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A Phenomenology of Photography in Nineteenth-Century Romania

Emanuel
Bădescu
Romania

I once asked myself why, when choosing between the academic portrait – the respective photographers considering themselves “academic painters” – and photography, the client would choose photography. I could see no advantage other than the lower price. In time, I realized that it was about the unfiltered pose of subjectivity of time, age, and soul that was rendered by a photograph and made it a unique and seemingly living witness of the past, especially of the personal past. That is why the client, perhaps not even knowing the reason, would choose himself, not the artist: the photographer was no longer the creator of the client’s image, like the painter, but the technician who handled the camera that captured it. Some of the painter-photographers understood the mechanism of this choice and sought to separate the photo from its miraculous purpose (somewhat degrading for any artistic pride) which reduced it to the status of craft, and transformed it into art.

Carol Popp de Szathmari is an example. We do not refer to laboratory techniques, which were not possible at the time. Rather, he simply set the background of the scene, the position of the subject, his physiognomy and gestures; thus, the image retained his own vision, his creative contribution. Like him and simultaneously with him, there were creations of painter-photographers all around the world, so that, from the adolescence of photography there emerged what we call today “photography of art” – practically a new, extremely complex art. It is notable that when they approached veduta (panorama), unable to intervene on the background, these photogra-



The photographer Carol Popp de Szathmari
in oriental costume



Cupidon with
broken arms
Photographer:
Carol Popp
de Szathmari
1848
Calotype



The first calotype made by a Romanian photographer was dated November 1848 and represents the image of Cupid, an antique piece from the collection of Carol Popp de Szathmari, author of this calotype

phers sought special angles dictated by their artistic vision, which immediately made the difference between a veduta-document and veduta-art. This helps us in distinguishing the vedutae made on request from those made of their own initiative.

Chronologically, the first shots were daguerreotypes, made first by itinerant photographers, as there were no certified workshops or studios in the press of the time. Unlike the daguerreotype (a positive image directly obtained on a rigid surface, on silver or on silvered glass, which meant a unique image), the calotype, the second chronological technique, produced a negative image from which could be produced a desired number of positive images. The first calotype made by a Romanian photographer was dated November 1848 and represents the image of Cupid, an antique piece from the collection of Carol Popp de Szathmari, author of this calotype. It became part of the collection of old photos belonging to Constantin Orășanu. Although its author gave it small consideration, it retains a certain artistic value.

photographers, more or less talented artists. An album compiled by Szathmari in 1862 and offered with dedication to Elena Cuza is a perfect example of the moment. There are photographs of outstanding quality, some of them betraying his artistic searches in this apparently hostile area.

Manuk Inn
Photographer:
Carol Popp
de Szathmari



Mogoșoaia
Bridge
Photographer:
Carol Popp
de Szathmari

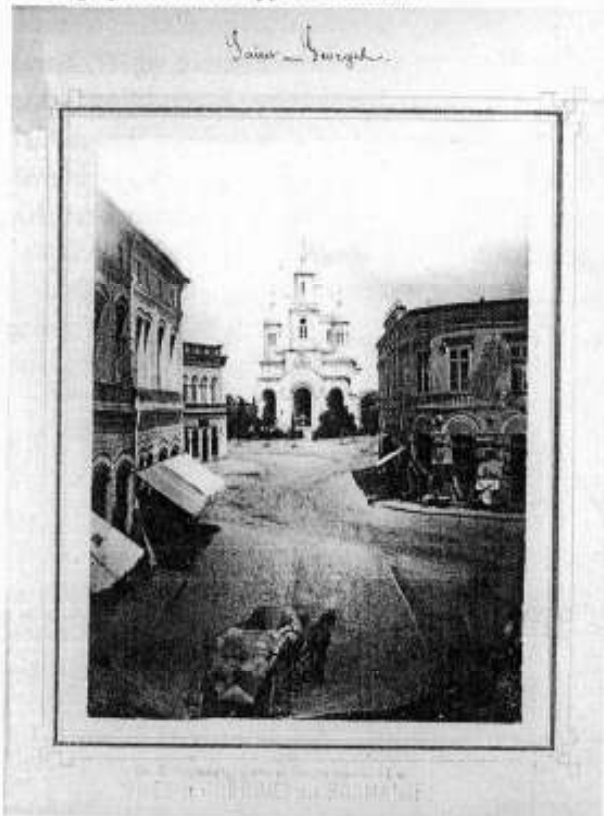


Crimean War
Photographer:
Carol Popp
de Szathmari
1854



The years after the Crimean War abounded in pictures: portraits, group images, and vedutae, most of them of Bucharest. The first photos on ethnographic themes appeared, made in the beginning by Szathmari, then by other

The Saint George Church
 Photographer: Carol Popp de Szathmari



Olt River Valley
 Photographer: Carol Popp de Szathmari



Coltea Tower
 Photographer:
 Carol Popp
 de Szathmari
 1869



his competitor, began his activity. An album presenting Otetelişanu's estate in Magurele still amazes today through grace and poetry. The photographer – the first who was not also a painter – captured those parts of the park that seemed to resonate with his sensitivity.

The Otetelişanu Park
 Photographer:
 Franz Duschek
 1864



Since then, the famous photographer Franz Duschek-father, his nephew by marriage and

The coming of Charles I from the Danube springs stimulated the young prince's desire to





adu Vodă Bridge
Photographer:
Franz Duschek



travel around the country, to know it, and to encounter his subjects. For three years, he had Szathmari as a guide, being a speaker of German at home. The result of these travels during the summers of the years 1866-1868 was a large album of great (especially documentary) value, entitled by the author *Albumul Romania*. The album was available in about three variants.

King Carol I
in the battlefield
Photographer:
Franz Duschek
1877



Romanian army
in the
arian battlefield
Photographer:
Carol Popp
de Szathmari
1877



The War of 1877 meant a new challenge for Szathmari, 65 years of age by then. However, he never left alone for the battlefield. Just as in 1854, he was accompanied by Franz Duschek, Andreas Reiser, Sava Hentia, G. D. Mirea, and Nicolae Grigorescu – some photographers, others painters. We inherited from them essential, very well known images.



The Triumphal
Entrance
of the Army
in Bucharest
Photographer
Franz Mandy
1878

With the entrance of the Army, led by Prince Charles, under the Triumphal Arch after winning the war on the plains of Rumelia in 1877, another photographer emerged, Franz Mandy. Strongly attracted by artistic photography and always attuned to the latest technical innovations, his vision would be special. Beside the multitude of conventional photographs made at the request of his clients, he left us the warmest and most sensitive images of the young Princess Mary, full of artistic values. He dominated Romanian photography until he died, in 1910.



Queen Elisabeth of Romania
Photographer: Franz Mandy

The Royal Ball
Photographer: Franz Mandy
1905



Let me remind you that, from the beginning of the last decade of the 19th century, Mandy had two formidable competitors, Franz Duschekson and John Spirescu. The former flirted with modernist photography – sometimes of a Cubist strain, such as the photos of the Cernavodă Bridge obtained between 1890 and 1895. The latter focused on the poetic image, his ve-

dutae impressing by their freshness, shadows and reflections, appreciated by jury of the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1900. These artists (as they were not only photographers) were clearly his “fellows”, who increased their number every decade in geometric progression and remained “eternal”, only by their quality – absolutely by chance – as witnesses of the time.



Queen Mary
of Romania
Photographer:
Franz Mandy



and received a number of awards from many exhibitions. She used new techniques like solarisation and photomontage. The second article, by Maria Śliwińska from ICIMSS, is a short overview of first experiments in photography done either on Polish territory or abroad by the first photographers and inventors.

Romania is also represented by two articles, one of them by Emanuel Bădescu from the Romanian Academy Library describing 19th century photographs, starting from the first calotype made by Romanian photographer Carol Popp de Szathmari in November 1848. An album compiled by Szathmari in 1862 also belongs to the earliest Romanian photographs that include portraits, group images, and vedutae, most of them of Bucharest. Numerous photographs illustrate this article. The second article, written by Dorottya Újvári, describes works of Hungarian photographer Ferenc Veress (1832-1916), a pioneer of photography active in Transylvania, which belonged at that time to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Veress opened the first photographic studio in Transylvania, in his hometown Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca now) in 1853 when he was 21 years old.

An article by Anna Grusková from the Theatre Institute in Bratislava, **Slovakia** moves us to the theatrical world. She makes us aware of the difficulties in taking photographs of people moving when acting. One of the oldest photographs from the Bratislava National Theatre come from a staging in 1935 of "Lady Macbeth in the Mtsensk District". These kinds of photographs are difficult to make, as they should include elements of theatrical expression, such as lighting, sound, movement, mystery and secrets, or art. The theatre's collection of photographs includes not only portraits of actors and actresses, theatre ensembles, costumes, set design, and theatre buildings, but also various forms of social life in cities, towns, and villages.

The most complex description concerns the situation of **Spanish**, or more precisely, Catalanian photographs through the contributions of four authors. Among them are an article by David Iglésias Franch, about the Centre for Image Research and Diffusion in Girona, with collections covering the first hundred years (1839-1939) of photography; and an article by Lourdes Martínez Prado describing a set of photographs from the construction of the Oliana dam in 1946. Imma Navarro i Molleví presents photographic collections in the National Archive of Catalonia whilst Francesc Sánchez Mata gives an overview of the Josep Marimon i Vidal Photographic Collection of the same archive. And finally, Alan Smith from TopFoto presents the work of **English** photographer John Topham (1908-1992), who was fascinated by photography as a schoolboy as well as at the time of his work for the Metropolitan Police, which he used as an opportunity for taking pictures of sociological scenes and conditions from the places avoided by the upper class.

Unfortunately, we are missing here information from such countries well advanced in photography as France and Germany. This suggests that *Uncommon Culture* should plan another issue devoted to photography to expand on this interesting topic.



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Emanuel Bădescu was born in Corabia on August 25, 1952. He is a graduate of the Faculty of History and currently a librarian at the Romanian Academy Library in the Department of Engravings. He is the author of the volumes "The Great Fire of Bucharest and other stories from Bucharest", "Things about Old Bucharest", "Mazar Pasha's Bucharest", "Romanians' National Anthems", "Bucharest under the Transience Government...", and "1918. Alba Iulia - Bucharest". He is a co-author of the volumes "Brief History of Royalty in Romania", "Nicolae Ionescu. Old Bucharest", "Carol Szathmari, Photographer of Bucharest", "Bucharest during Carol I", a tome comprising a summary of the history of photography of Bucharest.



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