

Abstract of Doctoral Thesis

The historical perspective on the Romanian spiritist phenomenon until the outbreak of the Second World War

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This PhD thesis aims to analyze the spiritualist phenomenon in the Romanian space as it appears in the Romanian society until the outbreak of the Second World War. Although figures such as Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu are famous for practicing spiritism, although in the daily press we encounter articles about the conversations with the spirits of the dead, there is no systematic historical study of this phenomenon in the Romanian space. This doctorate does not exhaust the issue of the spiritist phenomenon in the Romanian press from the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, due to the difficulty of collecting the sources necessary for the investigation. Spiritism in the Romanian space would seem inconsequential, but on a more detailed analysis of the press and of the literary and entertainment concerns of society at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, we realize that it represents not only a very present phenomenon but also a reflection of the preoccupations of this historically troubled period for our country and for the European space. The modernization of the Romanian society and its Europeanization make spiritism not only a fashionable phenomenon coming from the French salons where the ladies contact their dead husbands with the help of the mediums, but a real tool through which ideas about spirituality, culture and history spread in the Romanian space. Elites are the first to come into contact with the spiritualist phenomenon, and the press will not refrain from publishing articles written by renowned spiritualists such as Allan Kardec, Garbiel Delanne or William Crookes, At the same time criticism by some church representatives about the phenomenon will start to appear and gain acknowledgement.

The first chapter clarifies the most common and representative terms for this thesis. The second chapter discusses the position of the church over the spiritualist phenomenon, and especially the arguments that the church brings about the spread of spiritualism among those who claim to be practitioners of Christian religion. Chapters three and four discuss the historiography of the Spiritist phenomenon in the American, English and French societies as well as in the Romanian one. Here are analyzed the main studies that appear about the phenomenon, as well as their social and cultural implications for the spiritist phenomenon. In the fourth chapter, the books and the spiritualistic periodicals written by Romanian authors from the analyzed period are discussed, as well as their relation to the

literature of the time. The fifth chapter presents the pro-spiritist positions as they appear in Spiritistic books and periodicals. The sixth chapter discusses the positions against the spiritualist phenomenon in the Romanian press and literature. The last chapter explains how the spiritistic phenomenon influenced the development of experimental psychology, especially in the Romanian case. For the Romanian society, the spiritist phenomenon represented a step forward in the process of modernization and Westernization. His supporters actively engaged in the promotion of the phenomenon and therefore shared their concerns with other members of the elite, which led to a common effort in raising the consciousness and general knowledge of that time. The Church as an institution was supposed to have a firm stance on the phenomenon, and many famous church figures came and faced spiritualism with moral and ethical arguments. The spiritualist phenomenon encouraged the transcendence of what was ancient and the adoption of new forms of expression. His role in the development of psychology cannot be denied and for a country like Romania it was crucial. Historical, anthropological and social studies of the spiritualist phenomenon began to appear in the second half of the nineteenth century and peaked at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, although the spiritist phenomenon has been analyzed in its historical, social, scientific and anthropological dimension in the European and American case, in extensive specialized studies, when it comes to Romania, we encounter an absence not only of studies that interpret the trajectory and the influence of the spiritist phenomenon, but an absence of any conclusive history of the spiritualist phenomenon. The Spiritualist phenomenon is placed outside of history, being included in the category of phenomena that cannot be recorded as historical due to the lack of evidence to prove its scientific status.

The conflicts between occultism and spiritism have led to the inclusion of spiritism in the category of parapsychic, pseudo-scientific phenomena and, most importantly, of no importance to any respectable historian. However, the spiritist phenomenon has an important role in the history of the nineteenth century, and its influence, though indirect, is found in many of today's disciplines, such as psychology.

Both the Greco-Catholic religious press (present in *Unirea* from Blaj) and the Orthodox religion (present in David Voniga's interventions) have harshly criticized Spiritism and its followers and attempted to demonstrate sequentially the absence of any reality related to Spiritism and its followers. Outside Romania's borders, personalities such as astronomer William Crookes and great biologist Russell Wallace confessed to the spiritual movement, establishing the *Society for Psychical Research* in London in 1882.

In Romania, initiators of the Spiritist movement such as Stănulescu or Hasdeu opened the way to a new vision of spiritualism. The Victorian era has been haunted by the supernatural, in the sense that stories of ghosts and legends of spirits and demons have given rise to a particular interest from a wide audience, and premonitions and vowels have become a common subject. The voices that sounded beyond the wire of a telephone, the speed of the railways, as well as the remote communication through the modern technologies were all too many reasons to believe even more in the spiritualist dimension. The scientific dimension of spiritism, which is meant to be a science despite the religious aspects it discusses, was not taken seriously by many of the scientists of the time, but the social, political and economic context of the 1850s favored the assimilation of spiritualism in some environments and its adoption as a curiosity: the so-called industrial "miracles" came to detract from classical science and bring into question a supernatural evolution. The electric telegraph which led to a remarkable speed of information circulation coincided with the emergence of spiritism.

Technical progress, forcing the boundaries between possible and impossible, has facilitated the promotion and adoption of spiritualism by a large part of French society. In the nineteenth century, we witness a secularization of French society and, with it, the return of occultism, whose roots were anchored in the European intellectualism of the Renaissance. This return of occultism was achieved in the European society with the help of the messengers, the spiritualists, the theosophists and the humanists as well as other alternative belief systems. The return of occultism in France, alongside intellectual and social trends, was despised by a large number of clergy and anti-clergy. The biggest problem the Spiritist phenomenon is experiencing is the ideological volatility that prevents it from remaining focused on demonstrating or refuting the scientific hypotheses it proposes to demonstrate.

The influence and spread of the spiritualist phenomenon are related to the religious and cultural fertility of the nation where it comes, the avant-garde and the social exuberance that characterizes the 19th century society. If for the United States spiritism has some fabulous data for the nineteenth century, for countries like Romania, the state of affairs is much more modest. However, although spiritism does not become a national religion, as is the case in the United States, in Romania spiritism is on the lips and in the houses of the elites who practice this form of recreation in the highest circles. Because the proofs of the spiritual activities of the nineteenth century in Romania are not very abundant, the most readily available tool for analyzing this phenomenon is the press, both the non-spiritistic and the spiritistic.

The main research question: how did the Romanian press cover historically the spiritistic phenomenon will seek to identify the main arguments of historical, religious and social nature in the spiritualist debate as well as to demonstrate the role this debate has had in the public conscience and In the development of new historical research directions. In view of this, we will study the magazines and newspapers that appeared in Romania during the aforementioned period. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the historical studies on the spiritualist phenomenon in Romania, but especially to the way the press and the literature have reported this phenomenon.

The Romanian press exploited the Spiritist phenomenon through numerous articles at the end of the nineteenth century, and at the beginning of the 20th century the exoticism of spiritism would disappear and the pro and the positions of the phenomenon would become much clearer. The position of the church towards spiritism remains as firm from the beginning and the end of the analyzed period, regardless of the religious confession of its members. Spiritism is considered a diabolical phenomenon, outside religious norms, and practitioners of spiritism are incompatible with what the church preaches.

In spite of the position of the church towards the spiritualist phenomenon, there are church members such as the bishop of Arges and the primate metropolitan of Wallachia from 1893 to 1895 who participate in the spiritualistic sessions and encourage Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu in the spiritualistic manifestations he has in the press . The slower spread of the Spiritistic phenomenon contributes most to the profile of the Romanian society at that time, namely the rate of urbanization as well as illiteracy. According to the census of 1899, 78% of Romania's population was illiterate, and in rural areas the percentage rose to 84%. In Transylvania and Banat, territories that belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire at that time, but where the population was predominantly Romanian, the situation was better, with 64.6% illiterate. For the Romanian scientific community at the end of the 19th century, spiritism is a strange phenomenon whose phenomena are a starting point for sciences such as psychology or physiology. Romanian psychologists such as Florian Ștefănescu-Goangă or Nicolae Vaschide studied in the experimental psychology laboratories in France, Germany and Romania the spiritistic phenomena that they later explored and framed in experimental psychology.

The Spiritist phenomenon in Romanian literature has led to an overrun of the boundaries of language and to the introduction of fantasy literature, storytelling about theaters or theater plays with a spiritual theme in the Romanian literary consciousness.

Spiritism sparked the interest of the Romanian elites, the spiritistic meetings taking

place in the homes of many of them, being one of the most well-known activities. Not only Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu participates in spiritist meetings, but Queen Elizabeth of Romania herself, participates and organizes them at Peles Castle. The Spiritist magazines appearing are funded by lawyers, doctors who monthly donate large sums for meetings, conferences, and press appearances by media or spiritualists.

The interest in the Spiritist phenomenon reaches its climax at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. After the First World War, it will have lost its glory and exotism for a very simple reason: spiritist phenomena fail to change society at the level that the spiritualists propose to, so disappointment comes from death and war that can not be prevented by the "religion-science," as the French Spiritualists call it.

The non-spirited press that abounds in articles about the spiritualist phenomenon stands as proof of the importance of spiritism for the understanding of Romanian society at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Spiritist debate involves academics, historians, archaeologists, priests who are either trying to support the spread of the spiritualist phenomenon (C.Rădulescu Motru, B.P. Hașdeu) or to stop the inherent curiosity of the people related to the practice of spiritism in the spiritistic meetings (Gh. Marinescu , David Voniga, Vasile Suciu, Nicolae Iorga or Caragiale).

Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu's role in the spread of spiritism is a crucial one, unjustly excluded from studies of his literary work, after being declared a spiritualist. B. P. Hașdeu creates a true philosophical movement with deep cultural and popular implications within the spiritual movement in Romania, referring to pagan Romanian beliefs and traditions, brought to the surface by his historical research work. Elements of popular fantasy literature are present in B.P. Hașdeu after 1897, which only enriches it and brings a new stage of evolution in the work of the scholar.

The impact of spiritism in the Romanian society can also be understood from a different perspective: some of the most important Romanian writers of the time have given opinions on it. Among the most important are Ion Luca Caragiale, Ioan Slavici or Ion Agârbiceanu. Their opinions (mostly critical) have been expressed through the various publications of the epoch or, in some cases, even the subject of literary works (eg Anton Bacalbasa in his famous stories with Santa Claus).

We ask ourselves what character did the Spiritist phenomenon in Romania have in the past? An elitist one or has it become a mass movement? The answer to this question cannot be categorical, as it is a series of hues that, as we have already pointed out, both the profile of the society of the times and of the Romanian elites. Certainly, spiritism in Romania was an

import phenomenon, but it was gradually sought by the followers of the current to be adapted to the realities of the Romanian space. Spiritism in Romania emerged as a current within the elites, but gradually opened to society, thanks to the "publicity" around it due to the press, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, thanks to the efforts of its followers. This explains the appearance of spiritist magazines and of a whole genre literature, which can be considered as having a popularization role at some point. Also, including the criticisms made against the Spiritistic movement (even under the tutelage of the Romanian Orthodox Church), it had the role of popularizing it.

At the same time, we notice the existence of a gap, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century, between the magnitude of the current in the West and its forms of manifestation in the Romanian space. This situation was not only about spiritism but was found in many other fields of activity or some innovative ideas and currents of the time. After World War I, the Spiritist phenomenon loses some of its followers, but wins another. On the one hand, they are disappointed that spiritism as a phenomenon could not prevent the outbreak of war and implicit fatalities; on the other hand, those who find in spiritism a refuge for communicating with the spirits of the dead.

After World War I, psychological research in France and the United States is blooming, institutes for the research of medium phenomena appear, and Romanian psychologists such as Vaschide or Gruber are studying in the laboratories where these experiments are made. It is only after the Second World War that the influence of spiritism will begin to be reduced considerably until it disappears in 1947 with the arrival of the Communists to power. The Romanian Spiritualist phenomenon does not reach the size of the United States, Britain or France, but this is primarily due to historical conditions and secondly to religious conditions, the religious conscience of Romanians at that time leaving no place for such occult schisms as is the case of the United States where protestantism, evangelism and spiritualism are widespread beliefs that do not exclude one another. However, Romanian spiritism is spread throughout the country, being practiced and debated both in the Principalities and in Transylvania.

The influence of B.P. Hașdeu on spiritism is a beneficial one, although it is being fought by historians. In conclusion, spiritualism has an overwhelming influence on the development of experimental psychology in countries such as France, Germany, the United States or Romania. Due to the academic and professional reputation of the founders of Romanian experimental psychology, Romanian experimental psychologists are at the international standards, certified by their presence in publications such as the *Psychology*

Magazine or Psychology Annals of famous psychologists such as G.W Allport, H.Pieron, C.Spearman or F.Krueger. C. Rădulescu-Motru and F. Ștefănescu Goangă support the monistic theory, distancing themselves from Wundt's psychophysical theory. The use of several consecutive methods, as well as the internal observation, are the most important criteria for experimental research in Romania.

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