

## Editorial

### **Ioan Slavici the Contemporary or the Integrity of Historical Restitution**

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Certainly, every historical endeavour is born out of three fundamental answers to the why, the how and the when? Therefore the assertions of certain historians (such as Dale H. Porter, *History and Theory* 4; 297-313, 1975) that „*historical proof exist not to discover its own significance but to allow interrogation*”, are only useful in orienting, in ordering the perspective of each act of recuperation. The act of restitution, which is a compulsory step of each historical endeavour – and by which the life and the work are viewed through a complex relationship with its social and historical background – started in the museum from Şiria (Arad county) that bears his name. Upon seeing „Educațiunea Fizică” (ed. Minerva, Bucharest, 1909) I was smitten – Slavici being a well known author, less so as a pedagogue and totally unknown in the field of P.E- which, I must admit, represents a type of distraction; it ultimately means to be incredibly unmindful to the world as it is, fact that turns every honest *interprese* work into a very difficult one. The term *in-*

*terpres* designates the one who is necessary to afford the integral passing of historical proof from one age to another. Ioan Slavici (1848-1925) is our contemporary not so much by cancelling out the effect of chronological distance but because the book's message is adequate to the requirements of a very different present. In other words *then* and *now* are the same. For Slavici, the definition of physical education – the main theme of this text! – („physical education is the guidance towards maintaining one's own health and the proper development of one's body”) incorporates, aside the language used, the two major objectives of the contemporary definition: health and physical harmony (see, Dictionary of Sport Science, Schorndorf, Germany, 1987). Therefore, the issue of appropriating the meaning contained in the two sources must be seen as an undertaking in overcoming temporal distance and, at the same time, in integrating tradition in the present dynamic of understanding physical education.

Otherwise, not only the definition provided but the entire book, which represents the starting and end point of the restitution, must be considered within a specific context, one that is a century away. The distance itself is not insurmountable because an informed reader should be able to perceive, through a careful reading process, a certain number of very actual things and significances.

It is well known that the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a battleground for systems derived from *gymnastics* (see Nicu Alexe, *Istoria exercițiilor fizice*, Ed. Fundației Romania de Mâine, Bucharest, 2006) the main players being F. Ludwig Jahn (German), Ling (Swedish), Amoros (France), Clias (Swiss), Arnold (English) or Tyrs (Czech); in Walachia the main contributions were brought forth by Gheorghe Moceanu, Stephan Ludwig Roth and Spiru Haret. It must be underlined that physical education (as a concept) gains institutional consistency only in 1920 (France) and nationally in 1928 (The Law of secondary education), therefore when Slavici's book was published in 1909, his usage of the notion (physical education in schools) was ahead of its time. Slavici feels the need for a drastic educational reform and purposely writes his book from a physiological perspective, so that physical education's major objective comes to ad-

dress health, growth and harmonious development. Allow me two support examples: „the wise man`s chief concern is to maintain his vigour by fortifying the weak bodily parts and overcoming his overwhelming urges „(pg. 7) and „every movement contains four elements: the intention, the plan, the dexterity and the power of execution” or „dexterity and power pertain to physical education and are together developed through persistent and rational preparation” (pg. 95).

My interpretation is based on the methodological premise that historic investigation and structural description are interdependent. For, the path from the work itself to its background (*i.e.* its historic context) would be nothing but a senseless drift if not regulated by knowledge referring to the work`s internal structures. Therefore, the internal analysis of the ideas the book relies on is meaningless if the origins of the ideas themselves are ignored.

Basing his book on at least two identifiable sources - *Considerații asupra importanței și necesității gimnasticii din punct de vedere igienic și social* (C.I. Istrati, 1880) and *L'alimentation et les Regimes chez l'homme et chez les maladies* (Armand Gautier, 1904) – the author converses not only with the socio-historic reality of his time but also with an entire assimilated, interrogated or rejected library, resulting in a surprisingly contemporary message: „without physical education, intellectual and especially moral education become impossible and, more so, it is clear that times of cultural and moral decay were caused by physical degeneration”(pg. 103) .

The significance of the text, which I consider to be innovative for the period, is also a consequence of Slavici`s pedagogical work., for this work is part of an (sadly) unfinished didactic project (The Rational Education) which should have contained the following parts: Moral Education, Intellectual Education, Professional Education and Physical Education.

Therefore, in a novel and visionary manner, Slavici becomes also relevant as one of those who have laid the foundations of national physical education.