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Project site: Romania**

## **Report for the Hellenic Council Grant**

I spent five weeks this summer, from the 17<sup>th</sup> of July until the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August, in Bucharest, Romania, researching the political trajectory of an outstanding general in the Romanian Revolution of 1821, Dimitrie Macedonschi. I performed my research in the Romanian National Archives in July and at the National Library in August. The leader of this revolution, Tudor Vladimirescu, and the revolution itself are two of the foundational myths of the Romanian nation. You find a romanticized version of the events in textbooks, newspapers and even an eight year old will be able to tell you a fairy tale about this revolution. And truth be told, what can be more uniting than the image of a man who sacrificed himself for his own people, fighting against foreign repressors? This project was therefore of utmost importance for me personally, because I was able to deconstruct one of those narratives that lie at the basis of the historical and ethical perspectives that I have of my nation.

A bit of background on the revolution of 1821. It came about in Wallachia after more than a century of foreign rule in the two Romanian states at the time- Moldova and Wallachia. The Moldavians and Wallachians had been under Turkish pseudo-protectorate for centuries, but they had had plenty of autonomy to deal with internal issues until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, in 1711 in Moldova and 1716 in Wallachia, the Phanariote regime was instituted and for over a hundred years, the countries were ruled by Greek diplomats, who resided in Istanbul and whose only aim during their short rule was to get rich. After such a long time of arbitrary governing, the two countries were in need of serious social, political and economic reforms, which is what Tudor Vladimirescu promised to bring.

Dimitrie Macedonschi, a captain in Tudor's Pandur army, was his right hand in the beginning of the revolution. He was actually Tudor's military counterpart, namely he organized the forces and designed the plan for the coup in January 1821. Before the coup, Tudor did not enjoy the Romanian boyars' support. He eventually received some support, but that was only after Russia expressed its willingness to protect the new regime against the Turks. Macedonschi was one of the few important figures who risked being on Vladimirescu's side in a time when few others did. Nevertheless, towards the end of this revolt, Macedonschi, together with Hagi Prodan, another Pandur captain, were the main "conspirators" who betrayed Tudor. They didn't kill him themselves, but turned him in to Alexander Ypsilantis and did nothing to prevent his death.

I went into this project with the predetermined idea that something happened in those four months between the coup in January and Tudor's decapitation in May 1821 and therefore Macedonschi switched sides. I was looking for a specific fact or event, for an incentive for his so-called treason. I was furthermore expecting him to maybe have

secretly acted in the name of another political entity all along. And while I found some sources that argued that he was sympathetic with the Philikí Etaireía<sup>1</sup>, that statement is isolated and not supported by evidence.

In fact, the most apparent short term cause for Macedonschi's treason and ensuing failure of the revolution was Tudor Vladimirescu himself. His poor leadership skills and his lack of experience caused Macedonschi and the rest of the generals to become suspicious and afraid of Tudor. I have to admit that the History that I learned in high school was quite different from what I discovered this summer. In my textbook, the leader was mythified, his conspirators vilified and the whole story presented in a very subjective fashion.

The Romanian, but more importantly foreign historiography deal with Tudor's personality as a central element of the revolution. Filimon, a Greek Historian, describes Tudor as being narrow minded and fickle, uneducated, vain, cruel and completely devoid of military talent. "He deserved what Olimpiotul and Ypsilantis did to him." While this might be a harsh description, there is a seed of truth in Filimon's statements. In his extremism, Tudor committed atrocious acts that lost him the support of his own soldiers. For example, in order to chastise them for robbing the already poor villagers he killed them in horrible ways and without giving them the right to defend themselves. He was suspicious and distrustful of everyone, but by being so and not dissimulating it, he managed to make himself suspicious to the others. Because he didn't share with anyone what his relations with the Greeks, Turks and Russians were, he was thought to side with these actors and against the Wallachian interests at different moments in time. Even the French, Dutch and British sources<sup>2</sup> make associations between Tudor Vladimirescu and different foreign powers.

Macedonschi's decision to part with Vladimirescu only came as a natural consequence of Tudor's character, which translated into poor political and military decisions. When a man is the state, which is what Tudor Vladimirescu attempted to be for four months (a just state, nevertheless a dictatorship), the reason for the state's failure is expected to reside in him. I was nevertheless surprised by my findings due to the education that I received. I was trained to think that Tudor was the hero and Macedonschi the betrayer of the national cause. As it turned out, history is rather gray and not so much in black and white.

One important primary source that deals with the events in the Balkans in this period, and especially in Wallachia, is La Gaceta de Madrid, which I consulted in microfilm in the National Library of Spain. I am still deciding on a paper for my senior essay for the Spanish major, which I will write next semester. But it is possible that I write on the representation of the Romanians in the Spanish press of the time. The research that I did over the summer will be presented at the Mellon forum in November and will possibly turn into my senior essay in spring.

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<sup>1</sup> Fotino, Ilie Tudor Vladimirescu si Alexandru Ipsilant in Revolutiunea de la 1821 numita Zarava, Bucharest, 1874

<sup>2</sup> J.M. Querard, Wilkinson, Raffanel

