

**Raoul V. Bossy, *Mărturii finlandeze și alte scrieri nordice despre români* [Finnish testimonies and other Nordic writings about the Romanians]. ed. Silviu Marian Miloiu (Târgoviște: Valahia University Press, 2008), 159 pp.**

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This book represents a new version of Raoul Bossy's pioneering work Finnish testimonies about the Romanians published in 1937, to which two other testimonies are added. The book is structured in 159 pages, where one finds aspects of the Romanian history and society of the 19th century, written by Finnish officers who had taken part within the Russian army in innumerable wars against the Ottoman Empire, many of them carried on the Romanian territory. The volume starts with a description of diplomat Raoul Vasile Bossy, the one who gathered for the first time these Finnish testimonies about the Romanians. Silviu Miloiu presents in detail Bossy's career emphasizing his diplomatic skills. As a diplomatic envoy to Helsinki, Bossy set the bases of fruitful Finnish-Romanian relationship in particular difficult circumstances. Between 1934 and 1936, Bossy gathered all available documents and letters of Finnish soldiers who fought in Russian army against the Ottoman Empire. The book also includes the brief foreword where Bossy explains the reasons that determined him to edit his book.

Basically a volume of documents, the book starts with the journal of lieutenant colonel Gustav Adolf Ramsay, a participant at the 1829 Russian-Turkish war. In his war journal he depicts aspects of the Moldavian life and folklore. He was charmed by the beauty of local nature and by the simple way of living of the Moldavians. Ramsay admired the local people for their strengths and simplicity. Finnish at his origin, Ramsay had not been familiar with the Eastern European life style. Ramsay visited a series of Romanian towns and was very much impressed by them. The contrast between them was huge. He notes in his journal his impression of the city of Jassy and about the Black Sea. The kindness of the Romanian people made a very good impression on Ramsay. In essence, his journal is a valuable historical source because it details the local traditions and the atmosphere in the Romanian cities of the beginning of 19th century.

The next chapter of the volume refers to the letters written by General Frederic Nyberg to his family in Finland. He fought in the same war as Ramsay and lived the same experience. Nyberg was astonished by the beauty of people wearing clothes, by the houses and he made the difference between the Romanians and Russians and their languages. In his letters, Nyberg gives a pleasant picture of Moldavia. He writes about the beautiful fertile plains of Moldavia, the good and sweet vine and also about the

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social categories from Moldavia. Nyberg was pleased by the simple and natural Moldavian way of living.

Another Nordic perception of the Romanians was illustrated in the writings of the Finnish captain, Berndt Johan Rosenström, a soldier in the Russian army who was fighting against the Ottoman Empire. In Rosenström's writings one finds a detailed description of Moldavia and Walachia. He writes about the poverty of the people and the bad state of roads. He describes his first impressions about the city of Bucharest. He emphasizes the city contrasts where the oriental and occidental elements coexisted. Rosenström is charmed by the strange architecture of Bucharest that, in his perception, represented a mixture of oriental and western styles. He notes that in Bucharest a foreigner can find all he need, fine clothes, good perfumes, and other western products.

An important part of the paper is made of the testimonies of Finnish officers who fought in the Russian -Romanian -Turkish 1877-1878 war. The first testimony concerns colonel Teodor Fritiof Bläfield's participation in the battles for Plevna. Bläfield describes the Romanian share in this battle fought alongside the Russians. He depicts the heroism of the Romanian army but at the same time he doesn't agree with the Romanian strategy. He generally blames the Romanian officers for lack of experience on the battlefield. The Finnish officer analyses the hostilities between the both armies in eight chapters. He begins with the description of the army structure, evaluates its number and available weapons. For Bläfield, the Romanian participation provided an advantage over the Turkish army. He also depicts the Plevna battle.

A participant in the Russian campaign against Turkish army in 1878, Anton von Alfthan witnessed the Romanians' way of living, on their cultural traditions. He was positively impressed by the Romanian gastronomy and music. In Alfthan's view, the Romanian world seemed to be out of time with all its traditions and habits. He notes his impressions as his division was marching from Chişinău to Constantinople. On route, he visited Jassy, Bucharest and other Romanian towns and was obviously impressed. The personage pays little attention to the battles against the Turkish army.

Colonel Victor Tuderus also adds some more details about the Romanian towns in his personal diary. Like others Finnish officers, he was also charmed by the Romanian landscape. His brief descriptions provide what he considered essential about the Romanians and their lands he crossed in his journey from Moscow to Bucharest. Tuderus is impressed by the city of Bucharest, by the good food and wine, the beautiful women and the Romanians hospitality. He remained for a while in Bucharest and enjoyed hospitality there. He came to regret all these while in Bulgaria, as the conditions changed and the army was approaching the battlefield.

In 1878 a Finnish military expeditionary unit also reached Romania. Carl Ferdinand von Wahlberg as an officer of this unit confines his observations only to impressions about the Danube River.

At the end of the Russian- Romanian - Turkish 1877-1878 war some other Finnish officers, on their way back, also wrote their impressions concerning the Romanians and their traditions. I can mention here G. W. Eklung who wrote about the battle of Plevna and the maneuvers of Turkish navy on the Danube. W. Palander describes the Romanian villages of Moldavia. He was pleased by the contrast between

the small villages and the grandeur of Bucharest. The kindness of Romanian people is also mentioned in the journal of Axel Lindfords, another Finnish soldier in the Russian army. He also complains about the hot spell with unbearable temperatures, especially for the Finnish soldiers. The description of Bucharest is also present in the journal of the major sergeant Lemminkäinen. The latter wrote in 1878 about the beautiful places of Bucharest and its pleasant evenings. He also describes the exaggerated daily hot spell. The last Finnish testimony consists of Erik Hornborg's notes in which he describes the Romanian – Russian - Turkish war. He praises Romanian courage in the battle of Plevna and other battles of the 1877 – 1878 war.

An interesting part of this book is represented by the commentaries of the Finnish press about the Romanians. The newspaper *Helsingfors Dagblad* describes the Romanian landscapes and its social life. This newspaper wrote in details about Romania's involvement in the Russian -Turkish War.

In the last part of the book, Silviu Miloiu mentions a reproduction of Mihai Viteazu's portrait found in Sankt Petersburg and the key of Hotin received by Mannerheim during his war campaign in Romania published as separate articles by Bossy. The editor also adds to this edition a Danish testimony belonging to Frederik Schiern who made a trip to the valley of Danube in 1857. Following his journey, Schiern describes in detail the Romanian society, landscape and people. He was impressed by the structure of the Romanian society based on old segregations. In his opinion, Romania was a country of big contrasts. Schiern observed that the eastern culture interacted here with the western influence. Schiern gives a full picture of the Romanian society, surprising many social aspects. He went to Bucharest and found a large city with a strange combination of oriental and western elements. The rich were dressed after western last fashion and the others according to the Greek style.

For the Finnish officers and other Nordics travelers, Romania was an eccentric land where the new meets with the ancient and the western elements are mixed with the oriental way of living. Therefore, Miloiu's initiative of publishing this volume is very useful for those readers interested in seizing the foreigners' perceptions on the 19th century Romanian society. It is also a valuable historical source for the researchers of the Romanian-Finnish relations.