

PAINTERS AT THE ROMANIAN COURT

ADRIAN-SILVAN IONESCU

In the first half of his reign, first as Prince (1866-1881) and later as King (1881-1914) of Romania, Carol I (1839-1914) frequently invited artists-in-residence at his court, thus adding to the number of painters engaged in satisfying his esthetical needs as well as producing propaganda works. Prince Carol of Hohenzollern liked landscapes, portraits of ordinary people, as well as military and battle scenes: such subjects appealed to his artistic taste, but also to his concern for propaganda representation. He often had such works on display at his winter and summer residences in Bucharest, Cotroceni and later in Sinaia, where he often received and entertained royalties, aristocratic visitors, Romanian government officials and foreign diplomats. Dissemination via lithographs and prints was also used commonly to shape and consolidate esthetic and patriotic feelings among the public.

Wishing to gain a better knowledge of the country he had been called upon to rule, the young prince travelled frequently in order to familiarise himself with the landscapes, as well as to assess the economic and human resources, the traditions, customs and local historic monuments. His retinue on such travels often included native or foreign painters whose mission was to preserve in artistic form the images and impressions gained en route. More often than not the travelling artist who accompanied him was Carol Szathmari (1812-1887). A Transylvanian by birth, Szathmari settled in Wallachia as early as 1840, working for a succession of rulers. In 1863 he was appointed by Prince Alexandru Ioan I 'painter and photographer to the Court', a much-coveted position, which he kept after the Prince's abdication in 1866 and the accession of Prince Carol I of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen. A keen observer of human physiognomy and of regional costume, Szathmari was a documentary artist *par excellence*. During his trips with the prince, he would make sketches of landscapes and human faces and photograph historic locations, ruined fortresses, monasteries and churches with their sacred objects and the residing monks. On the basis of the vast material thus collected, Szathmari subsequently produced large-scale oil paintings for the princely collection, lithograph albums such as *Vues et costumes de la Roumanie* (1869, 1870), as well as photographic albums such as *The Bishopric of Curtea de Argeş* (Episcopica Curtea de Argeş, 1866) and *Romania* (România, 1869).

Responding to the Prince's invitation, Count Amedeo Preziosi (1816-1882), an artist of Maltese origins who lived in Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, visited Romania on two successive summers in 1868 and 1869. A refined and distinguished water-colourist, he enjoyed a good reputation both among the European visitors and among the Muslim and Frankish elites who resided in the

city on the Bosphorus and who were in a position to appreciate his colourful Orientalist works. Preziosi was well-known for large-scale representations of spacious landscapes and for compositions with human figures engaged in specific activities. In Bucharest, the Romanian capital city, he roamed the streets, mingled with the people, observed every detail and made sketches of everything he saw. He accompanied the ruling Prince in the latter's summer trips to the Prahova Valley, to the Carpathian mountains and to Buzău, where a major fair was organised annually for the so-called 'Drăgaică', summer equinox rites celebrated around 24 June. Upon his return to Istanbul, in the settled atmosphere of his studio, the artist worked on his sketches, producing large-scale water colours which he sent to the Romanian Prince: *A Panoramic View of Bucharest from Filaret Hill* (Panorama Bucureștilor din Dealul Filaretului), *A View from the Colțea Tower* (Vedere din Turnul Colței), *A Market in Bucharest* (Piață din București), *Bărăția Street* (Strada Bărăției), *The Stavropoleos Church* (Biserica Stavropoleos), *Cotroceni*, *Prince Carol I Welcomed in a Village in the Carpathians* (Domnitorul Carol I primit într-un sat din Carpați), *The Visit of Prince Carol I at the Small Nunnery of Saint George in Buzău* (Vizita Domnitorului Carol I la Schitul Sf. Gheorghe din Buzău), *The Welcoming Ceremony of Prince Carol I at Slănic Prahova* (Primirea Domnitorului Carol I la Slănic Prahova). In the left-hand corner of the latter work, the artist represented himself on horseback, working with his sketch-book propped up on his saddle. Next to him, also on horseback, is his fellow-artist and friend, Carol Szathmari, the Court painter.

During his next visit to Romania in the summer of 1869, Preziosi accompanied the ruling prince on a cruise down the Danube, from Giurgewo to Porțile de Fier (the Iron Gates). He seized this occasion to produce eleven landscapes seen from the Prince's yacht 'Ștefan cel Mare'. Unfortunately, these exquisitely radiant landscapes were never developed and they remained in the artist's sketch-book, today held in the collections of the Museum of the City of Bucharest. Other works were selected by the artist for re-working and were presented to his royal patron. These were principally views from the monasteries of Wallachia and Oltenia and scenes from fun fairs (Târgul Moșilor) and Bucharest market places, a colourful medley of merchants and buyers. They include titles such as: *The Lowlands of the Arges river* (Lunca Argeșului), *The Church of the Bishopric of Curtea de Argeș* (Biserica Episcopiei Curtea de Argeș), *The Crossing of the Olt River* (Trecerea Oltului), *Cozia Monastery* (Mănăstirea Cozia), *Surpatele Nunnery* (Mănăstirea Surpatele), *Dintr-un Lemn Nunnery* (Mănăstirea Dintr-un Lemn), *The Câmpulung Church of the Brethren* (Bărăția din Câmpulung), *The Nunnery of Saint George in Buzău* (Mănăstirea Sf. Gheorghe din Buzău), *Market-Place in Râmnicu Vâlcea* (Piață din Râmnicu Vâlcea), *A Bridge over the Dâmbovicioara Rivulet* (Pod peste Dâmbovicioara), *The River Dâmbovița at Radu Vodă* (Dâmbovița la Radu Vodă), *'Dâmbovița, Sweet Water...'* ('Dâmbovița, apă dulce...'), *The Fish Market in Bucharest* (Piața de pește din București), *The Moși*

Fair (Târgul Moşilor), as well as a series of full-length figures of peasant men and women in work dress or in their holiday best.

All these water-colours were greatly appreciated by the Prince – and this not only because he purchased them at relatively great cost from an artist whose work was valued rather highly in the art world. The Prince was clearly aware of the educational value of these pieces inspired by the country's picturesque landscapes and traditional costumes, and he put them on display in two exhibitions, in 1869 at the National Museum in Bucharest's University Palace and in 1873 at the Herdan Hotel for an event organised by the Society of Friends of the Fine Arts. As the first of these exhibitions took place while Preziosi was still in Romania, it can be assumed that this was as a way of honouring the visiting artist. There were many occasions when the Prince invited the titled painter for lunch at the Palace as a mark of special consideration.

As Prince Carol I wished to have a handy portfolio of representative images of the nation to offer to guests or take abroad to other European courts, he commissioned his court painter to copy Preziosi's watercolours. The outcome was a series of water colours created by Szathmari on the basis of the Maltese artist's work. Also on order from Carol I, a lithograph of Preziosi's *The Mowers* (Secerătorii) was produced in 1870 in Paris. Preziosi himself drew it on stone at the Lemercier studios, while Szathmari subsequently oversaw the production and the distribution in good conditions of the 129 prints made.

Perhaps Amedeo Preziosi's greatest quality was the fact that he never sought to romanticise his compositions, nor did he seek the picturesque for its own sake, where there was little or none of it. He had a gift for accurate and detailed observation as well as an expert hand, and he presented his subject in their natural state, with no concessions to the West's Orientalist tastes and diktats. He was a story-teller in pictures who, in everything he did, sought the narrative key which should render them attractive beyond their colourful exoticism. A man with a sense of humour, he used to immortalise little amusing episodes: peasants exhausted with the heat and the turmoil of the market; young men chatting up shy maidens; a cheeky Bucharest brat who harnessed a dog to carry his fare; a monk haggling for mushrooms with a pretty little peasant girl; merchants leaving the 'Fritz the Great' pub on unsteady legs and exchanging jokes after celebrating the day's gains; nuns lifting the hems of their vestments as they cross a river; a customer still undecided over his purchase at the fish market; Wallachian 'mermaids' bathing stark naked in the river Dâmbovița of the famed 'sweet waters', only two steps away from the water-sellers filling up their tanks with the same water destined for city consumption; smartly-dressed postillions looking much like 'musketeers with weapons at the ready', as a foreign traveller described them; ragged Gypsies with sly gazes; placid-looking soldiers whose uniforms appear too smart for their distinctly un-martial postures; elegantly dressed gentlemen and ladies who appear strangely alien in the midst of this motley mob at the 'gateway to the Orient'.

One other artist who worked consistently for Prince Carol I over time was the German Emil Volkers (1831-1905), a painter best known for his representations of animals and especially for his equestrian scenes. He made several brief visits to Romania, at around the same time as Preziosi, between 1867 and 1869, 1871 and 1872 and, possibly, 1877 and 1878. His first commissions were the 'portraits' of the Prince's beloved horses, Aprath, Coma and Don Juan, today on display at Peleş Castle. He also produced several oil portraits of Carol I, two of which represented the Prince on horseback, one in Prussian uniform, the other in Romanian uniform. Other works included: *Prince Carol's Arrival in Romania* (Intrarea Prințului Carol în țară, 1868), *The Ruling Prince Carol's Country-Wide Visit* (Vizita prin țară a Prințului Carol, 1869), *The Royal Hunt* (Vânătoarea regală, 1878), *Carol I Attending Troop Manoeuvres* (Carol I la manevre, 1880). But Volkers was also attracted by humbler subjects such as scenes of markets and fairs, for which he could draw on his outstanding talent for animal portraiture by including horses, cattle, buffaloes and other animals to be seen at the cattle market: *Stage Coach Station* (Haltă de poștalion, 1869), *Farmers Resting in the Field* (Popas în câmp, 1869), *Market* (Târg, 1872), *Stopping at the Water-Well* (Popas la fântână, 1872), *Peasant Woman on Horseback* (Țărăncă călare, 1878), *Romanian Peasants on Their Way to the Market* (Țărani români în drum spre târg, 1878).

Emil Volkers published some of his compositions on Romanian themes in the time's periodicals. For instance, 'L'Illustration' no. 1372 of 12 June 1869 carried his work *Le Prince Charles de Roumanie en voyage* on page 380. In German periodicals he would accompany his illustration with ample articles in which he described the specificity of Romanian landscapes, people and atmosphere. Thus, for instance he signed both the illustration and the text entitled *Der Markt zu Riureni in der Kleine Walachei* in 'Illustrierte Zeitung' no. 1601 of 7 March 1874, as well as *Aus Bukarest. Zigeunertoilette am Sonntag Vormittag* published in 'Ueber Land und Meer' no. 9 of 1876 (pages 164 and 166). It is probably also the case of *Die Zigeuner Siebenburgen*, unsigned, but stylistically attributable to Volkers, published in 'Illustrierte Zeitung' no. 170 of 17 June 1876 (pages 471 and 476).

Like Preziosi, Volkers was a keen observer, but he took attention to detail to tiresome lengths. All items are painted with equal intensity, irrespective of the plane in which they are located, which produces an impression of fastidious tidiness. The elements of the composition have no gradations in his treatment and figures are all given equal prominence. The outcome, therefore, lacks accents and depths: either everything is fore-grounded without exception, or a secondary plane is altogether absent. But Volkers, fascinated by the rich beauty of the national dress, engaged in a thorough study of it. His extremely minute, almost photographic, renditions of the ornamental elements of dress resulted in a certain cold remoteness. This is evident in the afore-mentioned portrait of the peasant woman riding astride her white pony, as well as in that of the woman spinning wool on top of her horse-ridden carriage in the painting *Romanian Peasants on*

Their Way to the Market (Țărani români în drum spre târg). An ethnographer could almost make out the style of needlework used, the type of yarn, the amount of metal and woollen threads used, as well as the overall pattern which could almost be copied as such from the surface of the painting.

During the Russo-Romanian-Turkish war of 1877-78 which brought about Romania's independence Volkers produced two small-scale water-colours representing Prince Carol I on the front line as Commander of the Western Army. Dressed in battle uniform, with a mantle, he is in the foreground, while his aides and guards stand back, half obscured by the snowy whirlwinds. In the second water colour – a preliminary sketch for a large-scale oil composition now at the Romanian National Army Museum – the Prince wears a full-dress cavalry general's uniform and heads the charge of a Romanian cavalry unit ('călărași'). It is a rather unusual dress for the Prince who, as a rule, preferred his infantry general's uniform, with a tunic and cap of dark blue cloth, trimmed with gold braiding. However, for reasons that are still unclear, in the early 1877, he posed for the photographer Franz Duschek dressed in cavalry uniform. Carol Szathmari was to use this photograph for a full-length official portrait which replicated the posture of the former ruling prince, Alexandru Ioan I: the model is located along the central axis, with the princely white mantle on and the sable fur cap with gem and plume aigrette next to a mace, both placed on a nearby table on which the Prince rests his hand. All these elements of dress – the mantle with an ample collar of sable fur and golden braiding, the plumed hat and the mace – were traditionally the ceremonial symbols of investiture for the rulers of the Romanian Principalities, but Carol I had never actually used them. The painting's composition itself was outdated and uninspiring. There is another full-length portrait of Carol I wearing the same cavalry uniform against the background of a mountain range and a radiant horizon – perhaps representing Sinaia. It was painted in 1881 by the American artist George Peter Alexander Healy (1808-1894) and is now in the collections of the Peleş Castle in Sinaia.

During the 1877-78 campaign, the Court painter Carol Szathmari, then 65, did not allow age to prevent him from accompanying his Prince to the front line. Although not in the first line of fire, he produced sketches and water-colour depicting battle scenes on the basis of eye-witness accounts. At that time, the Romanian artist was a regular contributor both to local and to foreign periodicals such as the Bucharest-based 'Resboiul' (The War), 'L'Illustration' in Paris, 'The Illustrated London News' and especially the 'Illustrierte Zeitung' in Leipzig. He produced several large-scale water-colours for the royal collection, now held at the Peleş Castle. They include *The Visit of Tsar Alexander II in Bucharest* (Vizita Țarului Alexandru II la București), *Carol I Entering the Plevna Redoubt after Its Surrender* (Intrarea lui Carol I la Plevna), *Prince Carol I Welcomed in the Village of Debova* (Primirea lui Carol I în satul Debova), *Carol I at Church in a Bulgarian Village* (Carol I la biserica dintr-un sat bulgăresc), *Carol I Reviewing Troops in*

Bulgaria (Carol I defilând în fruntea trupelor în Bulgaria), *Carol I on His Return from the 1877 Campaign* (Carol I întorcându-se din campania 1877).

The photographs taken by Carol Szathmari during the hostilities were subsequently collected in the album *Souvenir from the War of 1877-78* (Suvenir din Resbelul 1877-78). They represent artillery batteries on the border of the Danube, troops in bivouac or waiting to be reviewed by their commanders, the Prince's headquarters at Poiana in Romania, or at Poradim in Bulgaria, his staff generals and foreign military attachés, Prince Carol in front of his campaign tent or on the porch of his lodgings, surrounded by his aides.

When hostilities ceased, two more artists were commissioned by the Prince to produce works based on scenes from the campaign. One was Johann Nepomuk Schönberg (1838-1913), an Austrian artist who ended up almost being adopted by the British on account of his long collaboration with 'The Illustrated London News' and the consistent company he kept among British war correspondents and artists. In the latter part of his life he actually settled in London where he had a studio. During the Bulgarian armed conflict, he contributed both illustrations and articles to the Western press. Although in the early stages his reports and pictures were hostile to the Romanian side, he later witnessed episodes of Romanian bravery which changed his views. Over a period of 25 years, Schönberg produced six large-scale paintings commissioned for the Prince's collection: *The Crossing of the Danube* (Trecerea Dunării, 1893), *The Bombardment of Vidin or 'This is my kind of music!'* (Bombardarea Vidinului sau 'Asta e muzica ce-mi place!', 1891), *The Attack upon the Grivița Redoubt* (Atacul asupra redutei Grivița, 1891), *The Prince's Visit at the Grivița Redoubt* (Vizita domnitorului la reduta Grivița, 1893), *Carol I at the Battle of Plevna* (Carol I la bătălia de la Plevna, 1903), *Prince Carol I's first Encounter with Osman Pasha* (Prima întâlnire a domnitorului Carol I cu Osman Pașa, 1896). The artist was required to render the faces of the protagonists with the utmost accuracy and to this end he was supplied with photographs of the people directly involved in the episodes he had to depict. These were not only army commanders, but also junior officers and quite a few rank-and-file. All these requirements were stipulated in a contract signed on 10/22 July 1878 at Sinaia by Martin Stohr, cabinetmaker to the Court, representing Prince Carol I, and Friedrich Lachmann, former war reporter in the recently concluded campaign, representing the painter Schönberg. The latter's productions, large-scale works of 125 x 185 cm, were the pride of the collections at the Royal Palace in Bucharest.

Newly arrived in the Romanian capital in 1893 as wife of the heir to the throne Ferdinand (1865-1927), the young Princess Marie (1875-1938) felt rather lonely and isolated in her new home. In an attempt to revive her spirits, the King – or 'Uncle' as she used to call him – initiated receptions at tea time with ladies of the elite, usually much older than the young bride. The effect was quite the opposite of what the King expected: the princess was even more bored in the company of these older women and in the rather grim atmosphere of a salon adorned, undoubtedly, with Schönberg's paintings, as suggested by the slightly

ironic narrative of Princess Marie herself in her memoirs, *The Story of My Life* (Povestea vieții mele): “ La Princesse s’ennuie (...) So tea-parties were organized in a deadly dull room with Pompeian-red walls and ugly over-gilded chairs. As principal decoration, a series of war pictures representing King Carol during the campaign of 1877. Uncle under fire, Uncle on the ramparts, Uncle passing the Danube on a bridge of boats, Uncle on a prancing horse, Uncle in a snowstorm, Uncle receiving Osman Pasha’s sword. And beneath these patriotic pictures sat the sad little exile and received lean ladies and fat ladies, kind ladies and supercilious ladies, smart ladies and shabby ladies, ladies that were wrinkled and ladies that were painted, ladies who talked volubly and ladies who were almost as shy as the little stranger herself; but of these there were few, for Roumanians in general have a great flow of words at their disposal.”¹

The other artist commissioned to produce compositions based on the War of Independence was the German painter Friedrich Kaiser (1815-1890), who specialised in battle scenes. Three works of identical dimensions (64 x 109 cm) form part of a series with clear connections to the campaign of 1877: *Major Candiano-Popescu Presenting Prince Carol I and Grand Duke Nicholas with the Turkish Flag Captured at Grivița* (Maiorul Candiano-Popescu prezentând Prințului Carol I și Marelui Duce Nicolae steagul turcesc capturat la Grivița), *Prince Carol Leading the Romanian Troops before the Tsar and Grand Duke Nicholas with their General Staff* (Prințul Carol I în fruntea trupelor române defilând prin fața Țarului și a Marelui Duce Nicolae cu statul lor major) and *The Encounter of Prince Carol I with Osman Pasha* (Întâlnirea principelui Carol I cu Osman Pașa). One more painting, of smaller dimensions (42.2 x 34.8cm), represents the ruling Prince accompanied by General Alexandru Cernat and Colonel Victor Crețianu, all three on horseback, reviewing Romanian troops called ‘Dorobanți’. None of these works bears a date and there is no evidence that the author was on the front-line and witnessed the incidents presented.

In 1896, when Emperor Franz Joseph paid an official visit to King Carol I, he introduced his host to Tadeusz von Ajdukiewicz (1852-1915), a skilled Polish painter of military scenes. In 1897 this artist decided to settle in Bucharest and later he bought a house at Zizin, in a picturesque mountain region. He immortalised *The Parade in Honour of Emperor Franz Joseph Led by King Carol I at Cotroceni* as well as two equestrian portraits of the two sovereigns, both now in the collections of the Peleş Castle. In 1903, the Romanian editor I.V. Socec published a lavishly illustrated album entitled *The Romanian Army* (Armata Română) with a French translation which includes reproductions of Ajdukiewicz’s portraits of officers and soldiers from various battalions and wearing different uniforms. The Album opens with equestrian portraits of King Carol I, of the heir to the throne Prince Ferdinand and of Princess Marie dressed in cavalry uniform in her capacity as honorary Colonel in the 4th ‘Roșiori’ Regiment. Also included is an image from the

¹ Marie, Queen of Roumania, *The Story of My Life*, vol. II, Cassell & Co., Ltd. London, 1934, p. 32.

campaign of 1877 which Ajdukiewicz had not witnessed in person and which was inspired by Volker's water-colour and possibly by Szathmari's photographs: the Prince is represented wearing his mantle, with the hood covering his cap, riding through the heavy snows of Bulgaria followed by a few of his aides. Half covered by the abundant snow are frozen bodies of killed Turks, weapons and equipment abandoned by the defeated enemy. The Prince looks into the distance with the firm, concentrated expression of the self-assured, but cautious, victor. Although finely executed, the painting lacks the nerve and punch of a battle scene. It should be added, however, that Ajdukiewicz was not a painter of battle scenes as much as an outstanding *painter of military subjects*. He was much more at ease representing calm scenes of soldiers in repose, posing in full-dress as they awaited a parade or a review of troops than when he was commissioned to paint manoeuvres or gory scenes of battle, which would have required an altogether different set of skills and even some experience in the front lines. Also included in the Album is a print entitled *The Queen in the 1877-78 Campaign* (Regina în campania 1877-78), representing the kind Queen Elizabeth as 'mother of the wounded', giving assistance to a soldier in a military hospital. This was based on pre-existing illustrations contemporary to the campaign, possibly by Szathmari himself, who published a similar sketch in the illustrated periodical 'Resboiul' (The War) no. 95 of 26 October 1877. The subject lent itself to black-and-white treatment rather than colour, something that Ajdukiewicz himself recognised, confining himself to a sombre palette of greys and browns rather than his customary brilliant hues.

Most of the original paintings reproduced in the Album are now in the collections of the National Army Museum in Bucharest. Many of the paintings by the same artist left out from that volume found their way into private collections. A few have recently re-surfaced in art shops and auction houses, and have not failed to attract the attention of new generations of art lovers.

The artists invited by Prince Carol I to the Romanian Court were painters of exceptional talent who produced outstanding work worthy of a prominent place in both the Romanian national art heritage and in the world art circuit.

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