soviet museology published in 1950s Romania insist on the possible “mistakes in the form of museum exhibits. [...] The inability to put the ideological content in appropriate forms often leads to a decrease of the ideological-theoretical level of the exhibition and sometimes even to distortions and political mistakes.”¹³⁸ Despite their insistence on the ideological basis of the exhibition, the observation holds true. Museums interact with their visitors not only through the narrative they tell, i.e. the content of the exhibition, but also through the way they tell their story, i.e. the form of the exhibition. It may seem like a common place for anyone with a little bit of interest in museums, yet what is striking about post-communism museums is their lack of attention for the museological means they deploy. This has been mostly observed from outside the profession. Anthropologist and sociologist Vintilă Mihăilescu, once remarked, in a private conversation, that

¹³⁷ Ibid., 62.

¹³⁸ Mihailovskaia, *Organisation and Technique of the Museum Exhibit*, 3.

communist and post-communist exhibitions are practically, the same exhibition with different labels.¹³⁹

It is common in contemporary Romania that museums represent the recent past with the same collections that they exhibited decades ago to praise the communist regime. The objects stand in the same glass-cases, in an arrangement similar to their original one. The only thing that has changed is the label, with the curators hoping that the meaning of an object could be changed by labeling it differently. This is, once more, one of the legacies of decades of Soviet museography in Romania. As explained in the previous chapter, it was Soviet museology through “Stalin’s talking museums”¹⁴⁰ that introduced in Romania a complicated system of labels, explanatory texts and relevant quotations, surrounding and suffocating the objects (original but most of the times replicas). More insidious, Soviet museology maintained that the text, if used correctly, is stronger than the object and it can overwrite its meaning. A similar argument can be made about Doftana and Sighet museums. They are of course different prisons, yet the similarities in their histories, architecture and musealisation could make one state that it is the same prison-museum with only different labels.

One of the reasons for the contemporary success of prison-museums is the certitude of not only seeing but actually going inside, occupying the real object, the ultimate artifact, the building where it all happened. Being inside a prison cell, a genuine prison cell is one of the drivers behind a still vivid, possibly even growing, interest among visitors of these sites of terror. What is gradually learned is that compromises beyond professional standards have been made in order to offer the

¹³⁹ Private conversation (2007) with Vintilă Mihăilescu, Romanian social anthropologist and director (2006-2010) of the Romanian Peasant Museum.

¹⁴⁰ Jolles, “Stalin’s Talking Museums.”

visitors the real experience. Probably the best known contemporary examples are the reconstructed cells in the basement of the Hungarian Terror Háza.¹⁴¹

These reconstructed cells are interestingly enough personalized prison cells. In Doftana, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej's cell is museologically highlighted in the 1950s while at the Revolutionary Museum in Bucharest it is not just any cell from Râmnicu Sărat that is reconstructed but Ana Pauker's cell. In the Sighet memorial, Iuliu Maniu's and Gheorghe Brătianu's cells are presented as "in situ reconstruction [...] as it was and as it was described by the witnesses."¹⁴²

Historian Péter Apor observes that "the exhibition of communist prison cells plays a central role in post-communist museums."¹⁴³ While this is certainly true, this dissertation has shown that similar cases date back to the end of the Second World War. The Doftana prison-museum was nothing but a reconstruction claiming to provide visitors the real encounter with the walls that saw the suffering of inmates. As in the case of Terror Háza, if one carefully reads the accompanying texts, the fact that the cells are reconstructed is finally revealed but the authenticity effect is nonetheless sought carefully by the curators. Apor concludes that "these museums, showcasing violence, martyrs and terror within their walls are the direct descendants of the anti-communist imagination."¹⁴⁴ I argue however that they might equally be the direct descendants of communist imagination if one carefully looks at the museums of communism built before 1989.

An even stranger museological practice in the case of these prison-museum, communist and post-communist, is the practice of building itinerating reconstructed

¹⁴¹ Rév, *Retroactive Justice*, 298–299.

¹⁴² http://www.memorialsighet.ro/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=324&Itemid=102&lang=ro accessed September 3, 2013.

¹⁴³ Péter Apor, "Master Narratives of Contemporary History in Eastern European National Museums," 571.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 572.

prison cells. FIAP, the organization responsible for organizing the Doftana museum in the late 1940s also produced reconstructed prison cells for the Revolutionary museum in Bucharest inaugurated in 1948 and for the Party Museum inaugurated in 1958.

More recently, the Sighet memorial produced such a reconstruction for the National History Museum in Bucharest. In the 2007 *Communism in Romania* exhibition a real size prison cell was introduced into the exhibition. In 2013, the Romanian Peasant Museum produced a similar recreation in an exhibition dedicated to collectivization.

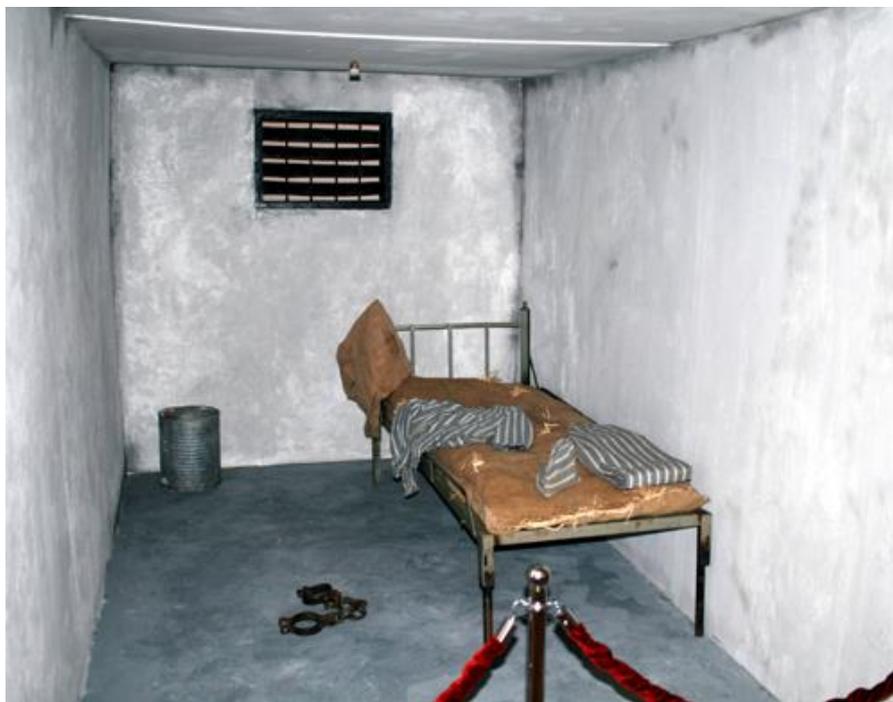


Fig. 3.15. Recreation of a Sighet prison cell in the 2007 exhibition *Communism in Romania* organized at the National History Museum. © Romanian National History Museum



Fig. 3.16. Recreated prison cell in the 2013 exhibition “The destruction of Romanian peasantry” organized at the Romanian Peasant Museum. Photograph by author.

Other museological artifacts displayed in prison-museums of both communist and anticommunist discourse are maps of Romania marked with detention places of the victims that each museum is seeking to represent. The post-communist variant of this map has been first produced by the journal *Memoria. Revista gândirii arestate* (Memory. Journal of arrested thought) in its first issue in 1990 and reproduced in every subsequent issue. It is not surprising to observe the major detention centers appear on both pre-1989 and post-1989 maps. Still, the continuities of the penitentiary system were not under scrutiny in any of the memorial-museum analyzed.



Fig. 3.17. “Map of prisons in which the communists have been imprisoned in the years of the bourgeois regime” Source: Ion Ardeleanu. *Muzeul Doftana*. Bucharest: Meridiane, 1968.

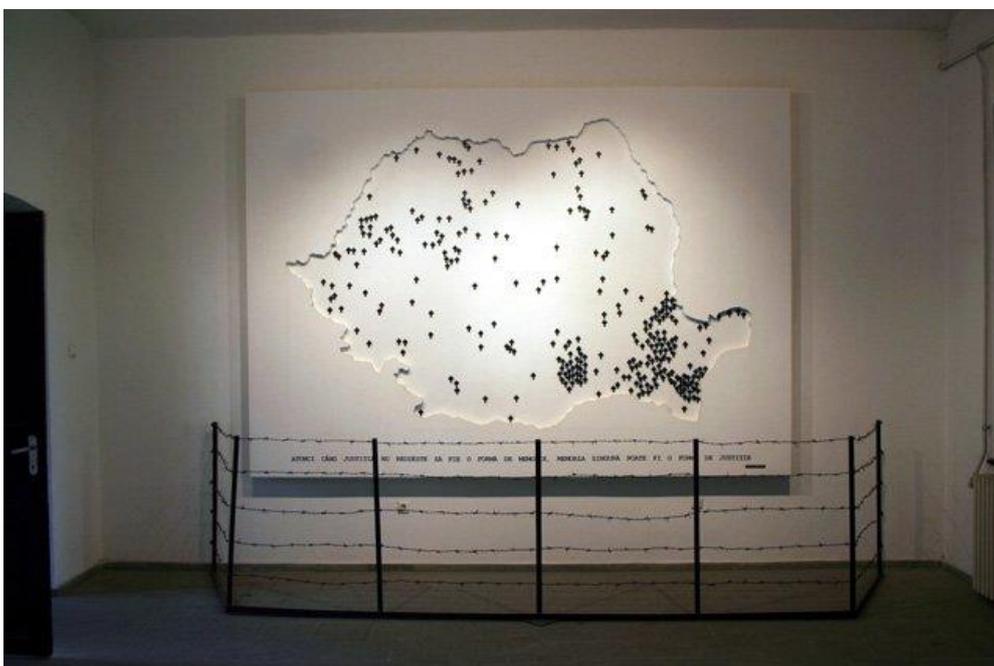


Fig. 3.18. The room of maps (fifth hall) in the Sighet Memorial-Museum representing detention centers in communist Romania. © Sighet Memorial-Museum

Equally powerful artifacts in these museums are the prison furniture, the prison clothing and the specific prison objects such as hand and feet-cuffs. The display of these artifacts (which in the case of Doftana museum have proven to be

borrowed from prisons functioning at the time of the museum's organization) is also strikingly similar.



Fig. 3.19. Prison clothes and handcuffs exhibited in the Sighet museum. © Dinu Lazăr and Liternet.



Fig. 3.20. Prison clothes exhibited in the Doftana museum. Source: Muzeul de Istorie a Partidului Muncitoresc Român. *Muzeul Doftana*. Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1960.

Convincing arguments have already been brought to maintain that the museological models of these post-1989 exhibitions have been the memorial-

museums dedicated to the Holocaust. Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine quotes Ana Blandiana saying that the inspiration for building the Sighet memorial came to her after a visit to the Auschwitz former concentration camp. “It was after a visit to Poland. At Auschwitz, a center for research on Nazism was being constructed, sponsored by the Council of Europe. Why not think about undertaking a twin center of research on Communism? we asked ourselves.”¹⁴⁵ According to James Mark, “many terror sites drew upon an internationally recognized visual iconography of genocide derived from mainly western sites devoted to remembering the Holocaust, which included the creation of banks of prisoners’ photographs taken by the prison authorities, walls of victims’ names and spaces in which to reflect on suffering.”¹⁴⁶ When the official proposal to build a Museum of Communist Dictatorship was issued, during the 2006 presidential speech condemning the Romanian communist regime, the model was pointed out to be the Holocaust Memorial in Washington.¹⁴⁷ This is not a Romanian exception: “The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Yad Vashem are, in the most literal sense, inspirations for the memory ministries and new historical museums that are now so popular and well-funded in much of eastern Europe. Scholars and curators do not seek to imitate their own traditional national museums, but rather the effective formats of museums of the Holocaust. They believe that the techniques used to isolate the Holocaust from history can also be applied to other episodes of mass killing and repression in eastern Europe.”¹⁴⁸

The fact that the Sighet Memorial currently resembles the now in ruins Doftana museum is not due to direct inspiration. On the contrary, the Sighet museum

¹⁴⁵ Laignel-Lavastine, “Fascism and Communism in Romania. The Comparative Stakes and Uses,” 174.

¹⁴⁶ Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution*, 69.

¹⁴⁷ *Report of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of Communist Dictatorship in Romania*, p. 639. [http://www.presidency.ro/? RID=htm&id=83](http://www.presidency.ro/?RID=htm&id=83) (accessed July 30, 2013).

¹⁴⁸ Timothy Snyder, “Commemorative Causality,” *Modernism/Modernity* 20, no. 1 (January 2013): 90.

is a counter-narrative to the Doftana museum. However, as this dissertation has shown Doftana museum was itself born contemporary to the current highly successful museums of former concentration camps. Even more, the curators of Doftana have been inspired by visits to former concentration camps on the verge of musealisation and sought to build in Doftana a homologue of what they have seen in Auschwitz, Ravensbrück or Buchenwald. The Auschwitz memorial is also the place where Ana Blandiana received inspiration for creating Sighet. And though they are certainly not the only inspirational offsprings of Auschwitz, Doftana and Sighet are certainly genealogically linked in ways which are uncomfortable to both.

Conclusions

This dissertation attempted to establish a genealogy of exhibiting communism in post-war and post-communist museums. Romanian museums provided the primary research material although, when possible, the national borders have been crossed as museums are a transnational phenomenon. Although the comparison might seem far-fetched to some, or, to the other extreme, too easy and obvious to others, the fact remains that the continuities and contact zones between museums established during the building and dismantling of socialist regimes are for the first time analyzed in this dissertation. One of the main findings of my research is that curatorial practice is much more resilient than narrative discourse. In other words, communist and anti-communist museums display strikingly different narratives yet the manner in which these narratives are exhibited is remarkably similar. The dissertation provides not only an inventory of these contact zones but contextualizes the building of museums of communism in the 1950s and the 1990s to the point that plausible explanations emerge for the unexpected continuities.

When discussing continuities, several focus points were chosen as relevant for all analyzed museums. It is highly possible that my interest has focused on them and not the other way around, yet it appeared to me that the research data revolved around certain issues that were seminal in the late 1940s as well as in the 1990s. The focus points to be discovered as a red thread going through the dissertation are: the museum building as part of the curatorial concept, the treatment of museum objects and the tension between text and object as museum artifacts.

This dissertation does not focus on the history of museum buildings as mere historical exposé or for providing context. I am arguing that the relationship with the building is part of the museological discourse; that the building is crucial for the shaping of the museum's message. This is not to say, with Nelson Goodman "how buildings mean"¹ or, more recently with Michaela Giebelhausen that "architecture is the museum"² because they both refer to buildings that are designed with a specific purpose in mind, in this case to be museum buildings. My research shows that the building shapes the museum discourse even more when it was not purposefully built to be a museum building.

The first and final chapters of the dissertation deal with museums that are housed in former prisons. My argument is that placing a museum inside a former prison is a deliberate choice that weights heavily on the curatorial concept as this hybrid form of prison-museum is almost a new genre in museum history. To put it bluntly, there are two major choices that museum curators make when occupying a building that was not intended for their specific museum or, more generally, a building that has a long and difficult history.

There is always the choice to ignore the building, to erase and modify its history and even its architecture. This is a quite common choice in the museum world, or at least it used to be until the last decades when museum buildings made an extraordinary come-back.³ From the museums discussed in this dissertation, the propaganda museums of the 1950s, the History Museum of the Romanian Communist Party, the Lenin-Stalin Museum and the Romanian-Russian Museum are perfect

¹ Nelson Goodman, "How Buildings Mean," *Critical Inquiry* 11, no. 4 (June 1985): 642–653.

² Michaela Giebelhausen, "The Architecture Is the Museum."

³ The Jewish Museum in Berlin is a perfect example of a building that became part of the curatorial concept. The architectural project by Daniel Libeskind became so famous that the building was actually inaugurated and opened for visiting already in 1999, two years before the actual permanent exhibition was installed.

examples of curating a museum in total disregard of the building that houses them. In the case of the Party museum, the interior architecture of the building on Kiseleff Blvd. was truly hidden as the vaults and arcades became squares and straight walls.

To the other extreme, the building is requisitioned for the museum precisely because of its history and its symbolic power. This is the case for prison-museums which, I argue, exhibit the building as their most valuable artifact. As I consider the appropriation of the building as part of the museological discourse, I have analyzed the ways in which this relationship has been built in prison-museum of the late 1940s and in the 1990s. Surprisingly enough, the similarities are many. Starting from the deliberate choice to present recent history in a former prison, a choice probably specific to transition periods after dictatorial regimes (and this seems to be indifferent to whether the new regime is itself democratic or again dictatorial), I have looked mostly at the way the building was treated and exhibited as a museum artifact. I argue that even though authenticity is the main attraction of museums housed in former prisons it is also the value that these museums seem to entertain less. The dissertation proves that Doftana is actually a total reconstruction which had in mind the needs of the new museum and not a truthful recreation of the former prison torn down by the 1940 earthquake. The same is true for the prison now housing the Sighet Memorial-Museum in northern Romania.

The reconstruction of prisons in order to serve as museums is also constrained by the limited time span that the curators choose to musealized. Although these prisons had decades of history (a century in the case of Sighet) inscribed in their walls, the museological concepts focused on the five, ten, fifteen years at the most when the story of the prison fitted the story their museum sought to tell. Concurrent,

even challenging, narratives are silenced just as the 1950s communist propaganda museum disregarded the buildings they inhabited.

A third way of appropriating the building is analyzed in the final chapter on the Romanian Peasant Museum. Established in 1990 in a building that was designed to be an ethnography museum but then occupied for forty years by a communist propaganda museum, the curatorial concept broke with museological continuities by choosing to address the history of the building in its entirety. Although focusing on and trying to “build a bridge” to the interwar period, the communist history of the building is exhibited, both inside and outside the museum. To be true, it is presented as a defeated ideology, a defeated museum, its artifacts are exhibited as “fake objects,” yet I argue that this is, museologically, an innovative project as compared to the long-practiced silence over uncomfortable subjects. In Michael Fehr words, “the memory of the museum literally crept out of its walls,”⁴ and I would add that the museums in this dissertation generally took a great deal of trouble to silence these walls.

Museum objects are thought to provide the *raison d'être* of museums. It is the objects that are collected, classified, researched and then exhibited in museums and it is the objects, the original objects that visitors come to see. In comparing the museums of the 1950s and the 1990s I look, for example, at the prison cell as artifact, the way it is exhibited, recreated, mapped, personalized and labeled. I argue that communist museology, starting in the 1950s, has changed the status of the museum object by placing the emphasis on the explanatory text. In continuing the museological practices established in “Stalin’s talking museums,”⁵ Romanian

⁴ Michael Fehr, “A Museum and Its Memory. The Art of Recovering History.”

⁵ Jolles, “Stalin’s Talking Museums.”

museums increasingly used replicas, reproductions and various forms of texts and labels to the level that they were sometimes called “paper museums.” The dissertation analyses the Soviet origins of this museology, the forms in which it became available in Romania through translated manuals of Soviet museology and hints to the heritage of these “paper museums” in the overtly anti-communist museums. The overabundance of texts in Romanian museums became such a landmark of communist museology that Horia Bernea, the director of the Romanian Peasant Museum in the 1990s conceived of a museology without labels which would “free” the object of predesigned interpretations. On the contrary, one museum that still makes intensive use of text is the Sighet Memorial-Museum whose genealogy can thus be clearly linked to the communist museums of the 1950s as well as to contemporary Holocaust museums.

The dissertation analyzes these museums not only in their national context, whose understanding is seminal for reading the museum’s “exhibitionary complex,”⁶ but also unravels the transnational influences and networks that made them possible. These early 1950s museums of communism, largely forgotten, and only mentioned, if at all, as an anti-model are interesting as part of, probably the first, organized network of museums in East-Central Europe, incorporating both Soviet and European tradition in museology and equally working toward the emergence of a new genre. I argue that, even though their narrative has been refuted, the museum genre they created successfully survived the demise of communist regimes. An important argument for the success of this “museum of communism genre” is its apparently unproblematic contemporary use in establishing museum of (anti)communism ever since the 1990s.

⁶ Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*.

The connection between anticommunist museums and “the Holocaust genre”⁷ has already been successfully argued for and I support these arguments.⁸ What has so far not been analyzed is the relation between museums of communism and Holocaust museums before 1989, while “real socialism” was still in power in East-Central Europe. Museums of communism, usually called museums of communist party history or museums of revolution, were founded as part of the propaganda system of the socialist republics at the same time when the first Holocaust museums and memorials were created. This common history deserves a historian’s attention since the timing of their birth is not a mere coincidence. Some of these museums, of communism or of the Holocaust, sometimes shared common initiators and creators, such as the FIAPP (Fédération Internationale des Anciens Prisonniers Politiques) and for some time their discourse, both narratively and museologically was strikingly similar.

Museums are a transnational phenomenon even though they became very national(izing) institutions. This dissertation argues that even in the context of the Iron Curtain dividing Europe, museology continued to be constructed transnationally. In the first chapter I analyze Doftana prison-museum in the years of its construction, just after the end of the Second World War. Contrary to what one might expect, it was not Soviet museology that had a greater impact in curating Doftana but a European network of Second World War memorials which Doftana sought to join. In the 1950s, I argue, Romanian Doftana became part of what will latter become a network of Holocaust memorials and was thus part of the creation of the “Holocaust genre” in museology. It is because of this transnational affiliation that Doftana and Sighet, the

⁷ Marcuse, “Holocaust Memorials.”

⁸ Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution*; Williams, *Memorial Museums*.

communist and anti-communist prison-museums are so strikingly alike. Sighet was inspired by Auschwitz fifty years after Doftana was inspired by Auschwitz.

The Soviet transnational network is analyzed in the second chapter. The historiographical mainstream claims that “everything” in Romania was Sovietized in the 1950s. My research is the first attempt to understand what Sovietization meant for museums and equally what were the limits of this Sovietization. The museums I am analyzing in the second chapter are part of Socialist networks of similar museums such as museums of party history, Lenin museums and museums of friendship with the Soviet people. Although this dissertation does not expand its analysis beyond the 1950s, the situation in Romanian museums around the fall of socialism cannot be understood without these necessary clarifications. My hypothesis for future research is that, even though the Red Army left Romania in 1958 and the Soviet/Stalinist era of Romanian communism is said to end around the same year, Soviet museology will continue to form the basis of museological practice in Romania. The discourse changes and the Slavic and Soviet influence is deleted out of history (as can best be seen in the silent dismantling of the Russian-Romanian museum in 1963) yet the practice, probably because of its technical qualities and the easiness of following strict rules, remained powerful and it is still used in post-1989 Romanian museums.

The position of the visitor in Soviet museology, a role that I call “the Socialist pilgrim” and the innovation of putting the visitor at the center of the museum is something that has not been previously remarked upon. The “new museology”⁹ of the 1990s is thus characterized by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: “Museums were once defined by their relationship to objects ... Today they are defined more than ever by

⁹ Peter Vergo, *The New Museology* (London: Reaktion Books, 1989).

their relationship to visitors.”¹⁰ If this was true for museums all over the world in the 1990s, it was equally true for Socialist museums in the 1950s and Soviet museums in previous decades. Romanian museums were confronted with a form of “new museology” as early as the 1950s, at least in what concerns putting the visitor at the center of museum preoccupations. The 1990s were museologically characterized by a revolutionary, albeit conservative return towards the museal object. This “conservative revolution”¹¹ is explained in the final chapter on the Museum of the Romanian Peasant.

As most research of the scale of a dissertation project, my initial plan was quite different and there were many moments when I had to totally reshuffle my hypothesis, arguments and even time frame. I discovered that the historical understanding of state socialism is impoverished if the narrative starts, as it usually does, in 1944. A decent historian cannot write about the immediate post-war period in Romania without being forced into primary research on the interwar and Second World War. The 1950s are so marked by what preceded them, the authoritarian regimes, the economic crisis and especially the lost war, that added knowledge is necessary. The problem is though that the history of the Second World War, the Romanian Holocaust, and the succession of authoritarian regimes starting in 1938 is only fragmentarily written and while political history is probably best represented other histories are just unwritten. It is not only that museums of the 1950s were very much in the business of exhibiting very recent history, pre-1945 history, and thus the historian is always drawn into exploring both facts and (miss)interpretations of facts. It is also that the people, institutions, objects and buildings that are functional in the

¹⁰ Quoted in Bronwyn Labrum, “Historicizing the Museum’s Recent Past,” *Museum History Journal* 5, no. 1 (January 2012): 34.

¹¹ Vintilă Mihăilescu, “The Romanian Peasant Museum and the Authentic Man.”

1950s were also there during and before the war and this pre-communist history usually has a defining influence on their behavior in the 1950s.

Museums are institutions built to protect the valuable memories, in their material form – as objects, of an era or of a community. Museums are synonyms with stability. Yet what is surprising about the museums of my research is that they barely managed to keep their own memory alive, the memory of their existence. The museums in this dissertation are not only absent from scholarly conversations. Except for the contemporary Sighet Memorial-Museum and in lesser degree the Romanian Peasant Museum, none of the museums in this dissertation appear in contemporary or past scholarly literature. These museums are also absent from public memory: their archives are not available in any public archive, their buildings have been reassigned or abandoned in ruins, their names have been forgotten. What was striking during this research was the fragility¹² of these apparently stable institutions.

Thus, besides the broader theoretical arguments of this dissertation, I am also providing the foundation for an unwritten history of museums in communist Romania. For the Doftana museum, the Party museum, the Lenin-Stalin and the Romanian-Russian museum this is the first academic work that provides basic data on their history, exhibition and the conditions of their disappearance. During archival research on this museum, two other museum names seemed to take shape only to disappear into thin air a few dossiers later. I have chosen to dedicate two subchapters to museums that never actually existed. The first and the second chapter end with two failed musealisations: the Târgu Jiu Camp Museum and the Museum of the Illegal Printing House. Both museums were organized up to inauguration when a, yet un-

¹² The ephemerality of museums has already been remarked upon by Susan A. Crane, “The Conundrum of Ephemerality: Time, Memory, and Museums.”

documented, decision cancelled the whole museal project. I believe failed projects to reveal important data for understanding the ones that succeeded. Târgu Jiu, for example, was organized in the early 1970s when the musealisation of former concentration camps was gaining momentum. It could have been a prison-museum complementing Doftana's discourse. The reasons for abandoning the project after actually rebuilding two barracks of the former camp go together with my argument for thinking about prison-museums as a genre which Doftana fitted much better than Târgu Jiu. The failed projects also speak of the historical narratives that the Romanian communists could not, with all their imaginative power, turn into museums. A museum of the illegal printing house, although present in many of the neighboring Socialist states, could not be inaugurated in a country where the interwar communist illegal activities had been extremely scanty. A museum of a camp such as Târgu Jiu was could not be inaugurated in a country where no historical recognition of the existence of camps (even masked as "political camps") had been made.

Not all the questions that emerged during research have been answered in this dissertation. I am still unsure about the reasons that made the recent past a major focus for museums in the post-war era. Up until the Second World War museums were in the business of preserving and presenting the old and extraordinary, with the exception of Soviet Russia which had started its own museum revolution and brought the present to the center of museum life. The post-war trend of musealising recent history has grown and it is still extraordinarily powerful in current museology but the question still remains as to the conditions that brought about this major change in museology.

I am equally uncertain about the context that made prisons a fertile place for building museums. I discuss earlier attempts and the specificities of this new prison-

museum genre, yet the extraordinary flourishing of this genre after the Second World War is still unaccounted for. The Doftana museum seems an obvious choice for a propaganda museum when looked at from the 21st century. Yet, in the late 1940s it was actually the first prison to be transformed into a museum in Romania. The only predecessor I could find is the Iron Guard initiative of 1940 to transform Râmnicu Sărat prison into a Legionnaire museum. Some of the Communist inmates were aware of the plan as they were transferred from Râmnicu Sărat in the autumn of 1940 to make way for the museum, but is that enough to explain the re-building of Doftana prison into a museum after 1945?

The successes and failures of Romanian communist museology were apparently short-lived if one looks at the long lives of other famous museums. Yet, if the institutions are today not even remembered by their name it is the museology they established in the 1950s that still influences contemporary curatorial choices in history museums. I have argued this by analyzing museums that, on a narrative level, exhibit opposing narratives. Doftana praises communist victims of the bourgeois regime while Sighet memorializes victims of the communist regime. However, the argument holds even for less politically active museums. Museology, I have tried to argue is not a craft or an art developed independent of social context. On the contrary, certain curatorial practices have been born to serve a particular historical moment, a particular world view. For museums to function, the content and the form must work in harmony. An anti-communist museum organized with communist museology does not function. This is an argument that the dissertation is trying to fundament yet, since this is not a dissertation in museum studies, it requires wider and more focused research.

As museums are forms of history writing, I believe the conclusions of the dissertation to be relevant beyond the museum world. As it has been shown in the body of the dissertation, museums become highly relevant institutions in times of political and societal change. It is not only new museums and new histories that are needed in periods of transition, but new ways of writing history and new ways of making museums. The fact, explored in this dissertation, that the museal representation of communism is largely drawn from museal representations of the Holocaust is not without consequences for the historical representation of communism. As argued in the dissertation, the Sighet Memorial is a rare example of a museum imposing its narrative on the political (and not the other way around as it is usually the case). The fact that a museum of communism could be inaugurated in 1997 Romania at a time when almost no serious scholarly research had been undertaken on the socialist regime was made possible by the appropriation of already tested models. The discourse on the Holocaust was not only a museal model put an epistemic one. The creators of the Sighet Memorial, representative for highly educated anti-communist elite, sought to explain the communist regime as a genocidal project, similar to the Holocaust (conceived as an event that had taken place elsewhere, in the neighboring countries, but not on Romanian soil).

Historian Timothy Snyder recently defined “commemorative causality whereby that which is most effectively and frequently commemorated becomes that which it is most convenient to present as causal in synthetic histories.”¹³ The problem with commemoration preceding historical work is that “Commemoration requires no adequate explanation of the catastrophe, only an aesthetically realizable image of its victims. As cultures of memory supplant concern for history, the danger is that

¹³ Timothy Snyder, “Commemorative Causality,” 77.

historians will find themselves drawn to explanations that are the simplest to convey.”¹⁴ The dangers of “commemorative causality” can be contained if more permeable time frames are taken into consideration. As stated above, even when the subject is commemoration or, more general, museal representation of the recent traumatic pasts, illuminating details appear when the inquires are made in the pre-1945 history of the place, people and events under consideration. Almost all 1950s museums had pre-1945 histories they sought to silence, as almost all 1990s museums of communism hold important parts of their institutional history as un-representable.

It is my belief that there are a number of practices, in both museology and history writing that are responsible for hindering rather than expanding our understanding of the past: a didactic approach to the past, leaving no place for open-ended questions, a reluctance to exhibit objects/historical evidence without neutralizing it with explanatory text, obscuring parts of one’s history out of a desire for coherence or clarity. This dissertation historicizes these practices, pointing to the moment and context of their appearance and trying to find explanations for their longevity. They are not inherent to museology or to history writing and are subject to change as any other historically determined practice. I believe museums, as forms of history writing, are gaining in self-awareness and are thus on the verge of substantial transformation.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Bibliography

Archival fonds

- AMNIR (Archive of the Romanian National History Museum), fond Muzeul Partidului (Party Museum)
- AMȚR (Archive of the Romanian Peasant Museum), Visual archive
- AMȚR (Archive of the Romanian Peasant Museum), Administrative archive
- ANR (Romanian National Archives), Collection 53. Dosare de partid (Party dossiers of deceased Party members)
- ANR, fond CC al PCR (Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party) – Cancelarie (Office)
- ANR, fond CC al PCR – Propaganda si Agitatie (Propaganda and Agitation)
- ANR, fond Apărarea Patriotică
- ANR, fond Asociația Foștilor Deținuți Politici Antifasciști din România (FIAP)
- ANR, fond Comitetul Pentru Presă și Tipărituri (Committee for Press and Printing)
- ANR, fond ISISP- Fototeca. Partially available online as *Fototeca online a comunismului românesc*, <http://fototeca.iiccr.ro/>.
- Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: General Records: Information Items; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

Interviews

- Armin Nagel. Interview 24196, December 15, 1996. Visual History Archive. USC Shoah Foundation.
- Emanuele Mises. Interview 48019, October 24, 1998. Visual History Archive. USC Shoah Foundation.
- Frida Kornbluth-Seinfeld. Interview 11633, February 4, 1996. Visual History Archive. USC Shoah Foundation.
- Fritz Litvac. Interview 50214, August 12, 1999. Visual History Archive. USC Shoah Foundation.
- Jeanette Ehrlich Winogrom. Interview 42531, June 23, 1998. Visual History Archive. USC Shoah Foundation.

- Manes Leib. Interview 843, January 24, 1995. Visual History Archive. USC Shoah Foundation.
- Tuba Abramovici. Interview 44484, July 3, 1998. Visual History Archive. USC Shoah Foundation.
- Vasile Bordeianu. Interview 2775, May 23, 1995. Visual History Archive. USC Shoah Foundation.
- Victor David. Interview 15378, n.d. Visual History Archive. USC Shoah Foundation. Accessed July 10, 2013.
- Ioana Popescu. Interview. Taperecorder, April 26, 2004. Personal archive.

Primary sources (printed)

- ***. "Comemorarea Luptătorilor Clasei Muncitoare Uciși Sub Zidurile Doftanei (Commemoration of Working Class Fighters Killed Under Doftana's Walls)." *Scânteia*, November 11, 1949.
- ***. "De La Doftanele Fasciste La Doftanele Imperialismului Anglo-american (From Fascist Doftanas to the Doftanas of Anglo-American Imperialism)." *Buletinul Federației Naționale a Foștilor Deținuți Și Internați Politici Antifasciști* no. 9–10 (Doftana 10 noiembrie 1940–10 noiembrie 1950) (November 1950): 32–35.
- ***. "Deschiderea Muzeului Lenin-Stalin (The Opening of Lenin-Stalin Museum)." *Scânteia*, February 13, 1955.
- ***. *Din Activitatea Muzeelor Noastre (From Our Museums' Activity)*. Cluj: Sfatul Popular al Regiunii Cluj, Secțiunea Culturală, 1955.
- ***. "Editorial 22." *Revista 22* 1, no. 1 (January 20, 1990): 1.
- ***. "Eri S-a Deschis Muzeul Romîno-Sovietic (The Romanian-Soviet Museum Inaugurated Yesterday)." *Scânteia*, March 28, 1947.
- ***. "Istoria Se Reia de Unde S-a Oprit? (Should History Restart Where It Stopped?)." *Revista 22* 1, no. 2 (January 27, 1990): 18–19.
- ***. "Manifestari Ale Institutului de Istorie a Partidului Pe Pe Langa CC Al PMR in Legatura Cu Aniversarea a 40 de Ani de La Crearea Partidului Comunist Din Rominia (Actions of the Institute of Party History of CC of RWP Related to the 40th Anniversary of the Creation of the Communist Party in Romania)." *Analele Institutului de Istorie a Partidului de Pe Langa C.C. Al P.M.R.* VII, no. 3 (1961): 141–143.
- ***. *Musée Central Lénine. Guide*. Moscow: Editions du progres, 1980.
- ***. "Muzeu Național La Doftana (National Museum at Doftana)." *România Liberă*, March 10, 1948.
- ***. *Muzeul de Istorie a Partidului Muncitoresc Romîn (History Museum of the Romanian Workers' Party)*. Bucharest, 1960.
- ***. "Pe Locul Doftanei Atunci Se-nălța-va ca Martor Un Roș Mausoleum (In Doftana's Place Will Then Be Raised as Witness a Red Mausoleum)." *Scânteia Tineretului* no. November 12, 1949.

- ***. “Steagul Luptei Celor Cazuti La Doftana. Comemorarea a 7 Ani de La Prabusirea Inchisorii (The Flag of the Fight of Those Fallen in Doftana. Commemorating 7 Years Since the Prison Crashed).” *Scânteia*, November 12, 1947.
- ***. *Tîrgu Jiu*. Bucharest: Sport-Turism, 1988.
- Al. P. “Recenzie La <<Artele Plastice in Rominia După 23 August 1944>> (Review of <<Fine Art in Romania After August 23 1944>>).” *Studii* 12, no. 4 (1959): 398.
- Ancuța-Rușinaru, Elisabeta. *Tîrgu-Jiu*. Comitetul de Cultura si Educatie Socialista al judetului Gorj, 1979.
- Apărarea Patriotică. *Acuzăm! (We Accuse!)*. Bucharest: Editura Apărării Patriotice, 1946.
- . *Primul Congres Liber Al Apărării Patriotice (First Free Congress of Patriotic Defence)*. Bucharest: Editura Apărării Patriotice, 1945.
- Apostol, Gheorghe. *Eu Și Gheorghiu-Dej (Me and Gheorghiu-Dej)*. Bucharest: Asociația Scânteia, 2010.
- Ardeleanu, Ion T. “Muzeul de Istorie a Partidului Muncitoresc Roman (The History Museum of RWP).” *Analele Institutului de Istorie a Partidului de Pe Langa C.C. Al P.M.R.* IV, no. 4 (August 1958): 26–56.
- Arghezi, Baruțu. *Inaintea Uitarii (Before Forgetting)*. Oradea: Mihai Eminescu, 1996.
- Bîrlădeanu, V. “Prin Muzeul Lenin-Stalin.” *Scânteia*, February 13, 1955.
- Bejan, Lia and Luminița Castali. “The Solemn Meeting to Condemn Communism Has Been Transformed into a Cheap Circus Reminiscent of Group Exorcism.” *Gardianul*, December 19, 2006.
- Berindei, Dan et al. *București Ghid*. Bucharest: Meridiane, 1962.
- Bernea, Ernest. *Spatiu, Timp Si Cauzalitate La Poporul Roman (Space, Time and Causality for the Romanian People)*. Bucharest: Humanitas, 2005.
- Bernea, Horia. *Câteva Cuvinte Despre Muzeu, Cantități, Materialitate Și Încrucișare (Few Thoughts on Museum, Quantities, Materiality and Crossings)*. Bucharest: Liternet, 2003.
- Bernea, Horia and Irina Nicolau. “L’installation. Exposer Des Objets Au Musée Du Paysan Roumain.” *Martor. The Museum of the Romanian Peasant Anthropology Review* no. 3 (1998).
- Blandiana, Ana. “Memorialul Sighet La Majorat. Vreti Sa Intelegeti Romania de Astazi? (The Sighet Memorial Turning 18. Do You Want to Understand Nowadays Romania?).” *Revista 22. Supliment* no. 314 (February 8, 2011).
- Bucur, Gabriela. “Muzeul Romîno-Rus.” *Informația Bucureștiului*, October 26, 1962.
- Bujor, M.Gh. *Doftana*. Bucuresti: Tipografia Finante si Industrie, 1934.
- Calimachi, Scarlat, Vladimir Block, and Elena Georgescu-Ionescu. *Dimitrie Cantemir. Viata Si Opera in Imagini (Dimitrie Cantemir. Life and Death in Images)*. Bucharest: Muzeul Romîno-Rus, 1963.
- Chivu, Ecaterina. “Aspecte Din Viața de Lagăr (Aspects from the Camp Life).” *Buletinul Federației Naționale a Foștilor Deținuți Și Internați Politici Antifasciști* no. 1 (November 1948): 20–21.
- Cirstoiu, Cornel. *Tirgu Jiu. Mic Indreptar Turistic (Small Touristic Guide)*. Bucharest: Meridiane, 1969.
- Cloșcă, Constantin. “Cîteva Probleme Legate de Prezentarea Muzeistică a Istoriei Contemporane Locale (Some Problems Related to the Museology of Local Contemporary History).” *Revista Muzeelor* no. 1 (1972): 34–36.

- Comnacu, Elisabeta. "Un an de Activitate a Federației Naționale a Foștilor Deținuți Și Internați Politici Antifasciști (One Year of Activity of FIAP)." *Buletinul Federației Naționale a Foștilor Deținuți Și Internați Politici Antifasciști* no. 2 (February 1949): 5–9.
- Diaconescu, Ioana. "Muzeul Comunismului Din România (The Museum of Communism in Romania)." *România Literară* no. 33 (August 19, 2011).
- Dianu, Gr.I. *Istoria Închisorilor Din România. Studiu Comparativ. Legi Și Obiceiuri (History of Prisons in Romania. Laws and Customs)*. Bucharest: Tipografia Curtii Regale, 1900.
- Federația Națională a Foștilor Deținuți și Internați Politici Antifasciști. *Doftana Dupa Luptele Ceferiștilor Și Petroliștilor Din 1933 (Doftana after the Fights of Railway and Oil Workers in 1933)*. Bucharest: FIAP, 1948.
- Felix, Ida. "Râbnița." *Buletinul Federației Naționale a Foștilor Deținuți Și Internați Politici Antifasciști* 11 (March 1951): 15–20.
- Fotino, George. "Biblioteca I.I.C. Brătianu (I.I.C. Brătianul Library)." *Boabe de Grâu* IV, no. 5 (May 1933): 257–273.
- Fundatia Academia Civica. *Take-Away Museum*. DVD, 2008.
- Gafencu, Laura and Anca Simina. "Exorcising an Era." *Evenimentul Zilei*, December 19, 2006.
- Galkina, P.I. et al. *Bazele Muzeologiei Sovietice. Manual Pentru Uz Intern (Bases of Soviet Museology. Manual for Internal Use)*. Bucharest: Ministerul Culturii, 1957.
- Gavrilă Sarafoleanu. "Program-cadru de Dezvoltare Muzeala (Frame-Program for Museal Development)." *Revista Muzeelor* no. 11–12 (1990): 117–119.
- Ghiu, Bogdan. "Pasi Catre Un Dialog Interior (Steps Towards an Inner Dialogue)." *Revista* 22 1, no. 2 (January 27, 1990): 5.
- Graur, Nicusor. *In preajma altei lumi; memorii politice, amintiri, portrete, procese si detineri, puscarile, celulele, si lagarele mele, manifestele clandestine sub regimurile dictatoriale, exilul in Cehoslovacia. (Close to another world: political memoires, memories, portraits, trials and imprisonments, my prisons, cells and camps, clandestine manifestos, exile in Czechoslovakia)*. Bucuresti: Editura S.A.R.C., 1946.
- Grosu, Petre. "Muzeul „V.I. Lenin – I.V. Stalin” Din Bucuresti." *Analele Institutului de Istorie a Partidului de Pe Langa C.C. Al P.M.R.* no. 1–2 (1955): 124–144, 157–171.
- Institutul de Studii Româno-Sovietic. *Muzeul Româno-Rus*. 1st ed. Bucharest: Cartea Rusă, 1949.
- Iorgulescu, Dr.N. "Regimul Penitenciar." *Enciclopedia Romaniei*. Bucuresti: Imprimeria Nationala, 1938.
- Nămolaru, Victor. "In Fata Celulei H Dela Doftana (In Front of the H Cell in Doftana)." *Scânteia*, July 7, 1948.
- . "Un Muzeu Despre Istoria Adevărată a Poporului Român. Dela Roata Pe Care a Fost Zdrobit Trupul Lui Horea, La Celula H, Dela Doftana (A Museum About the True History of the Romanian People. From the Wheel That Broke Horea's Body to the H Cell in Doftana)." *Scânteia*, July 5, 1948.
- Nicolau, Irina. "Moi et Le Musees Du Monde. L'histoire D'une Experience Museale Dans Un Pays de L'est." In *New Europe College Yearbook 1994*, 15–44. Bucharest: Humanitas, 1996.
- Nicolau, Irina and Carmen Huluiță. *Dosar Sentimental*. Bucharest: Liternet, 2003.

- Nicolescu, Corina. *Muzeologie Generală (General Museology)*. Bucharest: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1979.
- Maticescu, Olimpiu. *Apararea patriotica (Patriotic Defence)*. Bucharest: Editura Stiintifica, 1971.
- . *Doftana Simbol Al Eroismului Revolucionar (Doftana Symbol of Revolutionary Heroism)*. Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1979.
- Mihailovskaia, A.I. *Organizarea Și Tehnica Expoziției de Muzeu (Organization and Technique of the Museum Exhibit)*. Bucharest: Ministerul Culturii, 1954.
- Mihalache, Marin. *Moscova Leningrad. Muzeu Și Monumente*. Bucharest: Cartea Rusă, 1957.
- . *Muzeele Din București*. Bucharest: Meridiane, 1960.
- Muzeul de Istorie a Partidului Muncitoresc Român. *Muzeul Doftana*. Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1960.
- National Office for Tourism. *Muzeele Orașului București (Museums of Bucharest)*. Bucharest, n.d.
- Panaitecu, Petre P. *Istoria Românilor (History of Romanians)*. Bucharest: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1990.
- Pavel, Anghel. “Considerații Privitoare La Organizarea Expozițiilor de Istorie Contemporană (Considerations on Organizing Contemporary History Exhibitions).” *Revista Muzeelor* no. 4 (1972): 306–308.
- . “Incotro, Muzeele de Istorie? (History Museums, Where To?).” *Revista Muzeelor* no. 8–10 (1990): 44–48.
- Pătrășcanu, Lucrețiu. *Probleme de Bază Ale României (The Fundamental Problems of Romania)*. Bucharest: Socec, 1944.
- Petre, Nesia. “Inchisoarea Ramnicul-Sarat.” *Buletinul Federației Naționale a Foștilor Deținuți Și Internați Politici Antifasciști* no. 6 (February 1950): 24–26.
- Puțuri, Ion. *Prima Noapte La Doftana (First Night in Doftana)*. Scînteia, 1946.
- Radovan, Maia. *Împărăția Balaurului (Kingdom of the Dragon)*. FIAP, 1948.
- Reiman, P. “On the Activity of the Party History Institute of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and the Preparation of the New Party History Manual.” *Analele Institutului de Istorie a Partidului de Pe Langa C.C. Al P.M.R.* IV, no. 2 (1958): 127–140.
- Roller, Mihail, ed. *Istoria României. Manual Unic Pentru Clasa a VIII-a Secundară (History of Romania. Unique Textbook for Secondary 8th Grade)*. Bucharest: Editura de Stat, 1947.
- Rudenco, T. *Sfârșitul Doftanei: Memoriei Lui Ilie Pintilie (The End of Doftana: To the Memory of Ilie Pintilie)*. Bucharest: Scînteia, 1945.
- Sârbulescu, Mihai. *Despre Ucenicie (On Apprenticeship)*. Bucharest: Anastasia, 2002.
- Szabo, Eva. “9 Ani de La Prăbusirea Doftanei (9 Years Since Doftana’s Collapse).” *Scînteia*, November 9, 1949.
- Stancu, Zaharia. *Zile de Lagăr (Camp Days)*. Bucharest: Socec, 1945.
- Stoenescu, Aura. “Lagărul de La Târgu Jiu, o Fantomă Interzisă (The Târgu Jiu Camp, a Forbidden Phantom).” *Vertical*, June 23, 2010. [Http://www.verticalonline.ro/lagarul-de-la-targu-jiu-o-fantoma-interzisa](http://www.verticalonline.ro/lagarul-de-la-targu-jiu-o-fantoma-interzisa).
- Surcel, Vasile. “Țăranul Român a Cucerit ‘templul’ Fantasmelor Comuniste (The Romanian Peasant Conquered ‘the Temple’ of Communist Ghosts).” *Jurnalul Național*, November 16, 2010.
- Ștefănescu, L. “Muzeul de Istorie a Partidului Muncitoresc Român (History Museum of the RWP).” *Studii. Revistă de Istorie* XII, no. 4 (1959): 365–375.

- Șuță, Denisa. *Lagărul de La Târgu Jiu (Târgu Jiu Camp) - Television Documentary*, 2009.
- Tik, Ion. "Doftana II." *Ilustrațiunea Românească* II, no. 32 (July 1930): 6–9.
- . "Închisoarea Doftana. De Vorbă Cu M.Gh. Bujor (Doftana Prison, Talking to M.Gh. Bujor)." *Ilustrațiunea Românească* II, no. 34 (August 1930): 6–7.
- . "La Închisoarea Doftana (At the Doftana Prison)." *Ilustrațiunea Românească* 31, no. II (July 1930): 6–9.
- Tzigara-Samurcaș, Alexandru. *Muzeografie Românească (Romanian Museography)*. București: Imprimeria Nationala, 1936.
- Vlad, Radu-Dan. *Procesele Lui Corneliu Zelea Codreanu 1938*. Vol. 2. Bucharest: Majadahonda, 1999.
- Voicu, Ștefan. "Doftana." *Scânteia*, November 11, 1948.
- Wiesel, Elie. *Night*. Macmillan, 2012.
- Zelea Codreanu, Corneliu. *Însemnări de La Jilava*. Bucharest: Majadahonda, 1995.

Secondary literature

- Abraham, Florin. "Istoriografie Și Memorie Socială În România După 1989 (Historiography and Social Memory in Romania after 1989)." *Yearbook of the Institute of History „George Barițiu” Series HISTORICA* no. LI (2012): 145–172.
- . "Raportul Comisiei Tismăneanu: Analiză Istoriografică (Tismaneanu Commission Report: An Historiographical Analysis)." In *Vasile Ernu, Costi Rogozanu (eds.), Iluzia Anticomunismului. Lecturi Critice Ale Raportului Tismaneanu*, 9–13. Chișinău: Cartier, 2008.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. New York: Zone Books, 1999.
- Akinsha, Konstantin and Adam Jolles. "On the Third Front: The Soviet Museum and Its Public During the Cultural Revolution." In Anne Odom and Wendy R. Salmond (eds.), *Treasures into Tractors: The Selling of Russia's Cultural Heritage 1918-1938*, 167–181. Washington: Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens; University of Washington Press, 2009.
- Althabe, Gérard. "Une Exposition Ethnographique: Du Plaisir Esthétique, Une Leçon Politique." *Martor. The Museum of the Romanian Peasant Anthropology Review* no. 2 (2007): 144–158.
- Ancel, Jean. *The History of the Holocaust in Romania. The Comprehensive History of the Holocaust*. Lincoln : Jerusalem: University of Nebraska Press ; Yad Vashem, 2011.
- Antohi, Sorin, Balázs Trencsényi, and Péter Apor, eds. *Historical Studies in Post-Communist Eastern Europe*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007.
- Apor, Péter. "An Epistemology of the Spectacle? Arcane Knowledge, Memory and Evidence in the Budapest House of Terror," (manuscript)
- . "Master Narratives of Contemporary History in Eastern European National Museums." In Dominique Poulot, Felicity Bodenstein, José María Lanzarote Guiral, eds. *Great Narratives of the Past. Traditions and Revisions in National Museums Conference Proceedings from EuNaMus, European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, Paris 29 June – 1 July & 25-26 November 2011.*, 569–585. Linköping

- University Electronic Press:
http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=078, 2011.
- Barbu, Daniel. "O Istorie Naturala a Comunismului Romanesc (A Natural History of Romanian Communism)." In Vasile Ernu, Costi Rogozanu (eds.), *Iluzia Anticomunismului. Lecturi Critice Ale Raportului Tismaneanu*, 71–104. Chişinău: Cartier, 2008.
- Baudin, Antoine. "<<Why Is Soviet Painting Hidden from Us?>> Zhdanov and Its International Relations and Fallout, 1947-1953." In Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko (eds.), *Socialist Realism Without Shores*, 227–256. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 1986.
- Bennett, Tony. *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Bernea, Horia. *Câteva Cuvinte Despre Muzeu, Cantitaţi, Materialitate Şi Încrucişare (Few Thoughts on Museum, Quantities, Materiality and Crossings)*. Bucharest: Liternet, 2003.
- Bernea, Horia and Irina Nicolau. "L'installation. Exposer Des Objets Au Musée Du Paysan Roumain." *Martor. The Museum of the Romanian Peasant Anthropology Review* no. 3 (1998).
- Betea, Lavinia. *Lucreţiu Pătrăşcanu. Moartea Unui Lider Comunist (Lucretiu Pătrăşcanu. The Death of a Communist Leader)*. Bucharest: Editura Curtea Veche, 2011.
- . *Partea lor de adevar: Alexandru Bârladeanu despre Dej, Ceausescu si Iliescu Convorbiri ; Maurer si lumea de ieri. Marturii despre stalinizarea României ; Convorbiri neterminate cu Corneliu Manescu (Their part of truth)*. Bucharest: Compania, 2008.
- Boia, Lucian. *Istorie Şi Mit În Conştiinţa Românească (History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness)*. Bucharest: Humanitas, 1997.
- Bosomitu, Ştefan and Mihai Burcea, eds. *Spectrele lui Dej: incursiuni în biografia si regimul unui dictator (Specters of Dej: incursions into the biography and regime of a dictator)*. Iasi: Polirom, 2012.
- Buden, Boris. "In Ghetele Comunismului. Despre Critica Discursului Postcomunist (In the Boots of Communism. On the Critique of Postcommunist Discourse)." In Adrian T. Sîrbu, Alexandru Polgar (eds.), *Genealogii Ale Postcomunismului, (Genealogies of Post-communism)*, 59–76. Cluj: Idea Design & Print, 2009.
- Burton, Antoinette M, ed. *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005.
- Carp, Matatias. *Cartea Neagră. Suferinţele Evreilor Din România 1940-1944 (The Black Book. The Sufferings of Jews in Romania 1940-1944)*. 3 vols. Bucharest: Dacia Traiană, 1946.
- Cătănuş, Dan. "Disciplina de Partid Si Fostii ilegalisti.Cazul Constantin Agiu, 1955 (Party Discipline and Former Communists in Illegality. The Case of Constantin Agiu, 1955)." *Arhivele Totalitarismului* 3–4 (2010): 197–219.
- Ciuceanu, Radu. *Regimul penitenciar din România: 1940-1962 (Penitentiary regime in Romania: 1940-1962)*. Bucuresti: Institutul National pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2001.

- Ciuciu, Anca. "Nostalgia Unei Lumi Pierdute. Symbolismul Reportajelor Despre Sighet Și București (1929/1930-1939) de F. BruneaFox Și Ilustrate de Iosif Berman (The Nostalgia of a Lost World. The Symbolism of the Reports on Sighet and Bucharest (1929/1930-1939) by F. BruneaFox and Illustrated by Iosif Berman)." *Holocaust. Studii Și Cercetări* 4 (2011): 197–212.
- Comisia Prezidentiala pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din Romania. *Raport Final*. Edited by Dorin Dobrinu and Cristian Vasile. Bucharest: Humanitas, 2008.
- Crane, Susan A., ed. *Museums and Memory*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2000.
- . "The Conundrum of Ephemerality: Time, Memory, and Museums." In Sharon Macdonald, ed. *A Companion to Museum Studies*, 98–109. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.
- Deletant, Dennis. *Communist Terror in Romania: Gheorghiu-Dej and the Police State, 1948-1965*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.
- . *Hitler's Forgotten All. Ion Antonescu and His Regime, Romania 1940-1944*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- . "New Light on Gheorghiu-Dej's Struggle for Dominance in the Romanian Communist Party, 1944-49." *The Slavonic and East European Review* 73, no. 4 (October 1, 1995): 659–690.
- Dobrenko, Evgeny. *Stalinist Cinema and the Production of History Museum of the Revolution*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008.
- Edkins, Jenny. "Authenticity and Memory at Dachau." *Cultural Values* 5, no. 4 (2001): 405–420.
- Ernu, Vasile and Costi Rogozanu, eds. *Iluzia Anticomunismului. Lecturi Critice Ale Raportului Tismăneanu (The Illusion of Anticommunism. Critical Readings of the Tismăneanu Report)*. Chișinău: Cartier, 2008.
- Fehr, Michael. "A Museum and Its Memory. The Art of Recovering History." In Susan Crane, ed. *Museums and Memory*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.
- Fellman, Susanna, and M. Rahikainen, eds. *Historical Knowledge: In Quest of Theory, Method and Evidence*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012.
- Fischthal, Hannah Berliner. "Jewish Ghettos in Sighet and Dąbrowa Górnicza." *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 31, no. 2 (2012): 149–165.
- Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts Under Lunacharsky, October 1917-1921*. Soviet and East European Studies. Cambridge [Eng.]: Cambridge University Press, 1970.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. 1st ed. 1975. London: Penguin Books, 1991.
- . "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." In D.F. Bouchard (ed.) *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977.
- Fox, Thomas C. *Stated Memory: East Germany and the Holocaust*. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 1999.
- Fürtös, Andrea. "Personalul Administrativ Al Penitenciarului Sighet (1950-1955). Profiluri Umane (Administrative Personal of the Sighet Penitentiary 1950-1955. Human Profiles)." *Yearbook of the Institute of History „George Barițiu” Series HISTORICA* no. XLVI (2007): 401–432.

- Fukuyama, Francis. "The End of History?" *The National Interest* (Summer 1989).
- Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. Basic Books, 1973.
- Georgescu, Vlad. *Politică Și Istorie. Cazul Comuniștilor Români (Politics and History. The Case of Romanian Communists)*. 2nd ed. Munchen: Jon Dumitru Verlag, 1983.
- Gheorghiu, Mihai Dinu. *Intellectualii în câmpul puterii: morfologii și traiectorii sociale (Intellectuals in the realm of power: morphologies and social trajectories)*. Iași: Polirom, 2007.
- Giebelhausen, Michaela. "The Architecture Is the Museum." In Janet Marstine, ed. *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction*, 41–63. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006.
- Greco, Dan-Simion. "Lagăre de Internare În Județul Hunedoara (1944-1945) (Internment Camps in Hunedoara County: 1944-1945)." *Buletinul Cercului de Studii Al Istoriei Poștale Din Ardeal, Banat Și Bucovina XIII*, no. 4 (n.d.).
- Groys, Boris. "<<Utopia Înseamnă Investire În Artificial>> O Conversație Cu Boris Groys Despre Condiția Postcomunistă (<<Utopia Is Investment In The Artificial>> A Conversation with Boris Groys About the Post-communist Condition)." *Idea Arts+Society Magazine* no. 21 (2005).
- . "The Struggle Against the Museum; or, the Display of Art in Totalitarian Space." In Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff (eds). *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, 144–162. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.
- Goodman, Nelson. "How Buildings Mean." *Critical Inquiry* 11, no. 4 (June 1985): 642–653.
- Haliliuc, Alina. "Who Is a Victim of Communism? Gender and Public Memory in the Sighet Museum, Romania." *Aspasia* 7 (2013): 108–131.
- Hirsch, Marianne, and Leo Spitzer. *Ghosts of Home the Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.
- Huener, Jonathan. *Auschwitz, Poland, and the Politics of Commemoration, 1945-1979*. Ohio University Press Polish and Polish-American Studies Series. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003.
- Iacob, Bogdan Cristian. "Stalinism, Historians, and the Nation: History-production Under Communism in Romania (1955-1966)," 2010. PhD thesis, Central European University.
- Ignatova, A., and I. Gancheva. "The Attitude of Museums to Socialism in the Period of Bulgarian Transition to Democracy." *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Brasov* 4(53), no. 2 (2011): 25–32.
- International Commission for Studying Holocaust in Romania (presided by Elie Wiesel). *Final Report*. Iasi: Polirom, 2004.
- Ilie, Cornel Constantin. "Regimul Comunist Si Muzeele de Istorie Din Romania (The Communist Regime and History Museums in Romania)." Universitatea Valahia Targoviste, 2012. unpublished PhD thesis.
- Ilie, Oana. "Propaganda Politică. Tipologii Și Arii de Manifestare (1945-1958) (Political Propaganda. Typologies and Manifestation Areas)." Universitatea din Bucuresti, 2010. unpublished PhD dissertation.
- Ioanid, Radu. *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies Under the Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000.

- Ionescu, Andrei. "Fostul Lagăr de La Târgu Jiu, Abandonat de Autorități (The Former Camp in Târgu Jiu, Abandoned by the Authorities)." *Gazeta de Sud*, September 11, 2007.
- James, Beverly A. *Imagining Postcommunism Visual Narratives of Hungary's 1956 Revolution*. College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2005.
- Jenson, Deborah. *Trauma and Its Representations: The Social Life of Mimesis in Post-revolutionary France*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.
- Jolles, Adam. "Stalin's Talking Museums." *Oxford Art Journal* 28, no. 3 (2005): 429–455.
- Karge, Heike. "Mediated Remembrance: Local Practices of Remembering the Second World War in Tito's Yugoslavia." *European Review of History* 16, no. 1 (February 2009): 49–62.
- Karp, Ivan and Steven Lavine, eds. *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991.
- Kenney, Padraic. "'I Felt a Kind of Pleasure in Seeing Them Treat Us Brutally.' The Emergence of the Political Prisoner, 1865–1910." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 04 (September 20, 2012): 863–889.
- Labrum, Bronwyn. "Historicizing the Museum's Recent Past." *Museum History Journal* 5, no. 1 (January 2012): 29–52.
- Laignel-Lavastine, Alexandra. "Fascism and Communism in Romania. The Comparative Stakes and Uses." In Henry Rousso, ed. *Stalinism and Nazism: History and Memory Compared*, 157–193. University of Nebraska Press, 2004.
- Latour, Bruno. "Networks, Societies, Spheres: Reflections of an Actor-Network Theorist." *International Journal of Communication* no. 5 (2011): 796–810.
- Levi, Primo. *If This Is a Man and The Truce*. London: Abacus, 1993.
- Levy, Robert. *Ana Pauker: The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- Luke, Timothy W.. *Museum Politics. Power Plays at the Exhibition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.
- Macdonald, Sharon, ed. "Expanding Museum Studies: An Introduction." In *A Companion to Museum Studies*, 2–12. Blackwell Publishing, 2006.
- Maleuvre, Didier. *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art*. Cultural Memory in the Present. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Marcuse, Harold. "Holocaust Memorials: The Emergence of a Genre." *The American Historical Review* 115, no. 1 (February 1, 2010): 53–89.
- . *Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933-2001*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Mareș, Clara, Dumitru Lăcătușu, and Cristina Roman. *Dictionarul Penitenciarelor Din România Comunistă: 1945-1967 (Dictionary of Penitentiaries in Communist Romania: 1945-1967)*. Iasi: Polirom, 2008.
- Mark, James. *The Unfinished Revolution: Making Sense of the Communist Past in Central-Eastern Europe*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.
- Mihăilescu, Vintilă. "The Romanian Peasant Museum and the Authentic Man." *Martor. The Museum of the Romanian Peasant Anthropology Review* no. 11 (2006): 15–29.
- Miller, Sanda. "Brancusi's 'Column of the Infinite'." *The Burlington Magazine* 122, no. 928 (July 1, 1980): 470–480.

- Muraru, Andrei, ed. *Dictionarul penitenciarelor din România comunista : 1945-1967* (*Dictionary of penitentiaries in Communist Romania: 1945-1967*). Iasi: Polirom, 2008.
- Nicolau, Irina. "Moi et Le Musees Du Monde. L'histoire D'une Experience Museale Dans Un Pays de L'est." In *New Europe College Yearbook 1994*, 15–44. Bucharest: Humanitas, 1996.
- Nicolau, Irina and Carmen Huluiță. *Dosar Sentimental*. Bucharest: Liternet, 2003.
- Novicov, Mihai. "Cu Pumnii Strânși, Lângă Ruinele Doftanei (With Clenched Fists, Near the Doftana Ruins)." *Buletinul Federației Naționale a Foștilor Deținuți Și Internați Politici Antifasciști* no. 1 (November 1948): 15–17.
- . *Povestiri Despre Doftana (Stories About Doftana)*. Bucharest: Editura Tineretului, 1957.
- Odom, Anne and Wendy R. Salmond, eds. *Treasures into Tractors: The Selling of Russia's Cultural Heritage, 1918-1938*. Washington: Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens; University of Washington Press, 2009.
- Oișteanu, Andrei. "Sighet – Capitala Holocaustului Și a Gulagului Din România (Sighet – The Capital of the Holocaust and of the Gulag in Romania)." *Caietele Echinox* no. 13 (2007): 201–204.
- Opriș, Ioana. *Istoria Muzeelor Din România (The History of Romanian Museums)*. Bucharest: Museion, 1994.
- . "O Luminare La Memorialul Victimelor Si Al Rezistentei Dela Sighet (A Candle at the Sighet Memorial)." *Revista Muzeelor* no. 1–3 (2000): 10–13.
- Pavel, Anghel. "Considerații Privitoare La Organizarea Expozițiilor de Istorie Contemporană (Considerations on Organizing Contemporary History Exhibitions)." *Revista Muzeelor* no. 4 (1972): 306–308.
- . "Incotro, Muzeele de Istorie? (History Museums, Where To?)." *Revista Muzeelor* no. 8–10 (1990): 44–48.
- Pécoil, Vincent. "The Museum as Prison. Post Post-Scriptum on Control Societies." *Third Text* 18, no. 5 (2004): 435–447.
- Pelin, Mihai. *Deceniul Prabusirilor (1940-1950). Vietile Pictorilor, Sculptorilor Si Arhitectilor Romani Intre Legionari Si Stalinisti (A Decade of Downfalls 1940-1950. The Lives of Romanian Painters, Sculptors and Architects Between Legionnaires and Stalinists)*. Bucharest: Compania, 2005.
- Petkova-Campbell, Gabriela. *A Place in Europe: Bulgaria and Its Museums in "New" Europe*. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2009.
- . "Uses and Exploitation of History: Official History, Propaganda and Mythmaking in Bulgarian Museums." In *Dominique Poulot, Felicity Bodenstein, José María Lanzarote Guiral (eds.) Great Narratives of the Past. Traditions and Revisions in National Museums Conference Proceedings from EuNaMus, European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, Paris 29 June – 1 July & 25-26 November 2011.*, 69–77. Linköping University Electronic Press: http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=078, 2011.
- Petrescu, Cristina and Dragoș Petrescu. "Mastering Vs. Coming to Terms with the Past: A Critical Analysis of Post-Communist Romanian Historiography." In Sorin Antohi, Balázs Trencsenyi, Péter Apor (eds.), *Narratives Unbound: Historical Studies in Post-communist Eastern Europe*, 311–371. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007.

- . “The Pitești Syndrome: A Romanian Vergangenheitsbewältigung?” In Stefan Troebst, ed. *Postdiktatorische Geschichtskulturen Im Süden Und Osten Europas*, 502–618. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2010.
- Pleșa, Liviu. “Mihail Roller și „stalinizarea” Istoriografiei Românești (Mihail Roller and the ‘Stalinization’ of Romanian Historiography).” *Annals of the University of Alba Iulia History (Annales Universitatis Apulensis Series Historica)* 10, no. 1 (2006): 165–177.
- Pomper, Philip. *Lenin’s Brother : the Origins of the October Revolution*. New York: W.W. Norton & co., 2010.
- Popescu, Ioana. *Iosif Berman: A Photo - Album. Supplement to Martor. The Anthropology Review of the Museum of the Romanian Peasant 3/1998*, 1998.
- Popovăț, Petru. “Muzeul de La Șosea(The Museum by the Boulevard).” *Martor. Supliment* 4 (1999).
- Rabinbach, Anson. “Introduction: Legacies of Antifascism.” *New German Critique* no. 67 (January 1, 1996): 3–17.
- Radu-Bucurenci (Bădică), Simina and Gabriela Cristea (Nicolescu). “Raising the Cross. Exorcising Romania’s Communist Past in Museums, Memorials and Monuments.” In Oksana Sarkisova and Peter Apor, eds. *Past for the Eyes. East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989*, 273–303. Budapest: CEU Press, 2008.
- Rév, István. *Retroactive Justice: Prehistory of Post-communism*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2005.
- România În Relațiile Internaționale. Diplomatie, Minorități, Istorie. In Honorem Ion Calafeteanu (Romania in International Relations. Diplomacy, Minorities, History)*. Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2010.
- Rouso, Henry. *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France Since 1944*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Semenova, Natalia. “A Soviet Museum Experiment.” In Anne Odom and Wendy R. Salmond, eds. *Treasures into Tractors: The Selling of Russia’s Cultural Heritage 1918-1938*, 65–81. Washington: Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens; University of Washington Press, 2009.
- Sharenkova, Radostina. “Forget-me(-not): Visitors and Museum Presentations About Communism Before 1989.” *History of Communism in Europe* no. 1 (2010): 63–80.
- Sherman, Daniel J. “Quatremère/Benjamin/Marx: Art Museums, Aura, and Commodity Fetishism.” In *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.
- Snyder, Timothy. “Commemorative Causality.” *Modernism/Modernity* 20, no. 1 (January 2013): 77–93.
- Solonari, Vladimir. *Purifying the Nation: Population Exchange and Ethnic Cleansing in Nazi-allied Romania*. Washington, D.C. ; Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Center Press : Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.
- Stan, Lavinia. “The Vanishing Truth? Politics and Memory in Post-Communist Europe.” *East European Quarterly* XL, no. 4 (December 2006): 383–408.
- Stănculescu, Ovid. *Cercetări Asupra Regimului Penitenciar Român Din Veacul Al XIX-lea (Considerations on the Romanian Penitentiary Regime in the 19th Century)*. Cluj: Tip. Fondul Cărților Funduare, 1933.

- Stefan, Bruno. *Mediul Penitenciar Romanesc. Cultura Si Civilizatie Carcerala (Romanian Penitentiary Realm. Prison Culture and Civilisation)*. Iasi: Institutul European, 2006.
- Stites, Richard. *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Svetlana Dzhafarova. "The Creation of the Museum of Painterly Culture." In *The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-garde, 1915-1932*, 474–481. New York: Guggenheim Museum : Distributed by Rizzoli International Publications, 1992.
- Swensen, Grete. "Concealment or Spectacularisation – Analysing the Heritagisation Process of Old Prisons." In *C. Clark & C.A. Brebbia (eds.), Defence Sites. Heritage and Future.*, 231–243. Southampton: WIT Press, 2012.
- Tănase, Stelian. *Clienții Lu' Tanti Varvara. Istoriei Clandestine (Aunt Varvara's Clients. Clandestine Histories)*. Bucharest: Humanitas, 2005.
- Terry, Allie. "Criminals and Tourists: Prison History and Museum Politics at the Bargello in Florence." *Art History* 33, no. 5 (December 2010): 836–855.
- Tismăneanu, Vladimir. *Stalinism for All Seasons: a Political History of Romanian Communism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- . "Democracy and Memory: Romania Confronts Its Communist Past." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* no. 617 (May 2008): 166–180.
- . "Memorialul de La Sighet - 20 de Ani de La Înființare (Sighet Memorial - 20 Years Since Establishment)." Radio Free Europe, July 16, 2013.
- Tismăneanu, Vladimir and Cristian Vasile. *Perfectul Acrobat. Leonte Răutu, Măștile Răului (The Perfect Acrobat. Leonte Răutu, the Masks of Evil)*. Bucharest: Humanitas, 2008.
- Vasile, Cristian. "Evolutia Artelor Plastice in Primul Deceniu Communist (The Evolution of Plastic Arts in the First Communist Decade)." *Revista Arhivelor* no. 1 (2008).
- . *Literatura Si Artele in Romania Comunista 1948-1953 (Literature and the Arts in Communist Romania 1948-1953)*. Bucharest: Humanitas, 2010.
- . *Politicile culturale comuniste în timpul regimului Gheorghiu-Dej (Communist cultural politics during Gheorghiu-Dej's regime)*. Bucuresti: Humanitas, 2011.
- Verdery, Katherine. *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania*. Societies and Culture in East-Central Europe 7. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
- . "The 'Etatization' of Time in Ceausescu's Romania." In *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- . *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Vergo, Peter. *The New Museology*. London: Reaktion Books, 1989.
- Vidler, Anthony. *The Writing of the Walls: Architectural Theory in the Late Enlightenment*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Architectural Press, 1987.
- Vlad, Radu-Dan. *Procesele Lui Corneliu Zelea Codreanu 1938*. Vol. 2. Bucharest: Majadahonda, 1999.
- Voukov, Nikolai. "The Unmemorable and the Unforgettable. Museumizing the Socialist Past in Post-1989 Bulgaria." In Oksana Sarkisova and Peter Apor,

- eds. *Past for the Eyes. East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989*, 307–334. Budapest: CEU Press, 2007.
- Walby, Kevin and Justin Piché. “The Polysemy of Punishment Memorialization: Dark Tourism and Ontario’s Penal History Museums.” *Punishment & Society* 13, no. 4 (2011): 451–472.
- Walsh, Kevin. *The Representation of the Past. Museums and Heritage in the Post-modern World*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- White, Hayden. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973.
- Williams, Paul. *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities*. English ed. Oxford ; New York: Berg, 2007.
- Withuis, Jolande, and Annet Mooij. *The Politics of War Trauma: The Aftermath of World War II in Eleven European Countries*. Amsterdam University Press, 2010.
- Wyman, David S., and Charles H. Rosenzweig, eds. *The World Reacts to the Holocaust*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins university Press, 1996.
- Young, James Edward. “The Counter-Monument: Memory Against Itself in Germany Today.” *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 267–296.
- . *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Zelizer, Barbie. *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera’s Eye*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.