

In Memoriam
Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu (1838-1907)*

B.P. Hasdeu – a Treasurer of Documents and Libraries

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Abstract

The article points out to B.P. Hasdeu's special interest in documents and also in libraries as institutions that shelter manuscripts, varied historical sources, rare books etc. The European archives and libraries where Hasdeu conducted his research are mentioned and his most important printed works based on historical documents are discussed. The conclusion of the article is that B.P. Hasdeu nourished a true passion for documents and his scientific activity was indeed „phenomenal, of a colossal stature”. Hasdeu is indeed „a giant of the Romanian culture” and „a genius of an overwhelming stature”.

Keywords: *Archive, Library, Book, Document, Philology, History, Language.*

„Genius of an overwhelming stature, B.P. Hasdeu spent his creative powers with such largeness of spirit characteristic to a prince, a romantic and a hero like him. He left behind a lot of unfinished works and just a few monuments. But the plan of his unfinished work is relevant enough for the historical significance of a whole epoch. Hasdeu has been among the last

* The articles referring to B.P. Hasdeu represented papers presented at the Symposium dedicated to the commemoration of his death centenary – 1907-2007, organized at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Bucharest by the Library and Information Science Department on 10 May 2007.

great scholars of the 19th century to be acknowledged and he will be difficult to integrate completely into the Romanian culture” (1). That is one of the most comprising characterizations of Hasdeu, written by Mircea Eliade. Indeed, his contemporaries were overwhelmed by Hasdeu’s creative force; several decades had to pass until all the creative facets of this Titan of Romanian culture could be revealed.

B. P. Hasdeu’s scientific activity was considered a phenomenon of huge proportions. One of the main aspects of his work was the passion for documents and sources, a passion that would guide his historical and philological vocation since the age of fourteen until his death in 1907 (2).

His research work was permanently preceded by the investigation and finding of new and original sources of information and he managed to publish a great part of the documents that he discovered and of his creative work.

He was quite possessed by an almost fanatical attraction to the mysteries of history and he nurtured a special worship for documents. As a high school student in Chişinău, at the time when his interest in historical documents started, he would write: „I was mainly concerned with gathering materials for the history of my country. Insistence and constancy made my able to collect almost all the printed sources and a lot of manuscripts during a period of two years.

The acknowledgement and appreciation of Hasdeu’s scientific activity by his contemporaries lead to his appointment as General Director of the Archives of State in Bucharest on the 15/27th of May 1876 (by Decree number 841). He was the head of the Archives until the 1st of April, 1900 (3). That was an extraordinary period in Hasdeu’s life, as he would confess later.

He declared his passion for historical sources and archives once again in November, 1884: „Papers wrote that I quit from the Archive to keep my position as a deputy (he was elected deputy for Craiova area). It is a lie. I won’t leave the Archive as long as I live. I’m going to the Chamber tomorrow, I deliver a speech and I give up my position as a deputy. If the Chamber refuses, then I’m going to be both deputy and archivist” (4).

And Hasdeu made such a declaration because he considered that „the most beautiful mission of the archives is to facilitate the historical researches of scholars” (5).

Along time, he gathered industriously and with amazing insistence documents kept in the Romanian archives (as a director he had access to all the deposits) but also in foreign archives. He did that because in his conception, it was impossible to study the cultural and scientific Romanian phenomena without a previous systematic research of the

relationships to the neighbouring countries by exploring the foreign archives that reflected it.

The problem was „solved” during his study stages abroad, when he researched the libraries and archives of many foreign cities. He worked in Vienna, Budapest, Munich, Serbia, Bohemia and France in 1868; he visited Serbia again in 1869 and then again in 1877, when he studied in the National Serbian Library in Belgrade and went also to Budapest (6).

Hasdeu’s archive and library studies added to his fruitful connections to scholars and scientists like Stoian Novakovici, J. Jireček, N. Ducici, Wilhelm Schmidt, Baudoin de Courtenay, Jan Urban Jarnik and others.

In 1877, he traveled to Poland to investigate libraries and archives, first in Dzikov (where he found 10, 000 rare books and manuscripts in the library and archive of the Tarnowski Earls House) and then in Krakow, in the University library and archive, where he discovered 200, 000 imprints, 6,000 manuscripts, 9,000 coins, the correspondence between the Romanian rulers and the Polish kings etc. He also detected some documents in the old Royal Archive of Poland and he wanted to publish his results. Besides searching and researching documents, Hasdeu’s programme also included editing documents and writing historical, philological and linguistic studies *only* source-based. „The Romanian history is full of stories and gaps: in order to record the former and fill the latter, an ample study of the documents is required instead of crediting compilations, epistles, and memoirs [...] i.e. things that are described under the impression of one event or another.” It is important to underline this three-staged scientific research: detecting, researching and editing (of documents and works).

Therefore, one of the main components of Hasdeu’s activity, unfolding before his appointment as Director of the Archives, especially during his office and also until his death was that of editor of historical sources („archaeographer”).

Aware of Hasdeu’s interest and passion for publishing documents referring to the Romanian past, N. Kretzulescu, Minister of Cults and Public Instruction, asked him in 1864 to assume „the task of editing” a journal „including documents relating to the History of Romanians”. Hasdeu’s answer was a positive one (7). Following that, he signed a contract with the Ministry on the 22nd of July, 1864, by which he committed himself „to edit the review with the documents from the State Archives and from anywhere else”. The title *The Historical Archive of Romania* was suggested by Hasdeu and accepted by the Ministry. The first issue was due to come out of print on the 1st of August, 1864. Hasdeu was to receive 2000 lei as fee and editing expenses save print and paper expenses that were to be covered by the state.

The first volume entitled „The historical archive of Romania, under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice, Cults and Public Instruction. Critical collection of documents on the past of the Romanians since the earliest days until 1800” appeared on the 24th of August, 1864. In the introduction to the book, Hasdeu specified the method of editing the documents, observing the latest scientific requirements in archaeography.

A year later, in 1865, Hasdeu commented on the character of the publication in the editor’s report: „Besides its internal, document-based content and [...] its registers, the *Historical Archive* brings together all the epochs of the Romanian history from all the points of view so that the reader finds 300 pieces (documents) along approximately 200 pages of the first volume only [...]. The documents refer to one of the following fields at least: politics, society, law, church administration, military aspects, commerce, topography, chronology, linguistics, biography, heraldry, ethnography, literature, arts. My knowledge of about ten antique and modern languages allowed for my understanding and selecting everything that could shed a light upon the Romanian past.” A researcher could find collected, classified and correctly edited materials in the pages of the review that was issued only two years, until the 8th of July, 1866, when „the appointed Mr. Minister canceled the editing of the historical Archive as it couldn’t be subsidized by the State Budget any longer.”

That decision was not satisfactory for B.P. Hasdeu, who made a point to express his anger openly, by writing at the end of the second volume, in black letters: „The publication was stopped here by order of Mr. Minister of the Public Instruction, C.A. Rosetti.”

The following year Hasdeu fought for his review and he obtained its resuming in April 1867. M. Kogălniceanu and Professor Nicolae Ionescu supported him.

On the occasion of the resuming of the publication, Hasdeu felt it necessary to improve the content of the review, by enlarging the area of information that the documents covered. He also intended to publish documents referring to the history of „the Romanians across the Danube, Macedonian-Romanians, Morovlachs, Istrians etc beginning with emperor Aurelianus’ time and finishing with 1800 [...] and references to these Romanian populations contained in the works of famous historians and linguists.” The documents of this series were to be published in the following languages: Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Slavic, Bulgarian, Serbian, English, French, Spanish, Italian, German etc. „Every original document is to be published as such, translated and commented with notes.” The series was to be given „a special title: The Historical Archive of the Romanians

across the Danube”. The Ministry rejected such improvements. Hasdeu was to edit „unpublished Romanian documents and all kinds of Slav documents unpublished or not translated as yet into Romanian.”

Hasdeu’s success lasted only for two years as the history teacher Alex Crețulescu, the new Minister of Public Instruction, canceled the subvention for „The Historical Archive of Romania” in February, 1869, despite the positive vote of the Deputy Chamber. This time, the publication ceased definitively.

Saddened and dissatisfied by such a decision, Hasdeu sent nevertheless the last copies that he had for the 1869 volume to C.D. Aricescu, the director of the State Archives. Although he protested at first, the director finally accepted to correct the manuscript and to finish the work that Hasdeu had begun. „The Historical Archive” was not issued any longer, in spite of the insistency of several public persons, C.D. Aricescu included.

Another aspect of B.P. Hasdeu’s activity as document editor and director of the „Historical Archive” refers to his concern with making the publication known throughout the country and abroad. The review raised a vivid interest and the Romanian Academic Society asked for some copies to enrich the Academy Library in 1877, when Hasdeu was a director of the State Archives. Mihai Eminescu appreciated Hasdeu’s activity as a treasurer and editor of historical sources, writing in 1882: „By revealing these historical and linguistic documents, Hasdeu brings to the light not only materials of archaeological interest but *Romania* herself, the genius of the Romanian people clarified out of overlapping covers of ruins and barbarism.” (8) Acknowledging the scholar’s rigorous method of editing the documents, Eminescu wrote further that „Undoubtedly, one of the merits of Mr. Hasdeu is that of having introduced a new method, quite positivist, to research national history. As he possesses the two qualities characterizing genial intelligence – memory and judgment – and he knows several spoken languages, he is able to rebuild stone by stone our history. This history is a uniform manifestation of a single national genius, the genius of the Romanian people.” M. Eminescu himself was an expert in documents and Hasdeu appreciated him as such, recommending him in 1884 for the position of archivist at the General Direction of State Archives in Bucharest, as „he possesses very serious knowledge of Romanian history and paleography.” We find the two giants of the Romanian culture passionate about researching the Romanian past through documents and connected by an admirable common trait: the love for their country.

After the publication of the „Historical Archive” ceased, Hasdeu continued to detect, research and edit documents. In his review called

„Trajanus' Column”, whole series of old texts were published in the years following 1877, under the title *Spoken Romanian Language from 1560 to 1600*. Hasdeu himself edited and signed the materials. Later, after 1876, he started to publish the documents he had detected in the Archives from Serbia and Krakow and that he had copied at his expense.

Another fact to be mentioned is that all Hasdeu's works were based on documents he had found especially in the Romanian State Archives or abroad. Some of his most important studies and also references in the history of Romanian culture are: *The Critical History of the Romanians* (9) published in the period between 1872 and 1874; the Dictionary *Magnum Etymologicum Romaniae* in 4 volumes (1886-1899), *Words of the Old Times*, *The Chronicle of Zilot the Romanian*.

At the same time, Hasdeu paid special attention to the libraries where valuable documents and manuscripts could be found and especially where old books were kept, as those were also precious documentary sources (10). Immediately after his appointment as director of the State Archives, Hasdeu paid a special attention to the library of the institution, as he considered the library as an obligatory asset to the activity and prestige of the Archives. Along 24 years, the book fund and the administration of the Library of Archives in Bucharest and of that within the Archives branch in Iași were a priority for B.P. Hasdeu. He wrote dozens of notes to obtain subsidies and he personally purchased hundreds of books on sale in European stores. Among them, there were editions of documents, co ligatures, elzevirs, chronicles, grammars, paleography albums, lexicons, atlases. He also initiated the exchange of publications, using mainly his books to obtain other valuable books for the Library of Archives. Some of his exchange partners were The Krakow Science Academy, the Society for History and Archaeology in Moscow, the Royal Library of Copenhagen and the Library of the University of Strasbourg. As a director of the Archives and a person keen on documents he pleaded in front of many contemporary personalities of his time to donate books, manuscripts, documents and whole libraries to the National Archives. D.G. Peșcov, Teodor Codrescu, V.A. Urechia were among those who responded positively to his plea and the bishop of Buzău district, Dionisie, donated his library to the Archives. Hasdeu's life long work of collecting and editing documents impressed the great Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga who wrote in his 1934 book *People who Were Once*: „B.P. Hasdeu gave to our source collection - 'The Historical Archive' – the first Romanian book of Slavic studies; in his *Words of the Old Times* he treasured selected samples of the old language, a work that had never been done before; in the *Critical History*, he hastened the development of

historical studies by putting a huge amount of information in the scientific circuit of his time; he dared to dream about a great national Encyclopedia by beginning *Magnum Etymologicum*. He was a path finder in so many divisions of history and philology, although it is true that he often only did as much as pointing to the path. The path from the searching and gathering of documents to their publication that required asking for money was neither easy nor simple.”

That is how his contemporaries perceived him and how the generations to come in Romanian culture and science appreciated his rigorous work. But the great scholar wished that only the following words be engraved on his tombstone:

„On the funeral monument at the cemetery, in the empty place for the epitaph they should write 838 – year of death – Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, son of Alexandru, grandson of Tadeu, father of Iulia who, like his daughter, father and grandfather believed strongly in the mission of mankind, in God’s justice, in the immortality of the soul, who worked, suffered, loved and overcoming trials and strengthened by temptation. From the place he has descended in tears, he rises with a smile on his face to meet his own people.”

He wrote these lines in 1889, when he had to wait 8 more years for his absolution.

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