

Ludmila CHICIUC*

**NOTES REGARDING THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES
OF BOGDAN PETRICEICU HASDEU**

- Abstract -

The views of Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu on the methodology and philosophy of history were shaped under the influence of the advanced ideas of the European culture and philosophy. As he himself stated, he was “interested by rules, standards, totality”.

In the field of historical methodology, B.P. Hasdeu opted for a “thorough scientific method”. The successive stages that the historian must follow - data collection, partial interpretation (that is, grouping and comparing them) and building the edifice (that is, drawing the conclusions).

B. P. Hasdeu’s conception blends together the old, preponderantly providentially, explanation with the scientific, positivist one. Hasdeu admitted the objective existence of historical factors: natural or social, but considered that their action is limited by the intervention of the Providence. In spite of these, Hasdeu considered that man played an important part in history, emphasising that “neither the divinity, nor nature can annihilate... man’s free will”.

B. P. Hasdeu considered that the influence of land on a people was very important, and therefore he formulated a unique historical law - the law of posthumous territorial influence, stating that a territory can influence a people even long after it leaves that particular territory. B. P. Hasdeu concludes that a nation is formed by the interaction between a land and a people (race).

Keywords: Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, encyclopaedist, historiography, philosophy, scientific method, territory, nation

**NOTE PRIVIND CONCEPȚIA ISTORICĂ
A LUI BOGDAN PETRICEICU HAȘDEU**

- Rezumat -

Vederile lui Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu în domeniul metodologiei istoriei și cele privitoare la filosofia istoriei s-au format sub influența ideilor avansate din cultura și filosofia europeană. După cum el însuși a afirmat, îl „preocupă regula, norma, totalitatea”.

În domeniul metodologiei istoriei B. P. Hașdeu a optat pentru „o metodă științifică riguroasă”. Fazele succesive pe care trebuie să le urmeze istoricul – culegerea datelor,

* „B.P. Hasdeu” State University of Cahul, Republic of Moldova.

deslușirea în parte (adică gruparea și compararea lor) și clădirea edificiului (adică extragerea concluziilor din acestea).

B. P. Hașdeu este teoreticianul în a cărui concepție se întâlnesc vechea explicație preponderent providențială cu cea eminentamente științifică, de sorginte pozitivistă. Hașdeu admitea existența obiectivă a factorilor istorici: naturali sau sociali, dar considera că acțiunea lor este limitată de intervenția Providenței. Cu toate acestea Hașdeu atribuia un rol deosebit în istorie, omului, subliniind că „nici acțiunea divinității, nici cea a naturii nu pot anula ... liberul arbitru al omului”.

B. P. Hașdeu considera foarte importantă acțiunea pământului asupra unui neam, încât a formulat și o lege istorică inedită în domeniu – legea influenței teritoriale postume, susținând că teritoriul poate influența o națiune chiar după ce aceasta de mult îl părăsise. B.P. Hașdeu concluzionează că o națiune se formează prin interacțiunea dintre un pământ și un neam (gintă).

Cuvinte cheie: Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, enciclopedist, istoriografie, filosofie, metodă științifică, teritoriu, națiune

Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, justly considered “the summit of Romanian encyclopaedism”, was also a great philosopher of history.

His theoretical works include a wide variety of issues from the philosophy of history, among which: the ontological definition of history, the relationship between nature and society, the natural and social factors of historical evolution, the issue of progress in history, the constitution and consolidation of history as science, research methods in history, historical writing, historical truth and history objectivity, the role of personality and of masses in history, and many other issues.

Manifesting an exceptional analytical and systematising spirit, “the most erudite Romanian of the XIXth century”¹, as seen by Mircea Eliade, managed to cover in his works all the compartments of methodology and philosophy of history. His views on methodology and philosophy of history were shaped under the influence of the advanced ideas of the European culture and philosophy, especially the conceptions of G. Vico, F. Bacon and G. Hegel, but he expressed himself his predilection for the philosophy of history, specifying that he is “interested by rules, standards, totality”.

We will focus on the most expressive ideas and conceptions of this distinguished Romanian scholar, trying to systematise them on fields.

In the field of history methodology, B.P. Hasdeu opted for a “thorough scientific method”. B.P. Hasdeu’s contemporary historiography was characterised

¹ Mircea Eliade, *Despre Eminescu și Hasdeu (About Eminescu and Hasdeu)*. Iași, Junimea Publishing House, 1987, p. 94.

by methodological failures and critical spirit, as noted by the thinker around 1856: "Romanian history is full of stories and gaps". Therefore, ever since 1860, in Foreword to *Foița de istorie și literatură (History and Literature Paper)*, he will launch his famous theory of the methodological triad: "There are three successive and irremovable operations in the writing of history: data collection, their partial interpretation and, finally, building the edifice". It is known that the golden rule of modern historiography was formulated by the German theoretician Leopold von Ranke like this: accuracy, penetration, exposition. This rule appears at Hasdeu also, as seen, in more or less similar contents, by pointing to the successive stages that the historian must follow - data collection, partial interpretation (that is, grouping and comparing them) and building the edifice (that is, drawing the conclusions).

In his subsequent studies, B. P. Hasdeu will state and magnify the initial methodological conception. Thus, in 1871, in an article, "Vladislavu Basarabu", inserted in "Columna lui Traian" (Trajan's Column) Magazine, speaking of the conjunction of criticism methods and divination in history research, B.P. Hasdeu was claiming: "Criticism consists in the mutual purification of wells. Divination re-establishes the logical solidarity between rhapsodic deeds. Without criticism, history is a lie; without divination, history is a fragment; without both criticism and divination, history is impossible"².

In the Preface to *Istoria critică a Românilor (Critical History of the Romanians) (1873-1875)*, the erudite history theoretician was laying down the basic principles of the scientific method used in history research, among which he mentioned: inflexibly serving historical truth, founding statements "only on data synchronic with the events" and on several sources, supporting facts by several evidences, giving priority to eye witnesses, paying attention only to the information which is close, both in time and place, to the narrated event, contesting any authority besides the historical truth, using the source in text and context (also, knowing the language of the original document), closely observing the accepted rules of quotation, as well as the need to take into account interdisciplinary relations, etc.

In the same *Critical History of the Romanians*, B.P. Hasdeu was insisting on the complex and multi-lateral study of historical deeds, indicating four types of historical sources, "wells": "tests, natural science, philology and political economics", without which, "one cannot be a historian in the XIXth century". The scholar confirmed through his own experience the truth of these ideas, gathering a wide documentary material on the past of our people from foreign archives, by

² Apud Adrian Pop, *O fenomenologie a gândirii istorice românești. Teoria și filosofia istoriei de la Hasdeu și Xenopol la Iorga și Blaga (A Phenomenology of the Romanian Historical Thought. Theory and Philosophy of History from Hasdeu and Xenopol to Iorga and Blaga)*, Bucharest, ALL Educational Publishing House, 1999, p. 20.

making exhausting travels to Poland, Hungary, Austria, Bohemia, Bavaria, Italy, the Balkan countries, Switzerland, France, England and, thus, facilitating the study of the Romanians' history. He often advised his daughter, Iulia Hasdeu, to focus on the study of sources by gathering the necessary documentary materials for her doctoral thesis entitled "The Unwritten Philosophy and Literature of the Romanian People - Theodicy, Metaphysics, Logics, Psychology, Ethics".

In B.P. Hasdeu's view, a primordial requirement of the research method in history is the need to research with "the torch in criticism in your hand", criticism having the role of "unburying truth". About the critical attitude and doubt, as indispensable elements of research, the erudite thinker was writing in *Sic Cogito*: "I was sceptic in every area of my knowledge... working... through my own research, a new path..."³

Continuing the list of B.P. Hasdeu's merits in the field of history methodology, we must underline the thinker's emphasising the necessary correlation between analysis and synthesis. As pointed by the contemporary historian and analyst, Adrian Pop, B.P. Hasdeu was stressing the superiority of analysis⁴. What he called the analytical method, that is, the "minute breakdown into smaller and smaller elements" was seen as "the only way able to build the historical edifice on a solid, wide and deep foundation". In his vision - "once all the elements of the skeleton are defined, it is then easier to recompose it by synthesis".

Hasdeu places the monographic study among the historical syntheses of the highest value. And this because, first and foremost, the monographic study has a general - historiographic importance, as "the history of a nation or country ... is the most truthful universal history" and, secondly, it has a specific importance because regional monographs check the role of geographical conditions or land factor in determining people's actions. This thesis had a special status in the European tradition regarding geopolitics and the philosophy of history⁵.

Another topic of history methodology, approached in Hasdeu's work regards the aesthetics of historical writing. In the context of the debates at the junction of the 19th and 20th centuries regarding the issue of considering history either art or science and the historian either artist or scientist, B. P. Hasdeu was the first in the Romanian historiography who tried to solve this dilemma dialectically, noting that: "The historian is a worker and an artist at the same time"⁶ and he saw

³ B. P. Hasdeu, *Sic Cogito*, Craiova: Scrisul românesc, 1991, p. 23

⁴ Adrian Pop, *O fenomenologie a gândirii istorice românești. Teoria și filosofia istoriei de la Hasdeu și Xenopol la Iorga și Blaga. (A Phenomenology of the Romanian Historical Thought. Theory and Philosophy of History from Hasdeu and Xenopol to Iorga and Blaga)*, Bucharest, ALL Educational Publishing House, 1999, p. 21

⁵ Ibidem, p. 22

⁶ B. P. Hasdeu, *Scriseri (Writings)*. Chișinău, "Știința" Editorial-Polygraphic Enterprise - Bucharest, Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing House, 1997, vol.2, p.199

history as both art and science, “these two areas of knowledge contemplating each other”.

In the field of history epistemology, Hasdeu, influenced by Vico’s cyclic theory, by Darwin’s evolutionism, but by the biblical precepts as well, stands out, first of all, by defining *history as reality*. Like his Western predecessors, B.P. Hasdeu perceives the history of humanity as a continuous cycle of births, growths, developments, weaknesses, disappearances and rebirths of peoples in time and space on a forever growing spiral. In his view, “The entire humanity forms one only individuality which passes through the three ages: divine (childhood), heroic (manhood), human (old age).” Thus, the Romanian scholar accepts, ultimately, Vico’s theory of the “historical cycle”, claiming him too that the society evolves according to “its organic and specific laws which no one has to fabricate”.

Regarding the definition of history as knowledge, we find in B.P. Hasdeu’s creation, an enormous diversity of appreciations. The illustrious thinker, considered history, for instance, as “the most supra-ordinary part in the positive classification of sciences”, “the hardest of all the sciences”, its object being the “narration of past times”.

The issue of theorising the finality and functions that history can and must assume are another subject of history epistemology, approached in the philosophical and historical work of the Romanian scholar.

We know that, most of the theoreticians who referred to the cognitive side of the finality of the study of history, conceived it along the lines of establishing an organic comprehensive explicative connection between past, present and future, meaning that by knowing the past, we understand better the present and we can responsibly prefigure the future. The same idea we encounter at B.P. Hasdeu, formulated as follows: “the life giving role of history is not only that of clarifying an ancient situation, of re-establishing a past image, but, mostly, that of preventing and preparing a possible future regeneration of a nation.”

Regarding B.P. Hasdeu’s attention to the educative side of the finality of the study of history, we will not attempt to illustrate it by means of a concrete expression, but we will only point to a simple fact, which cannot be doubted, precisely: considering the past an inexhaustible source of lessons and examples for the present and for the future, which is attested by the entire historical work of the scholar.

Special, even original, is the implication of the illustrious thinker in the field of history ontology.

Until reaching today’s ontological concept of history, which excludes the intervention in history of a unique determining factor or the simple and direct causality of historical facts, the philosophy of history witnesses a series of successive proposals for the identification of factors and forces which govern historical evolution. Romanian historiography made no exception to this.

The contemporary historian and analyst Adrian Pop notes that B. P. Hasdeu's conception joins the old, preponderantly providentially, explanation with the signally scientific, positivist one. Indeed, Hasdeu was admitting the objective existence of historical factors: natural (earth, climate, local accidents) or social (race, institutions, great people), but considered that their action is limited by the intervention of the Providence. In spite of these, Hasdeu considered that man played an important part in history, emphasising that "neither the divinity, nor nature can annihilate... man's free will".

B. P. Hasdeu considered that the influence of land on a people was very important, stable, decisive, and therefore he formulated a unique historical law - *the law of posthumous territorial influence*, its essence being that a territory can influence a people even long after it leaves that particular territory (influence which can still affect a people after scores of centuries, even at great distances). Building up Herder's ideas regarding people's spirit, B. P. Hasdeu concludes that a nation is formed by the interaction between a land and a people (race): each land having its special idea in the universality of lands and each people having a special idea in the universality of peoples. Therefore, when a nation settles down on a land, the connection between these specialities gives rise to a nation. In his opinion, great ideas, "limit" or "restrict" the action of nature, and the Providence, which is above everything, ensures the existence of a "supra-direction" in history.

In B. P. Hasdeu's theory of history we discover other analogies with the ideas of Western predecessors. For instance, when dealing with the issue of social and historical evolution and when explaining the role of personality in history, we notice a strong inspiration from Hegel's philosophy of history.

If Hegel was finding that the "simple abstract change which takes place in history means a progress towards the better, and the more complete", that "in nature everything is repeated", Hasdeu concludes that "only monotony is not in conformity with the dignity of history".

Very similar are the visions of these two titans of the modern thought in revealing the role of personality in history. Hegel calls historical personalities the "heroes of an epoch", "great people of history... whose own goals include that substantiality which is the will of the universal spirit, those people who think and understand what is necessary and actual". B. P. Hasdeu, in accord with Hegel, appreciated the great personalities as "representative powers", "plenipotentiary exponents" of the society and of the epoch, "instruments of the century, of the nation, of the mankind".

These, and many other examples which were not included here above, fully demonstrate that B. P. Hasdeu's historical theory is naturally inscribed in the area of the requisitions of European philosophy and culture. The Romanian encyclopaedist scholar had an infinite trust in the force of science and sought to complete this science, both through its general theory, researching and unveiling significant issues of methodology and philosophy of history, founded on optimism, continual interest in scientific truth, trust in the progress of human spirit, etc., as well through his works of national history.