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The Process of Modernisation Reflected in the Activity and Writings of Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu. The Role of Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu in the Modernisation of the State Archives (1938–1953)

ABSTRACT

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***The Process of Modernisation Reflected in the Activity and Writings of
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Modernisation of the State Archives (1938–1953)***

ABSTRACT

The process of modernisation of Romanian society during the interwar period has been addressed in numerous works and studies over time¹. The present research seeks to complement this historiographical discourse by proposing several innovative elements. It aims to capture modernisation both as a conceptual framework and as an ongoing process in its concrete manifestations, through an interdisciplinary approach situated at the intersection of history and sociology.

During the interwar period, both historiography and sociology assumed an active role in conceptualising and implementing actions aimed at modernising Romanian society², each embracing the character of a militant discipline. This study analyses the manner in which one of the historians of the period, Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu (1904–1976), contributed to this process of modernisation, within a context in which history and sociology presented themselves as reform-oriented militant sciences³.

The aim of my research is not to present a biography of Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu, but to undertake a socio-historical study of his activity at the head of the State Archives from a dual perspective: on the one hand, I analyse his role in the modernisation of archival science itself; on the other, his action in modernising the institution of the State Archives as a social phenomenon⁴.

The proposed research makes an original contribution from three complementary perspectives: thematic, methodological and source-based. The modernisation of the State Archives has thus far been treated in a fragmentary manner, often from strictly

¹ See Keith Hitchins, *România: 1866–1947*, 4th edition, (translated by George G. Potra, Delia Răzdolescu), Humanitas, București, 2013, pp. 414-460; 522-570; 571-616, (capitolul 10, „Viață politică, 1919-1940; capitolul 13, „Al Doilea Război Mondial” și capitolul 14, „Tranziția, 1944-1947”).

² See Z. Ornea, *Anii treizeci. Extrema dreaptă românească*, ediția a IV-a, , Cartea Românească, București, 2015, pp. 21-73 (mai ales capitolul I: „Democrația și raționalismul sub acuzare”)

³ Dana Costin, „Istorie și sociologie în România: de la primele întâlniri la inovațiile interdisciplinare ale Școlii Gusti”, in *Transilvania*, 1/2025, pp. 97-105.

⁴ Eadem, „Evoluția instituției și științei arhivistice românești în timpul directoratului lui Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu (1938-1953)”, in *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Contemporană (SMIC)*, vol. XXII, 2023, pp. 98-114.

biographical or technical-administrative angles⁵. The present study instead advances a comprehensive socio-historical approach that examines the relationships between the individual (Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu), the institution (the State Archives), and the socio-political context (interwar Romania, the wartime period, and the post-war era).

The originality of the approach also lies in the chosen method: the combination of microhistorical analysis with social history⁶ and the instruments of historical sociology⁷ allows for the reconstruction of a complex institutional dynamic, involving both internal conflict and interaction with successive political regimes. From this perspective, the case of the State Archives becomes a representative example of the manner in which cultural institutions in Romania were simultaneously agents of modernisation and objects of ideological reconfiguration.

The contemporary relevance of the topic is supported by the growing interest in the history of cultural and scientific institutions in Eastern Europe, within the broader context of the revalorisation of institutional memory and the critical-reflexive reassessment of the Romanian twentieth century. The topic contributes to a deeper understanding of the processes of symbolic, disciplinary and administrative negotiation through which institutions adapted to, or resisted, ideological pressures and political transformations⁸.

The importance of the study is further supported by the use of documentary fonds that have been difficult to access or insufficiently exploited: the file from the CNSAS archive concerning Sacerdoțeanu's activity, internal minutes, autobiographies, professional correspondence, administrative reports, and indirect testimonies regarding the institutional climate. These sources allow not only for a factual reconstruction, but also for an interpretation of the social meanings attributed to modernisation by the actors involved. The research thus brings into focus not only a prominent historiographical figure, but also a model of analysis applicable to other studies of institutional transformations in twentieth-

⁵ See Mihail Fănescu, Ileana Leonte, Victor Trandaf și Ion Vasile, *Arhivele Statului. 125 de ani de activitate 1831-1956*, Direcția Generală a Arhivelor Statului din Republica Populară Română, București 1957.

⁶ See Karl Appuhn, „Microhistory”, in *Encyclopedia of European Social History from 1350-2000*, vol. I, ediție coordonată de Peter N. Stearns, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 2001, pp. 105-112.

⁷ Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, ediția a II-a, (trad.) John și Anne C. Tedeschi, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1992, pp. vii-xiv; Giovanni Levi, “On Microhistory”, in Peter Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, Polity Press, 1991; see also Theda Skocpol (ed.), *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984.

⁸ See Katherine Verdery, *Secrets and Truths: Ethnography in the Archive of Romania's Secret Police*, Central European University Press, 2014; și *My Life as a Spy: Investigations in a Secret Police File*, Duke University Press, 2018. See also Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România, *Raport final*, ed: Vladimir Tismăneanu, Dorin Dobrințu, Cristian Vasile, București, 2006 (especially the 3rd chapter: „Societate, Economie, Cultură” - Ideologie și teroare. Monopolul asupra vieții culturale.), pp. 488-508.

century Romania, contributing to the articulation of a social history of expertise and scientific institutions.

The topic is situated within a disciplinary and interdisciplinary framework in which social history, historical sociology and archival science converge. Although interest in the history of cultural and scientific institutions has increased in recent decades, studies dedicated to the State Archives and, in particular, to the activity of Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu, remain few and insufficiently correlated with the theories and methods of social history.

The existing literature concerning Sacerdoțeanu is fragmentary, being dominated by succinct biographical approaches or technical analyses centred on administrative reforms⁹. These contributions, although useful, do not comprehensively address the interaction between the institution's internal dynamics, the socio-political context, and the director's role as an agent of modernisation.

Similarly, the history of Romanian archives remains underrepresented in major syntheses on the institutional culture of the twentieth century. Compared with research devoted to other institutions such as museums, libraries and universities, the State Archives appear only sporadically, most often in legislative or ideological contexts. The proposed topic therefore responds to a genuine need for a deeper examination of the history of a fundamental institution responsible for preserving national memory, as well as of the ways in which historical expertise and administrative decisions were influenced by successive political regimes.

At the international level, research on the modernisation of archives is situated within the broader direction of a social and cultural history of expertise, which emphasises the interaction between administrative structures, professional practices and legitimising discourses¹⁰. Such approaches are illustrated by studies dedicated to archives in Central and Eastern Europe, in Poland, Hungary or the former East Germany¹¹. The present study

⁹ See Ana Felicia Diaconu, „Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu”, in *Hrisovul*, Serie nouă, VIII 2002, pp. 93-96; eadem, „Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu - omul și opera. Contribuții la dezvoltarea științelor auxiliare ale istoriei”, in *Revista Arhivelor*, LXVI, 1-2 2004, pp. 37-47; Corneliu-Mihail Lungu, „In memoriam. Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu, Director General al Arhivelor Statului”, in *Revista Arhivelor*, LXVI, nr. 1-2 2004, pp.24-28; Gheorghe Popa, „Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu și învățământul arhivistic din România”, in *Hrisovul*, XIII, Serie nouă, București, 2007, pp. 23-33; Bogdan Popa, „Biografia lui Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu: o reevaluare a surselor”, in *Revista Istorică*, no. 3-4, mai-august 2009, pp. 291-298.

¹⁰ See Francis X. Blouin Jr., William G. Rosenberg, *Processing the Past: Contesting Authority in History and the Archives*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011; Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988.

¹¹ See „Rețeaua Arhivelor Statului din Polonia”: <https://archiwa.gov.pl/en/> (accessed on 20 octombrie 2023).

seeks to contribute to this literature through a well-documented Romanian case study constructed on the basis of a comparative-regional methodology.

Accordingly, the research aligns itself with an emerging field in European historiography, contributing not only to the understanding of the modernisation of archives in Romania, but also to a broader comprehension of how institutional transformations both reflect and participate in processes of social and political modernisation in the twentieth century.

The research began from the conviction that the modernisation of the Directorate of the State Archives between 1938 and 1953 cannot be understood solely through the lens of the legislative framework or changes in political regimes. My principal hypothesis was that modernisation arises from a permanent interaction between norms and practices, between regulations imposed from above and everyday adaptations carried out from below. In other words, I considered that the institution's genuine transformation must be sought not only in the Official Gazette or ministerial decrees, but also in minutes, internal reports, inventories, articles in the wall newspaper and autobiographies.

I formulated a second hypothesis concerning the non-linear character of the process. I assumed that the professionalisation of archival science did not follow a straight line, nor was it exclusively the result of political will. On the contrary, I anticipated that it was also constructed through the accumulation of instruments and the sedimentation of working practices, even under conditions of crisis or ideological control. The standardisation of terminology, the drafting of guides and the training of a generation of archivists are elements which, even if temporarily slowed or diverted, created a durable infrastructure.

A related hypothesis of a prosopographical nature was that Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu's legitimacy cannot be reduced to the offices he held or to his administrative decisions. I considered that it must be understood on three levels: institutional (official recognition), intellectual (scientific and pedagogical contributions), and autobiographical (the strategies through which he presented and shaped his own biography). The autobiographies of 1948, 1950 and 1961, for instance, are not merely personal narratives, but documents through which he negotiated his position and asserted his place within the professional field.

Through these hypotheses, I sought to demonstrate that the modernisation of the State Archives is, in essence, a social history approached from a microhistorical perspective: it unfolds in the interactions between norms and practices, in conflicts among employees, in rituals of criticism and self-criticism, in intellectual networks, and in the autobiographies through which professional authority is constructed.

Research Objectives

Starting from these hypotheses, I formulated five major objectives, each intended to illuminate a facet of the modernisation process. As indicated above, the general objective of the research is to produce a comprehensive socio-historical analysis of the modernisation of the State Archives during the directorship of Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu (1938–1953), with emphasis on institutional dynamics, reformist discourses and the symbolic reconfigurations associated with this transition¹². The thesis seeks to understand how this cultural-administrative institution was transformed under the successive impact of political regimes and how Sacerdoțeanu managed, at theoretical, administrative and strategic levels, the tensions between professional vocation, ideological constraints and necessary reforms¹³. In order to achieve this general objective, the research pursues a series of specific objectives (hereafter O1–O5):

O1. Reconstruction of the political-institutional context (1938–1953)

I aim to analyse the manner in which changes of political regime (the Carolist authoritarian regime, the Antonescu dictatorship, and the communisation of institutions after 1945) directly influenced the Directorate of the State Archives. Particular attention will be paid to moments of crisis (the territorial losses of 1940, the bombings of 1944), as well as to administrative reorganisations (the educational reform of 1948, the transfer of the Archives to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1951), in order to demonstrate how the institution experienced these transformations both at the normative level and in its daily activity¹⁴. Thus, I undertake an analysis of the socio-political context of Romania between 1938 and 1953 in order to understand the structural framework within which archival reforms unfolded and the institutional challenges faced by the leadership of the State Archives.

O2. Analysis of the reform directions initiated by Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu

I intend to reconstruct the logic of the modernising programme promoted by Sacerdoțeanu on three levels: conceptual (the establishment of a unified professional vocabulary and classification patterns), organisational (the introduction of clear procedures for inventorying, registration and departmental accountability), and professional (the

¹² See Joan M. Schwartz & Terry Cook, „Archives, Records, and Power...”, pp. 1-19; see also Terry Cook, Joan M. Schwartz, „From (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance”, in *Archival Science* 2, 2002, pp. 171–185.

¹³ Dana Costin, „Evoluția instituției și științei arhivistice românești...”, pp. 98-114

¹⁴ See Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism pentru eternitate. O istorie politică a comunismului românesc*, (trad.) Cristina Petrescu, Dragoș Petrescu, prefață Cristian Vasile, București, Humanitas, 2014 (especially chapter III and IV), pp. 107-144; 145-172.

elaboration of instruments such as inventories, guides, methodological instructions and catalogues). The purpose is to demonstrate that these measures were not isolated initiatives, but components of a coherent programme that strengthened the institution even under difficult political conditions¹⁵.

O3. Investigation of internal conflicts and mechanisms of adaptation

I propose to examine the ways in which professional and political tensions shaped institutional life. I will analyse minutes of meetings, articles in the wall newspaper, inspection reports and denunciations (particularly those from 1952–1953), in order to highlight the climate of suspicion, the rituals of sanctioning and the strategies of solidarity. This objective seeks to show how the institution functioned through a continuous negotiation between competence and conformity, between the director's professional usefulness and the ideological pressures of the time¹⁶.

O4. Assessment of the professionalisation of the field and the consolidation of scientific discourse

I intend to evaluate the extent to which the period 1938–1953 produced a durable professional infrastructure. I will employ operational indicators, such as the number of researchers, the volumes consulted, the archival items inventoried, and editorial series such as *Revista Arhivelor* and *Hrisovul*, in order to demonstrate how activity evolved from sporadic practices dependent on individual initiatives to a standardised organisational culture recognised at an academic level¹⁷.

O5. Reconstruction of the institutional and intellectual legitimacy of Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu

I aim to analyse the manner in which Sacerdoțeanu constructed and defended his professional authority on three levels: institutional (through his appointment in 1938, successive reconfirmations and his role in the 1951 reorganisation), intellectual (through inventories, guides, instructions and the training of disciples), and autobiographical (through the strategies of self-legitimation in the autobiographies written in 1948, 1950 and 1961). Within this framework, I will also discuss his relationship with Nicolae Iorga,

¹⁵ Dana Costin, „Evoluția instituției și științei arhivistice românești...”, pp. 98-114.

¹⁶ See Andrei Florin Sora, „Funcționari publici în primii ani interbelici (1918–1923). Cadru legal, forme asociative, autoreprezentări”, in Sorin Radu și Oliver Jens Schmitt (coordonatori), *România interbelică. Modernizare politico-instituțională și discurs național*, Iași, Polirom, 2023, pp. 134-158.

¹⁷ Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu, *Îndrumări în cercetările istorice*, București, Editura Casa Școalelor, 1943; idem, *Arhivistica*, București, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1970.

regarded as a source of prestige, a vulnerability in the 1950s, and a legacy later recovered¹⁸.

By achieving these objectives, the thesis seeks to contribute to the development of a social history of cultural institutions in Romania and to a deeper understanding of the relationship between expertise, modernity and political regimes.

The methodology adopted in this research reflects the interdisciplinary character of the approach, situated at the intersection of social history and institutional analysis. As the principal objective is to understand a process of institutional modernisation within a context of profound political transition, I opted for a methodological combination capable of enabling both structural analysis and exploration at the micro level, namely interpersonal relations, everyday practices and the meanings attributed by actors to their own activity.

The principal analytical instrument is the microhistorical method, applied to the case of the State Archives and the activity of Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu. This method allows for a detailed examination of institutional processes and individual strategies in relation to the social and political dynamics of the period 1938–1953. Microhistory is complemented by a contextual analysis grounded in historical sociology, with emphasis on networks of ideas, the legitimacy of expertise and the construction of professional authority within a changing political regime.

Another fundamental methodological element is the analysis of institutional and professional discourse, with the aim of understanding how reforms were justified, contested or internalised. The analysis encompasses administrative texts, legislative projects, autobiographies and memorandum-type sources, all treated as expressions of a particular vision of the institution, expertise and the role of the state.

The research is based on a wide range of primary sources, including:

- archival fonds from the National Archives and from the CNSAS archive (personal files, minutes, internal and external correspondence);
- memoranda, opinions, draft laws and regulations authored by Sacerdoțeanu;
- articles and volumes published by him, particularly in *Revista Arhivelor*;
- autobiographical sources, including the autobiographies from 1948, 1950 and 1961.

This documentary basis is complemented by relevant secondary sources from Romanian and international historiography, particularly works in the field of the social

¹⁸ See Dana Costin, „Portretul Intelectual și uman al lui N. Iorga în scrierile lui Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu”, în *Revista Istorică*, tom. XXXII, 2021, nr. 1-3, pp. 87-99.

history of expertise, scientific institutions and administrative culture in Eastern Europe. The choice of this complex method is justified by the layered and contradictory character of archival modernisation during the period under study. Only an approach that simultaneously integrates institutional, biographical, discursive and comparative dimensions can faithfully render the logic of this process and its specific features within the Romanian context.

Innovative Elements

The originality of the research lies in the application of a socio-historical perspective to archival science, a field treated in Romanian historiography almost exclusively in technical, legal or administrative terms. I sought to demonstrate that the State Archives can be understood not merely as an institution of storage and preservation, but as a social and cultural space in which professional expertise, institutional authority and ideological loyalty are negotiated.

An important contribution consists in placing administrative sources (orders, reports, minutes, inventories, annual accounts) in dialogue with autobiographical sources, particularly the autobiographies of Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu. This combination enabled me to capture simultaneously the institution's "official face" and the individual strategies through which actors presented and justified their roles within a continuously changing political context.

I also made use of documents previously regarded as marginal, such as articles from the wall newspaper, minutes of trade union meetings, denunciations and reports, transforming them from secondary materials into central points of observation. These proved to be privileged windows onto mechanisms of adaptation and conflict, onto the institutional rituals through which pressure and control were exercised, as well as onto forms of internal solidarity.

Another specific contribution of the research is the reinterpretation of the relationship between Nicolae Iorga and Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu. I demonstrated that this connection cannot be reduced to a simple biographical lineage but must be understood as part of a social history of intellectual legitimacy: a source of prestige in the interwar years, a vulnerability in the early communist period, and a cultural legacy subsequently recovered.

Overall, the thesis proposes an interdisciplinary framework that combines microhistory, social history and discourse analysis, applied to a case study reflecting broader processes of institutional modernisation in contexts marked by discontinuity and

authoritarianism. This approach opens the way for similar studies of other cultural institutions, contributing to the consolidation of a social history of expertise in twentieth-century Romania.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The structure of the thesis reflects the internal logic of an interdisciplinary endeavour that combines social history, institutional analysis and the history of ideas. The study of the modernisation of the State Archives under the leadership of Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu (1938–1953) is conceived not merely as a historical recovery, but as a broader inquiry into the ways in which institutions evolve, reform and adapt within contexts of ideological transition and political pressure. The modernisation of the archives thus becomes an occasion for reflection on the role of expertise in the public sphere, on the tensions between authority and professional autonomy, and on the capacity of institutions to navigate periods of crisis and restructuring. What follows is a concise presentation of the thesis. The thesis is structured into seven distinct chapters, each contributing to a comprehensive analysis of the modernisation process from the perspective of a social history of the State Archives under the directorship of Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu (1938–1953).

The introductory section establishes the theoretical, methodological and thematic coordinates of the research, justifying the choice of subject and formulating the key questions of the investigation. It discusses the personal and academic motivations, the scientific context within which the study is situated, and the innovative elements brought forward by the proposed approach.

The first chapter lays the conceptual foundations of the research by analysing theories of modernisation and their adaptation to the Romanian case. It provides a contextualisation of institutional modernisation processes and proposes a reading of the State Archives from the perspective of social history, combining conceptual approaches with a concrete analysis of the Romanian context and of the case study represented by the modernisation of the State Archives under the leadership of Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu.

From a conceptual perspective, modernisation is understood as a complex and multifaceted process, extending beyond mere structural change and integrating symbolic, ideological and relational dimensions. A critical analysis of modernisation theories, beginning with the classical visions of Weber and Parsons and continuing with the reformulations proposed by Eisenstadt and Bourdieu, highlights the plural and contextual

character of modernisation. In particular, the sociological perspective inspired by Pierre Bourdieu, with its emphasis on power relations, symbolic capital and the professional field, provides the theoretical instruments necessary for an in-depth exploration of institutional processes and the active role of social actors.

From a methodological standpoint, the chapter advocates a microhistorical and cultural-institutional approach characteristic of German social history, emphasising the detailed analysis of the relationships between expertise, authority and institutions. This model enables not only the description of structural changes, but also the understanding of the internal mechanisms of reforms, tensions and everyday negotiations, offering a comprehensive and nuanced perspective on institutional modernisation.

The analysis applied to the Romanian context reveals the contested and fragmented character of modernisation, reflected in the intellectual debates among Gherea, Zeletin, Lovinescu and Gusti. The interwar and post-war Romanian cultural and ideological context decisively influenced institutional reforms and the professional status of the archivist. The reforms initiated by Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu cannot therefore be understood outside this broader framework of debates and ideological conflicts, deeply marked by the contradictions and tensions of the period. The case study of the modernisation of the State Archives demonstrates that institutional reforms are never neutral or linear. Under Sacerdoțeanu's directorship, the institution underwent a profound transformation at administrative, symbolic and professional levels, shaping a modern, autonomous and responsible ethos. At the same time, the analysis reveals how this professional autonomy was constantly negotiated and contested, particularly after 1948, when ideological pressures redefined the relationship between expertise and political power. Therefore, institutional modernisation is fundamentally a socio-historical process, defined by the complex interaction between ideas, structures, actors and contexts. Through the adopted approach, the chapter seeks to demonstrate that the modernisation of the State Archives under Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu represents a paradigmatic example of interdisciplinary and contextual analysis, highlighting the tensions and negotiations inherent in any institutional reform project within specific historical contexts.

The second chapter proposes a synthetic history of the institution of archives, from medieval origins to the post-war period, emphasising the administrative, ideological and symbolic transformations that shaped these structures.

This evolution is traced from the beginnings of archival practices in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, through the processes of institutionalisation and professionalisation in the modern and contemporary periods, to the particularities of Romanian archival science, with special emphasis on the intellectual and institutional project of Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu.

The analysis demonstrates that archives have never been merely passive repositories of documents, but active instruments through which legitimacy has been constructed, power exercised, and collective identities shaped. From ancient archives designed to legitimise authority and social order, through the centralisation and rationalisation of the French model, to the ideological rigidity of the Soviet model, the archive has consistently functioned as a space in which memory and official truth are negotiated.

In the Romanian case, the institution of the State Archives, founded in 1831, evolved under the influence of external models and the domestic political context, culminating in the reforms implemented by Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu between 1938 and 1953. His project, grounded in a modern conception of archival science, marked a turning point in the development of the institution, consolidating the professional identity of the Romanian archivist and imposing clear administrative norms. However, these reforms were affected by the ideological and political pressures of the communist regime, generating internal tensions and conflicts and illustrating the complexity of the relationships between expertise, administration and ideology, as well as the importance of selective processes and personal influences in the formation of institutional memory. The understanding of archives as institutions cannot therefore be separated from the historical and political context that shaped them, and the role of the archivist is not neutral, but entails strategic decisions and essential moral responsibilities¹⁹.

Archives represent dynamic structures, continuously negotiated between memory, power and knowledge. They are spaces of authenticity as well as of control, constantly reflecting the values, tensions and interests of the societies that created and administered them. These findings substantiate the relevance of the case study devoted to Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu, which provides a concrete example of how documentary selection reflects power relations and professional vision.

¹⁹ Joan M. Schwartz & Terry Cook, „Archives, Records, and Power...”, pp. 1-19.

The third chapter is devoted to the analysis of the institutional reforms implemented by Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu during his directorship. It examines processes of professional regulation, internal reorganisation, conflicts and initiatives of external promotion, with emphasis on the interactions between individual and structure, highlighting both institutional dynamics and the professional and ideological conflicts that accompanied archival modernisation. Far from constituting a linear development, this history reveals a series of discontinuities, tensions and moments of redefinition of the function of the archives, reflecting the complexity of the relationship between memory, authority and power²⁰.

In the premodern era, archives operated within informal frameworks, often dependent on ecclesiastical institutions or local administrative bodies. The consolidation of the modern state brought with it legislative regulations that sought to transform these disparate practices into a coherent system structured around the idea of a national documentary heritage²¹. The nineteenth-century regulations laid the foundations of a modern archival infrastructure, yet their implementation frequently remained precarious owing to the lack of specialised personnel and of a uniform institutional culture. The interwar period would attempt to remedy precisely these deficiencies through scientific instruments and professional training.

The professionalisation initiated in the interwar period under the leadership of Constantin Moisil succeeded in imposing a solid methodological framework, but did not eliminate inefficiencies and the informal culture of archival work. In this context, Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu assumed the leadership of the institution in 1938 and initiated a far-reaching reform marked by a modernising vision, but also by an authoritarian style of leadership. His attempt to discipline, standardise and control archival activity generated significant resistance, reflecting the clash between two models of professional authority: one informal, based on seniority and individual autonomy, and the other formalised, oriented towards efficiency and institutional conformity²².

Under the pressure of the communist regime established after 1948, the archives were reorganised as instruments of ideological surveillance. The subordination of the State Archives to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1951 radically transformed the function of

²⁰ Joan M. Schwartz; Terry Cook, „Archives, Records, and Power...”, pp. 1–2.

²¹ See Michel Duchein, „The History of European Archives and the Development of the Archival Profession in Europe”, in *The American Archivist* 55, 1992, nr. 1, pp. 16–18.

²² Constantin Bălan, „«Revista Arhivelor» la 70 de ani de la apariție (1924–1994)”, in *Revista Arhivelor* LVI, 1994, nr. 1, pp. 14–16.

the institution, which shifted from the role of guarantor of collective memory to that of administrator of a politically filtered history. The regional network and the corresponding normative acts, such as Decree no. 17/1951 and Council of Ministers Decision no. 472 of 29 May 1951, are clearly reflected in local practice²³. In the specialised literature, this transformation is interpreted as the transition to the logic of a “total archive” or National Archival Fonds, in which state control over holdings, access and publication becomes the organising principle²⁴.

In this chapter, I therefore sought to demonstrate that the history of the State Archives must be read not only in administrative terms, but also as a barometer of the broader changes that affected professions, institutions and documentary culture in modern Romania. The archives were not merely repositories of the past, but spaces of negotiation between authority and knowledge, between bureaucratic routine and identity construction, between professional vocation and ideological imperatives, an interpretation aligned with contemporary research on “archives, documents and power”²⁵.

Naturally, this institutional modernisation, tense and often contradictory, cannot be understood in the absence of its scientific project. The reform promoted by Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu at the head of the State Archives did not confine itself to administrative or legislative aspects; it was accompanied, in parallel, by a sustained effort to consolidate archival science as an autonomous field, endowed with its own concepts, methodologies and working instruments.

Chapter IV, constructed on the basis of documents from the CNSAS archive²⁶, deepens the conflictual dimension of the period by investigating internal tensions, strategies of institutional survival and mechanisms of political control. The analysis of the contradictory portraits constructed around Sacerdoțeanu offers a nuanced image of the relationship between professionalism, ideology and legitimacy.

The file from the CNSAS archives concerning Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu provides a complex and vivid perspective on the institutional and political realities of the State Archives during the difficult years of the establishment and consolidation of the

²³ Mircea Timbuș, „Serviciul Regional Arad al Arhivelor Statului (1951–1956)”, în *Revista Arhivelor* LXXVII, 2011, nr. 1, pp. 54–55

²⁴ See Bogdan-Florin Popovici, „‘Arhiva totală’: experiența românească. O incursiune în istoria conceptului de Fond Arhivistic Național”, in *Revista Arhivelor*, vol. LXXXV, 2008, nr.1, pp. 24-26, 46-50.

²⁵ Joan M. Schwartz; Terry Cook, „Archives, Records, and Power...”, pp. 1–2, 6–8.

²⁶ Vezi A.C.N.S.A.S., Fond K, (Cadre), dosar nr. 12859.

communist regime in Romania. The analysed documents reveal not only the mechanisms of ideological control and pressure exercised upon institutions, but also the ways in which personal life, minor gestures and interpersonal relationships were converted into political vulnerabilities, systematically exploited in order to restructure institutional authority. As Daniela Ciobanu-Ioniță has observed, “denunciation was not merely an isolated instrument of repression, but a social and discursive practice with deep implications for institutional dynamics”²⁷, a fact profoundly reflected in the case of the State Archives.

When the analysed material is viewed as a whole, it becomes evident that the Directorate of the State Archives was not merely an institution marked by occasional conflicts, but one involved in a profound reconfiguration of relations of loyalty, competence and legitimacy. Behind reports, denunciations and informative notes, a broader struggle emerges, not only for positions, but for the redefinition of dominant values: what type of professionalism is acceptable, who possesses the authority to decide, which forms of behaviour are valued and which become suspect in the new ideological context.

The identified tensions did not stem from a lack of professional activity, but from a deep cleavage between two visions of the role of the archives and of those who served them. For some, continuity, scientific rigour and professional neutrality constituted the foundation of the institution. For others, these had become obstacles to an imperative transformation that required the replacement of old hierarchies with politically compatible ones. Within this climate, every personal relationship, every hesitation and every signature could be politically reinterpreted, according to the logic of a system that privileged adherence rather than competence.

The analysis of the Sacerdoțeanu file enabled me to observe how seemingly minor instruments, such as the wall newspaper, trade union complaints or anonymous denunciations, were used not only to undermine a personal authority, but to construct, step by step, a new institutional order. The State Archives thus appear as a discreet yet decisive laboratory for the rewriting of a desirable Romanian institutional model in the 1950s, achieved not through spectacular gestures, but through attrition, symbolic pressure and the cultivation of suspicion. In this respect, one may concur with Daniela Ciobanu-Ioniță that

²⁷ Daniela Ciobanu-Ioniță, *Delațiunea ca practică socială și discursivă în România comunistă*, București, Editura Universității din București, 2022, p. 76.

the discourse of denunciation is “institutionalised, conspiratorial [...] and subject to a predominantly negative moral evaluation by the greater part of society”²⁸.

The Sacerdoțeanu case is not unique, but it is emblematic: it shows how a form of professional authority can be eroded through an accumulation of persistent gestures that do not seek to prove guilt, but to construct an ideological incompatibility. Beyond the accusations formulated in reports and denunciations, often impossible to verify, what matters in the logic of the regime is the establishment of an irreconcilable rupture between the individual and the new institutional order. Intervention thus becomes inevitable, and the replacement of the director, although difficult in the absence of professionally equivalent personnel, is treated as a necessary political act, all the more so since, at least until the end of his directorship, he was not a party member.

This case is relevant not only for what it reveals about an individual biography, but above all for the manner in which it exposes the mechanisms through which politics penetrates the depths of professional and institutional life. In this chapter, I sought to trace not only the facts, but also the structure of the tension that made possible the substitution of a legitimate authority with a conformist one. The file from the CNSAS archives is therefore not merely a documentary source, but a revealing testimony to the effects of ideological pressure on individual lives and to the fragility of institutions subjected to forced transformations.

Chapter V, structured in three sections, explores Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu’s scientific contribution to the definition of Romanian archival science. It highlights the transformation from independent researcher to theorist of archival science, the construction of a professional language, and the tension between historical vocation and institutional mission. Both academic publications and official reports are analysed, the latter being considered expressions of an integrative conception of modernisation.

The first section of the chapter emphasises the manner in which the themes addressed by Sacerdoțeanu between 1922 and 1950 were influenced by his professional position. From studies in local history, palaeography and diplomatics, published in journals at home and abroad, to methodological works of an applied character, his editorial activity experienced thematic diversification in the first part of his career and a progressive concentration on issues specific to archival science as he assumed administrative positions.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 92

The second section analyses the official reports drafted during the period in which Sacerdoțeanu led the Directorate of the State Archives (1938–1946). These documents are approached not only as administrative sources, but also as expressions of a project of institutionalisation and professional legitimation. Through detailed reporting, the introduction of statistics, methodological justifications and requests for financial and logistical support, Sacerdoțeanu used the official report as a means of constructing a coherent professional identity for the archival institution and for the field of archival science as a whole.

In the third section, the focus shifts to the synthetic works that define the theoretical maturation of his contribution: *Îndrumări în cercetările istorice* (1943) and *Arhivistica* (1970). These works provide a conceptual and methodological systematisation of archival science, propose specialised terminology and formulate fundamental distinctions, such as fonds versus collection and archivology, archivotechnics and archiveconomics, with the aim of stabilising a unified professional language and a specific method. The comparative analysis of the two works highlights both an underlying continuity and an adaptation of language and structure to the ideological context of the communist period.

Thus, Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu's scientific contribution does not consist merely in the production of individual works or in simple institutional involvement, but in the articulation of a vision of archives as a space of research, an instrument of knowledge and an autonomous professional field. Between applied research, institutional justification and theoretical systematisation, a coherent trajectory emerges, marked by methodological consistency and a constant effort to modernise Romanian archives.

Chapter VI approaches Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu's directorship from the perspective of autobiographical texts, treating autobiography as a form of professional self-legitimation. Three key texts, written in different historical and ideological contexts, are analysed in order to capture the discursive strategies through which Sacerdoțeanu constructs a coherent professional identity in the face of the constraints imposed by the communist regime. The chapter offers an internal view of the tensions between loyalty, conformity and aspiration to posterity.

Sacerdoțeanu's professional trajectory, as it emerges from autobiographical texts and institutional documents, provides a relevant case study of the manner in which a twentieth-century intellectual succeeded in maintaining professional continuity while traversing radically different political regimes. Between 1938 and 1953, Sacerdoțeanu led the State

Archives, transforming an archaic institution into a modern structure aligned with the requirements of European archival science. This institutional achievement, however, cannot be separated from the ideological context in which it unfolded.

His autobiographies, written at key intervals in 1948, 1950 and 1961, document not only the evolution of a career, but also the discursive adaptation necessary for survival within a political regime that demanded not only loyalty, but also the rewriting of one's personal past. If the texts of 1948 and 1950 respond directly to the requirements of the personnel apparatus and the Stalinist regime, the 1961 text becomes a form of professional claim, an autobiography written not for the authorities but for posterity. Here, Sacerdoțeanu assumes the role of founder of a discipline, builder of a scholarly school and creator of a distinctive terminology, and his voice acquires a personal, reflective and even melancholic tone.

At the same time, the analysis of the documents shows that the loyalty expressed in writing was not accompanied by deep ideological conviction, and the regime was aware of this. Sacerdoțeanu was not a militant, but a specialist who understood that professional survival required the simulation of the expected discourse. His strategies, including the use of the regime's language in key texts, the avoidance of explicit political positioning and the emphasis on work efficiency, were sometimes interpreted as duplicity and at other times as neutrality. The truth likely lies between the two: Sacerdoțeanu practised a form of professional adaptation that enabled him to remain active and influential within a system in which many other voices were silenced.

Chapter VII examines the influence of Nicolae Iorga on the thought and activity of Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu. The master–disciple relationship is analysed on multiple levels, intellectual, institutional and affective, and is traced in its evolution from enthusiastic collaboration to strategic distancing during the communist period, culminating in cautious attempts at ideological and cultural recuperation in the 1960s and 1970s.

The intellectual relationship between Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu and Nicolae Iorga goes beyond the simple bond between disciple and mentor, reflecting instead the manner in which Romanian intellectuals of the twentieth century negotiated the complex challenges of profoundly different historical and ideological contexts. This relationship did not consist merely of a unilateral transfer of intellectual influence, but involved a permanent dynamic of adaptation and reinterpretation through which Sacerdoțeanu shaped his own professional and intellectual identity within a restrictive and shifting socio-political framework.

Far from ending with Iorga's physical disappearance, the relationship between the two historians continued in the form of an intellectual legacy that had to be managed with prudence and subtlety during the communist period. This legacy was not exclusively positive, grounded in mutual admiration and intellectual collaboration, but also entailed real risks imposed by the context of the time. The analysis of this relationship thus offers a revealing perspective on the compromises and subtle strategies employed by Romanian intellectuals under the communist regime, as well as on the ways in which valuable intellectual legacies survived, discreetly and sometimes covertly, under the conditions of a dominant official ideology.

In particular, the dual strategy adopted by Sacerdoțeanu, combining the official ideological reinterpretation of Iorga with the reaffirmation of his genuine contributions to archival science and the culture of the book, reveals the complexity of the means by which Romanian intellectuals preserved and protected their intellectual inheritances in difficult periods. In this sense, the relationship between Sacerdoțeanu and Iorga illustrates not merely a biographical or historical episode but constitutes an important contribution to understanding how cultural and intellectual memory can be preserved and reinterpreted in restrictive contexts.

Deliberately, the final chapter of the thesis moves beyond strict institutional analysis in order to address a dimension often underestimated in the history of administration, namely the intellectual influences and cultural formation of institutional leaders. The study of the relationship between Nicolae Iorga and Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu provides not only an interpretative framework for understanding certain professional choices and scientific discourses of the latter, but also a broader perspective on the transformation of cultural authority in twentieth-century Romania. The chapter thus functions as a symbolic closure of the research, where intellectual biography, the history of memory and strategies of cultural adaptation to successive regimes intersect. Without departing from the general theme of institutional modernisation, the chapter proposes a reflection on the formation of symbolic capital and the transfer of authority in an environment profoundly marked by political discontinuities. In this sense, the Iorga–Sacerdoțeanu relationship is interpreted not merely as a personal lineage, but as a form of mediation between tradition and modernisation.

Through this architecture, I seek to provide a nuanced analysis of the manner in which institutional processes are deeply permeated by the social, conflictual and

ideological dynamics of their time. The archives no longer appear merely as spaces of preservation, but as living places in which professional interests, social tensions and competing visions of modernity, authority and memory intersect. In this respect, Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu's directorship becomes a paradigmatic case of modernisation under conditions of political transition, as well as an example of the continuous negotiation between expertise and principles, on the one hand, and professional survival, on the other.

Note on the Reuse of Previously Published Material

In accordance with academic regulations and established research practice, I explicitly state that certain sections of the thesis reuse, in an expanded and revised form, materials previously published by the author. This reuse aims to integrate research results disseminated during the doctoral studies into the coherent framework of the thesis.

Chapters III and V incorporate, in a substantially developed version, the ideas presented in the article “Evoluția instituției și științei arhivistice românești în timpul directoratului lui Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu (1938–1953)”, published in *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Contemporană* (SMIC), vol. XXII, 2023, pp. 98–114. Chapters IV and VI represent an extended version of the article “Modernizare, tensiuni ideologice și conflicte interne: Arhivele Statului în epoca Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu (1938–1953)”, published in *Psihologia Socială*, 55, no. 1, 2022. Chapter VII develops further the reflections from the article “Portretul Nicolae Iorga în viziunea lui Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu”, published in *Revista Istorică*, XXXII, 2021, nos. 1–2, pp. 87–99.

The thesis thus represents the outcome of a research trajectory carried out throughout the entire doctoral period. The articles published in specialised journals constituted intermediate stages in the dissemination of results, while the present work integrates them, in an expanded and revised form, into a unified construction that reflects the overall investigation and its final conclusions.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS OF THE THESIS

This research began with the question of how an institution of memory undergoes modernisation when caught between ideological constraints, rapid political change and professional aspirations. The Directorate of the State Archives in the years 1938–1953

offered a relevant case study for observing how norms, practices and individual biographies intersect and influence one another. I chose to examine this process through the figure of Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu, not in order merely to reconstruct his biography, but because his trajectory reflects the specific tensions of the period: between the interwar academic tradition and the pressures of the communist regime, between professional competence and political constraint, between the ambition to build a school of archival science and the necessity of maintaining one's position within a hostile context.

The hypotheses formulated at the beginning of the study and the theoretical foundations assumed in the first chapters guided the interpretation of the sources. The Weberian model of rationalisation, theories of multiple modernities and the Bourdieusian framework concerning symbolic capital provided reference points for interpreting the archival field. At the same time, recourse to German social history and microhistory allowed me to focus not only on normative decisions, but also on everyday mechanisms: meetings, criticism, inventories and reports. Within this interpretative framework, modernisation does not appear as a linear process, but as an evolution marked by discontinuities, adaptations and improvisations.

The results show that the Directorate of the State Archives was profoundly shaped by the political-institutional context: Carolist centralisation, the evacuations of 1940, the losses of 1944, editorial control after 1945 and the personnel policy of 1948 were not merely external circumstances, but factors that alternately generated blockages and relaunches. At the same time, the reform directions initiated by Sacerdoțeanu display visible coherence: the unification of terminology, organisational orders and the professional instruments elaborated attest to the existence of a consistently pursued modernising plan. Internal conflicts functioned in turn as spaces of adaptation: criticism and self-criticism, minutes and wall newspapers operated as mechanisms through which the institution adjusted and reconfigured itself. At the professional level, instruments and editorial series contributed to stabilising activity, while the degree of professionalisation can be observed in the concrete outputs and the activity data reported in the documents.

With regard to Sacerdoțeanu's legitimacy, the analysis of the autobiographies allowed the distinction of three levels: institutional legitimacy, intellectual authority and autobiographical strategies of self-legitimation. Together, these dimensions outline the image of a director defined both by professional competence and by adaptation to the constraints of a transitional era. An additional layer is represented by his relationship with Nicolae Iorga: a source of prestige in the 1930s, a vulnerability in the 1950s when invoking

his name had become risky, and a cultural legacy revalorised in the 1960s and 1970s. This evolution demonstrates that intellectual memory is not fixed, but subject to reinterpretation and recontextualisation. In Sacerdoțeanu's biography, it is confirmed that professional legitimacy cannot be detached from the networks and traditions within which it was formed.

Taken as a whole, the principal conclusion of the thesis is that the professionalisation of the archives during this period was an ambivalent process: politically constrained, yet capable of producing durable instruments and training specialists. This ambivalence helps explain how infrastructures of knowledge are constructed in hostile contexts. Not only through decrees and governmental decisions, but also through inventories, guides, minutes and editorial series, the institution maintained continuity and transmitted working standards. More than an institutional history, the present study proposes a social history of institutions: the archives appear not merely as extensions of the state, but as spaces where norms encounter practices, where individuals seek solutions, where conflicts perform a regulatory function and where professional competence manages to survive under pressure. The evacuations of 1940, the losses of 1944, the trade union meetings of 1949 and the denunciations of 1953 are not merely administrative episodes, but lived experiences that confer a human dimension upon the institution.

The contributions of the thesis can be synthesised on two complementary levels. The first is factual: through the analysis of a specific period and the integration of sources often relegated to the background, such as wall newspapers, minutes and autobiographies. The second is methodological: through the application of a microhistorical framework and the use of internal data to assess processes of professionalisation. Within this perspective, the study of the State Archives between 1938 and 1953 transcends the limits of an institutional monograph and offers a useful framework for understanding how institutions of memory function and adapt under conditions of political constraint. The transfer of the State Archives to the Ministry of Internal Affairs introduced a cult of secrecy and gradually fostered a reserved, even hostile, attitude towards researchers. In accordance with the Soviet model, the political factor now exercised absolute and exclusive control over memory and the past.

Ultimately, the general conclusion of this work is that modernisation did not depend exclusively on norms and reforms, but also on the individuals who worked within the institution. Through the effort to preserve documents, to compile inventories and to maintain a minimum of professional continuity, the archivists of this period succeeded in

ensuring a foundation that endured through regime changes. Within this experience stands the figure of Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu: not as a heroic model nor as a mere victim of the political context, but as a professional who sought to negotiate constraints and to leave behind durable results.

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