


ALEXANDRINA CANTACUZINO AND THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT OF THE INTERWAR YEARS. A REVIEW

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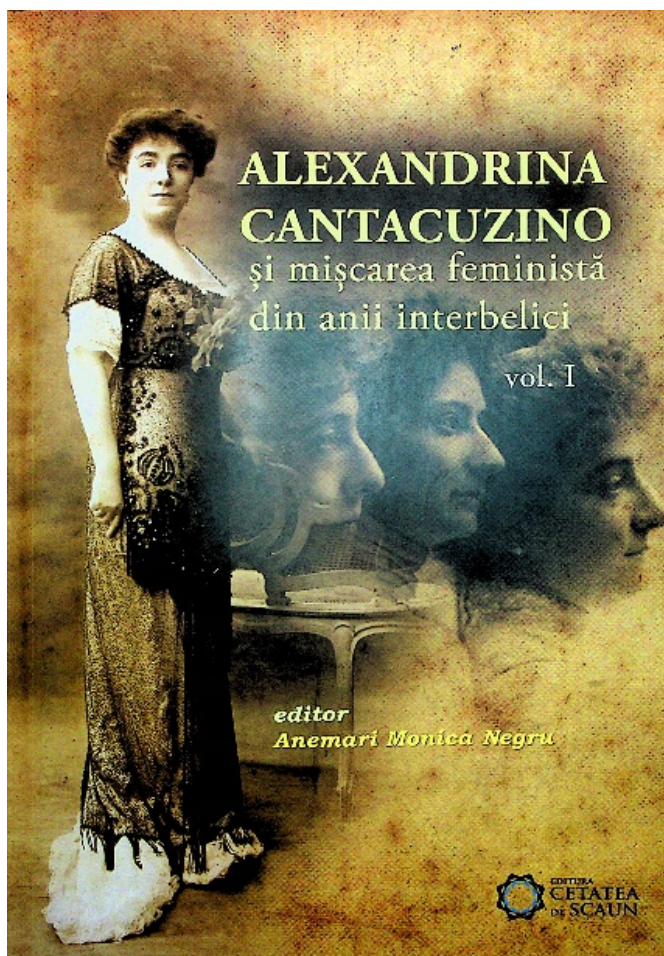
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Alexandrina Cantacuzino și mișcarea feministă din anii interbelici [*Alexandrina Cantacuzino and the Feminist Movement of the Interwar Years*], edition of documents elaborated by Anemari Monica NEGRU, volumes I–II; Editura Cetatea de Scaun, Târgoviște, 2014, 345 p. (vol. I), 2019, 395 p. (vol. II)

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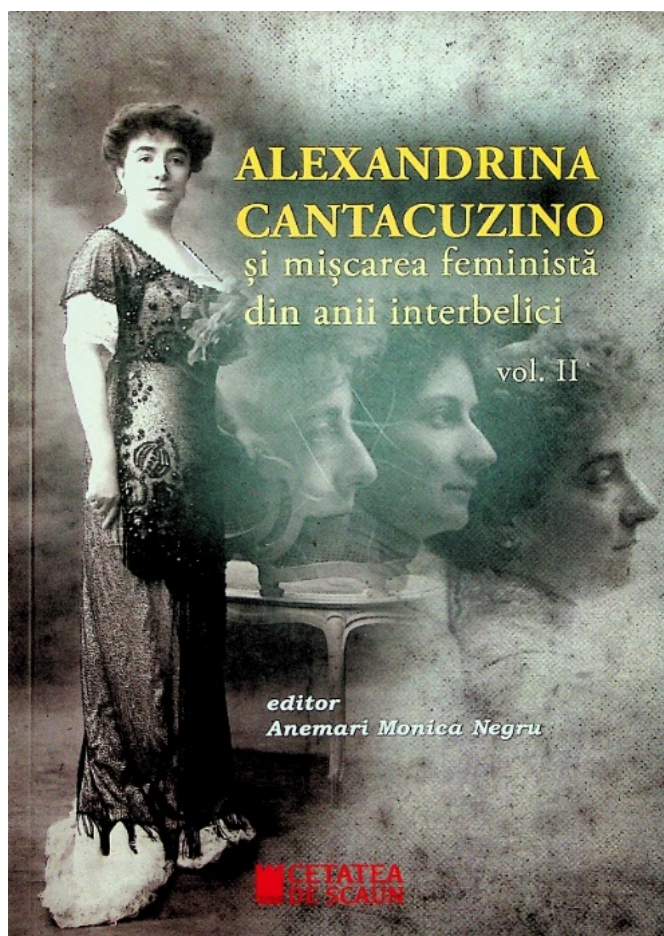
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After a first volume that appeared in 2014, Cetatea de Scaun Publishing House in Târgoviște released a second one (in 2019), dedicated to the Romanian feminist movement of the interwar decades. Both volumes are edited by historian Anemari Monica Negru, archivist at the National Archives of Romania. She is well-known due to several volumes published in the last decade, about women's associations, female personalities, and the feminist movement in contemporary Romania. The scholarly substance of both volumes lies in the documentary contributions that they bring, by exploiting the *Cantacuzino Family Fonds*, which is an archival fonds of great consistency, kept at the National Central Historical Archives of Romania in Bucharest. This fonds consists of 1,122 archival units, with documents dating from 1853 to 1969, written in 16 languages: Romanian, French, English, German, Polish, Bulgarian,

Serbian, Chinese, Japanese, etc. From the presentation of the fonds at the beginning of the



introductory study in the first volume, it becomes clear that the documents concern the entire family, followed by various documents on individual members of the Cantacuzino family, some of them containing photographs of the family members and their properties. The author also mentions that documents from the fonds of the National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women, as well as the Meissner and Aida Vrioni fonds kept at the National Archives of Romania have been examined to complete the biography of Alexandrina Cantacuzino.

Both volumes are structured according to the same pattern: each of them begins with an introductory study, followed by documents reproduced in extenso. The introductory study in the first volume starts with the presentation of the family background and then discusses the biography and views of

Alexandrina Gr. Cantacuzino. The study continues with the analysis of her connection with the feminist initiatives of the following associations: the National Council of Romanian Women (Consiliul Național al Femeilor Române), Women's House (Casa Femeii), Women's Little Concord (Mica Înțelegere Feminină), the Society of Nations (Societatea Națiunilor), and the FIDAC Women's Auxiliary Section (Secția Auxiliară Feminină FIDAC). The volume continues with a list of documents, after which the documents are presented in extenso, followed by an index of names and another one of places. At the end of the volume, there is an appendix containing mostly photographic documents.

Alexandrina Cantacuzino is a well-known female figure in interwar Romania, today perhaps unjustly forgotten, so the present work has the merit of presenting to the public and the Romanian society a European-level female personality from Greater Romania. She was born in 1876, in Ciocănești, in the Ilfov County of those days, and lived until 1944. She studied in France, where, in addition to acquiring an exquisite French language, she studied history, economics, and rhetoric. She married the conservative politician Grigore Gheorghe Cantacuzino (1872-1930) in 1899, receiving the princess title based on the aristocratic origins of the Cantacuzino family. This marriage produced three sons: Grigore, Constantin, and Alexander. She was an exceptional personality endowed with a vast culture, and a good orator as well. At the same time, she was a particularly prolific writer, and in addition to her books, the list of her works includes communications, conference speeches, reports, accounts, essays, and memoirs.¹

¹ See a list of her best-known works in the first volume *Alexandrina Cantacuzino și mișcarea feministă din anii interbelici* (ed. Anemari Monica Negru), vol. I (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2014), pp. 10-11.

Alexandrina Cantacuzino was a representative personality of Romanian and international feminism in the first decades of the twentieth century, being one of the first Romanian feminists who advocated and fought for the economic and political emancipation of women. She stood out with her high-impact activity and a wide-ranging work, to the publication of which the present edition, signed by historian Anemari Monica Negru, makes a substantial contribution.

Our book review will refer in particular to the second volume edited by Anemari Monica Negru, because it is a more recent publication. With regard to its content, the second volume continues the first one, by revealing the collaborative activity of Alexandrina Cantacuzino with various associative entities in interwar Romania, of which some were women's associations. The introductory study, written in Romanian and in French, provides a comprehensive summary of the content of the documents published in extenso in the second part of the volume. This volume is thus a documentary contribution, primarily concerning Alexandrina Cantacuzino's collaboration with the Romanian Intellectual Union (Uniunea Intelectuală Română), a highly prestigious cultural society that brought together leading members of the Romanian interwar elite. The Romanian Women's Group (Gruparea Femeilor Române), considered to be "the first political party of women in Romania",² was a group with which Alexandrina Cantacuzino collaborated explicitly and systematically after its foundation in 1929.

Alexandrina Cantacuzino also worked with other societies and associations of the time, as follows: the National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women (Societatea Ortodoxă Națională a Femeilor Române), Solidarity (Solidaritatea), the Interallied Memorial in Liège (Memorialul Interaliat de la Liège), Bușteni Popular Athenaeum (Ateneul Popular Bușteni), Female Weaver (Țesătoarea), as well as with professional women's associations. The introductory study presents all these segments of Alexandrina Cantacuzino's biography in distinct sub-chapters, and finally focuses on some of her initiatives as a municipal councillor in Bucharest. Throughout the introductory study, all these issues are illustrated by the documents published in extenso in the volume. Most of these documents are meeting minutes of the above-mentioned associations and societies in whose activity Alexandrina Cantacuzino was involved, followed by her speeches and correspondence.

Like the documentary material published in the first volume, the texts we are dwelling on are also primary sources that highlight Alexandrina Cantacuzino's exceptional activity and career, which served the ideals regarding the emancipation of women's status in the Romanian society. Through their publication, a famous figure, one of Romania's outstanding female personalities of the twentieth century, is brought back to the attention of historical specialists and the public. Besides systematically documenting Alexandrina Cantacuzino's public activity, these documents are also important, as the editor of the volume states, in that they provide particularly valuable information concerning the history of the associations, societies, and groups in which she was active, knowledge of which is scarce at the current stage of research. We believe that the editor of these volumes, Anemari Monica Negru, deserves all the consideration for this work of documentary restitution, through which she introduced into the scientific circuit highly relevant documents revealing the significance of the programmatic approach regarding the emancipation of the female condition in Romania during the interwar period. Speaking of this two-volume edition of documents, it is worth noting the professionalism with which it was elaborated, by compiling at the end of each volume an index of names and one of places, which makes this reference work an instrument for scientific research.

² *Alexandrina Cantacuzino și mișcarea feministă din anii interbelici* (ed. Anemari Monica Negru), vol. II (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2019), p. 13.