

Islamic, Ottoman Era Artefacts and the Politics of Memory: Dimitrie Papazoglu's Collection of 'Antiquities and Oriental Rarities' for 'The Feeling of Love of the Progress of My Nation'

Abstract

In 1855/1860, Dimitrie Papazoglu (1811–1892) opened a museum in his private residence on Calea Văcărești, no 151, Bucharest, with objects amassed during and after retiring from his military career, ca. 1855. Papazoglu doubled opening a museum with the publication of a catalogue, in 1864, which listed Egyptian and 'Oriental' artefacts, some even sourced locally. Their presence in a private collection from a region in the process of creating a national state, independent from the Ottoman Empire, raises a series of questions. Could these artefacts be attributed to a form of internalized Orientalist discourse or is it simply a consequence of the Westernization process? How do the Ottoman era and Islamic objects reconcile with Papazoglu's discursive goal for collecting being for 'the feeling of love of the progress of my nation'¹? Therefore, this paper aims to investigate the meaning of these artefacts in the general context of the collection, and the negotiation within the process of articulation a concept of Romanian heritage. The analysis will focus on the museum catalogue published in 1864, supported by additional archival material, to assess the labels Papazoglu used for defining the variety of objects he collected, and how these taxonomies underpin the production of knowledge on the concepts of heritage and of 'Oriental.'

Keywords: heritage practices, museum catalogue, nationalism, Ottoman Empire, Dimitrie Papazoglu, private collection

1. The Mid-19th Century Heritage Turn and the Creation of the Romanian Nation-State

Heritage practices emerging in the late 18th century and the first half of the 19th century in the Danubian Principalities were closely intertwined with the nation-building process, using artefacts to channel Westernizing projects, much like other regions of the Ottoman Empire. Private initiatives and collections increasingly became integral to state-led, public initiatives. In 1834, the Natural History and Antiquities Museum opened in Bucharest, its collection largely formed from a substantial donation by the private collector Mihalache Ghica. In turn, around 1860 (the date varies in archival records) former military officer and self-fashioned archaeologist Dimitrie Papazoglu used his own collection to establish a museum in his private residence, which visitors could access by appointment.

1 'Concordeea', year I, no 28, May 15, 1857.

In a chapter recently submitted for publication, titled *Heritage and civilizational discourse: 'civilized Europe' and 'antiquities' in mid-19th century Romania*,² I examined heritage-making practices, including collecting, as outcomes of a broader civilizational discourse. Drawing on Laura Doyle's concept of inter-imperiality, which encompasses Southeast Europe, I explored the dynamics between the creation of the first museums in the Danubian Principalities and the role of private collections. Focusing on the collaboration between archaeologist Alexandru Odobescu and Dimitrie Papazoglu – specifically their effort to exhibit artefacts from Papazoglu's collection in the Danubian Principalities' pavilion at the 1867 Paris Exhibition – the chapter also engaged with Yannis Hamilakis concept of indigenous archaeologies.³ Dimitrie Papazoglu's biography and (self)identities are particularly complex: his family roots trace to Kastoria/Arvanitochori, yet his autobiographical writings repeatedly assert a Romanian lineage. These aspects of his life are also examined in a recent critical edition I published,⁴ where I approached Papazoglu as both collector and publisher, emphasizing his inter-imperial biography.⁵ This article therefore will focus on the contents of Papazoglu's collection, specifically what he described as 'antiquities and Oriental rarities,' drawing on the 1864 museum catalogue.

In a 2016 article, Michał Wasiucionek argued for 'bringing the Ottoman Empire back' into the study of the early modern Danubian Principalities – and vice versa.⁶ This perspective raises important questions for the 19th century, when the dissolution of the empire and the assertion of national identities often instrumentalized material culture as heritage. Against this backdrop, this article aims to examine Papazoglu's agency in collecting Muslim tombstones from Brăila's cemetery, Qur'an manuscripts, Ottoman-Turkish documents bearing his ex-libris, Ottoman swords, pistols, etc. To what extent can he be analysed comparatively with other late Ottoman era collectors such as General Husayn,⁷ Muhammad Khaznadar,⁸ Hakky Bey,⁹ or Abdüllatif Subhi Paşa?¹⁰

Papazoglu's family migrated to Wallachia sometime in the second half of the 18th century, and his claim to local nobility, namely the *boyars*, was facilitated through marriage into the Slătineanu family. Both his military career and collecting practices reveal ambivalent, even contradictory, actions. For instance, Papazoglu was awarded the *Nişân-ı iftihar*¹¹ for suppressing the 1842 Bulgarian uprising in Brăila, yet in 1878

2 This chapter has been submitted to the publication editors, Prof. Dr. Eleonora Naxidou and Prof. Dr. Yura Konstantinova, in a collective volume titled *Balkan Perspectives of Europe, 18th–21st centuries*, to be published with Routledge Press, estimated 2025–2026.

3 Hamilakis 2011.

4 Coman 2024.

5 See for example, Cristache-Panait 1968; Căzănişteanu 1971; Opaschi 2001.

6 Wasiucionek 2016, 169.

7 Oualdi 2020.

8 Moumni 2020.

9 Türker 2014.

10 *ibid.*, 2022.

11 National Library of Romania, Historical Archive, Saint-George collection, Berat, D.508/LII, fol. 4.

he presented a 17th-century sword to Tsar Alexander II in recognition of his war against 'the Muslim yoke over Christian populations.'¹² Such contradictions illustrate his inter-imperial positioning, which is also apparent when engaging with Papazoglu's correspondence, where, aside from an Ernest from Roustchiouk, the geographies point to Russia, Central and Western Europe.¹³

Similarly to collectors such as Muhammad Khaznadar, Hakky-Bey or Abdüllatif Subhi Paşa, Papazoglu's engagement with heritage extended well beyond collecting. In addition to the brochures mentioned in the critical edition of the Danube River travel guide,¹⁴ he drew inspiration from the French model of archaeological excursions to survey and report on heritage sites in Wallachia and Moldavia for the Ministry of Cults and Public Instruction.¹⁵ He even ventured into heritage legislation with his *Project for the Archaeology of the Romanian Country*.¹⁶ The taxonomies Papazoglu attempted to define for heritage closely mirrored those he had applied to his own collection, as described in a guidebook he published about Bucharest.¹⁷ The categories in Papazoglu's proposed archaeology of Wallachia included:

Medals, gold, silver, brass; Coins, idem idem, Big, small, and medium modules; Statues and busts, gold, silver, brass, stone, and clay; Bowls and vessels idem, idem, idem; Sculpted plaques, idem, idem, idem, idem; Jewelry, iron and silver rings, small sculpted stones, golden and silver pins; Iron and brass instruments; Armour and brass and iron clothing; Big stones and columns, with historical fragments and inscriptions; Petrifications with different plants and insects; Manuscripts in different languages; Old books printed in different languages.¹⁸

These taxonomies and related heritage practices align with other brochures he produced on heritage, in which his definitions of 'antiquities' were deeply intertwined with Romania's national formation and historical narrative. For instance, in a brochure marking the relocation of the remains of Michael the Brave, a 16th century *hoşpodar*, to Bucharest, Papazoglu emphasized that this act would make the city's inhabitants

12 Romanian Academy Library, Manuscripts Section, Arhiva Papazoglu, S29(2), Bucarest, Octobre 1878. The context was not random; it was in the immediate aftermath of the 1877 Russian-Turkish war which led to the independence of Romania from the Ottoman Empire.

13 Coman, Inter-imperial negotiation and heritage: Moving objects, people, ideas. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12947504>, 2024.

14 Coman 2024, 5–6.

15 SANIC, Copy after a report of the Romanaşi Prefecture to the Ministry of Interior Affairs May 23, 1864, Ministry of Cults and Public Instruction Fond, D. 400, fol. 203.

16 SANIC, Ministry of Cults and Public Instruction Fond, D 126/1864, fols. 106–13.

17 'If travelers will have the pleasure of visiting my modest collection of antiquities and rarities all discovered in Romania, over the course of 40 years, I shall feel the greatest honor to receive them in my home, Văcăreşti street, no 151, color of Blue, and I will be content in showing and explaining them all the antiquities within it, and which are arranged in a particular display on categories.' Papazoglu, 2000, 271.

18 SANIC, Ministry of Cults and Public Instruction Fond, D 126/1864, fol. 106.

‘proud before other nations.’¹⁹ In the 19th century, in the emerging Romanian nation-state, Michael the Brave had become an iconic figure in painting and in national historiography, celebrated for his anti-Ottoman campaigns. Through this brochure, Papazoglu reinforced the anti-Ottoman symbolism associated with Michael the Brave, highlighting not only the *hospodar*’s victories against the invading Ottoman army, but also his knowledge of Turkish (sic!), and his travels to Țarigrad.

In *Excursiune arheologică 1874 la trei vechi reședințe ale României*,²⁰ Papazoglu expressed concern for the preservation of three former princely courts, even forbidding guards from smoking near wooden scaffolding to prevent fire. He used the *Excursiune* as a platform to recommend that the local administration commission historians to write a history of Târgoviște,²¹ and publish ad-hoc brochures for the ‘benefit of the youth and the enrichment of national history, to show that the Dâmbovița district has within it the most historical and beautiful monuments.’²² As Sharon Macdonald has argued in *Memorylands*, heritage ‘implies ownership’ and transforms the past ‘into an arena from which selections can be made and values derived.’²³

Beyond his publications exploring how buildings and artefacts could serve the burgeoning Romanian national history, archival sources show that visitors often recorded their impressions of Papazoglu’s museum in writing. His correspondence, alongside his consistent practice of sending the museum catalogue to colleagues in the heritage field, was frequently framed as serving the national interest.²⁴ Laurajane Smith notes that ‘the interplay between authorized and subversive identities is quite revealing about the work that the Authorized Heritage Discourse does in helping to de-legitimize and legitimize certain forms of identity.’²⁵ The identity(ies) in Papazoglu’s case operated on two levels: first, his discursive, nationalist-militant agenda, expressed as ‘the feeling of love for the progress of my nation;’²⁶ second, his self-fashioning as an aristocrat, exemplified by the reproduction of his family coat of arms which Papazoglu dated to 1784.²⁷ (Figure 1). This emblem, which he described in a caption beneath the design, carried an explicit call for preservation at a familial level: ‘The crest of my family of Papazoglu. The original is in silver, from the year 1784, left to me by my late beloved father. Recommending my successors to keep (it) for the entire future of my family. Dimitrie Papazoglu.’

19 Papazoglu 1866, 10.

20 Papazoglu 1874.

21 Târgoviște becomes a significant lieu de memoire for 19th century emerging patrimony definitions as one of princely courts used by the hospodars of Wallachia.

22 Papazoglu 1874, 10–1.

23 Macdonald 2013, 18.

24 Romanian Academy Library, Manuscript section, Papazoglu archive, S31/MXXX. Papazoglu corresponds with Ferenc Pulszky, Hungarian National Museum director between 1869 and 1894, offering details of his collections and a copy of Papazoglu’s museum catalogue.

25 Smith 2006, 49–50.

26 Concordea, an I, nr. 28 din 15 mai 1857.

27 Opaschi 2001.

Figure 1. Coat of arms drawn by Dimitrie Papazoglu, inv. no 238465, National Museum of History of Romania



The paradox of militant nationalist agency combined with the deliberate preservation of objects symbolizing imperial rule has been described by Linda Nochlin: ‘rescued from the fury of the people by revolutionary art lovers and scholars, the visual objectifications of tyranny, superstition and oppression were, through the alchemy of the museum, transformed into the National Heritage, the most precious possession of the people.’²⁸ In the previously mentioned letter to Tsar Alexander II, Papazoglu framed Ottoman rule in Romania through the ‘yoke’ paradigm. Although he appears in several portraits wearing the *Nişân-ı ıftihâr*, Papazoglu also published a lithograph representing the Dealu Spirii battle against the Ottoman forces, led by Ömer Lütfi Paşa, during the suppression of the 1848 Wallachian uprising (Figure 2). This, in turn, recalls Saphinaz-Amal Naguib’s observations on the potential of objects to become clichés, vehicles for the (re)production of cultural or religious stereotypes. As Naguib writes, ‘an object refers to something else beyond itself. It is the concrete thing that is bestowed upon it. In the context of museums, representation requires classification and presentation.’²⁹

28 Nochlin 1972, 15.

29 Naguib 2015, 68.

Figure 2. Lithograph, editor Dimitrie Papazoglu, with a caption: 'Dedicated to Romanian Armies. The fight of the Romanian soldiers with the Ottoman army'. Inv. no 131532, National Museum of History of Romania



Following Papazoglu's death, his private collection was sold by his son, Constantin Papazoglu, between 1906 and 1909, after being evaluated by a specially convened commission. The objects were dispersed among several public museums in Bucharest, including the National Archives. Since no systematic research into the full contents of Papazoglu's collection has yet been undertaken, and my own investigation into the provenance of the objects is still ongoing, this article bases its analysis on the catalogue Papazoglu published in 1864. This catalogue serves both as a means of identifying the objects in the collection at that specific moment in time, and as an instrument of knowledge production, revealing what Papazoglu himself understood by 'Oriental rarities and antiquities.' As Dahlia Porter has argued,

processes of sequencing, labelling and organizing objects on paper were deployed to forge and consolidate, or, alternatively, disrupt and dispute, each museum's nascent institutional identity. Catalogues function as 'instituting genres' – that is, genres of

writing that enact and thereby make visible the dynamic processes of institutional formation and evolution.³⁰

The case of Dimitrie Papazoglu, a military officer turned collector and self-taught archaeologist, and the objects he considered worthy of being classified as ‘antiquities’³¹ illuminates shifting paradigms and identities. Scholarship regarding the intricacies of this process in the successor states of the Ottoman Empire is still developing, with notable gaps concerning the histories of heritage, particularly the complex agency of private collectors. Many of these lacunae result from the persistence of Westernizing and nationalist discourses, which have operated multiple layers of selection, not only on the objects themselves, but also on the very conception of patrimony as a symptom of ‘looking West.’³²

The Papazoglu case study is therefore essential for understanding how heritage is constituted: what is chosen, by whom, and how these choices are framed within a civilizational discourse of Westernization, summarized as ‘aligning with the good world.’³³ Furthermore, Islamic art and Ottoman-era artefacts have been marginalized in Romanian scholarship concerning museum collections, apart from a handful of museum catalogues and a few studies.³⁴ By engaging with the taxonomies Papazoglu applied to the objects in the Papazoglu Museum, and examining the categories he labelled ‘Oriental rarities from Asia, Egypt, and Persia,’ we can gain deeper insight into the politics of memory and the shifting value of Ottoman-era objects in the Danubian Principalities.

2. Museum Catalogues and Collecting ‘Oriental’ Artefacts: Knowledge Production and Defining Taxonomies

The negotiations inherent in the emergence of nation-states in Southeast Europe from the Ottoman Empire, especially as reflected in 19th-century definitions of patrimony, produce complex challenges for analyzing collecting and heritage practices. One relevant line of inquiry concerns whether other mid- to late-19th-century private collectors in the Ottoman Empire published catalogues as tools of public outreach or didactic engagement. So far, I have found mostly auction catalogues, along with one notable example by Adrien de Longpérier, who produced a catalogue for artefacts loaned

30 Porter 2022, 157.

31 While throughout the article I will use the term heritage, much of the archival material concerning Papazoglu’s private collection uses the term antiquities as a taxonomy for collected and displayed artefacts. The meaning of the term antiquities is not defined but can be understood to be one that is quite broad and encompassing. On the topic of the transition from antiquarianism to heritage, see Eriksen 2014.

32 Except for a few studies such as Cristache-Panait and Panait 1968; Căzănișteanu 1971; Ion-îță 2002; Ichim 2013, Dimitrie Papazoglu has not been the subject of systematic research concerning the full extent of his private collection.

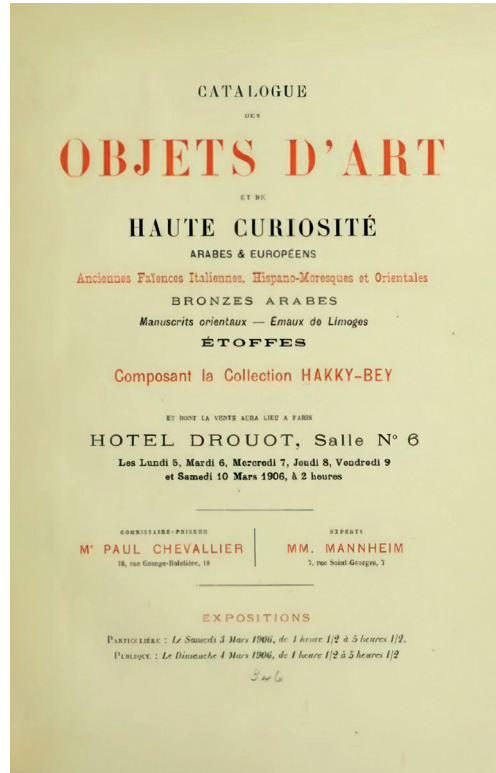
33 Papazoglu 1866, 10.

34 See here Dunca 2013 and 2015; Beldescu 1997.

Figure 3. Cover of the Kogălniceanu auction sale catalogue, image source: Badea-Păun, Gabriel. 2014. 'În căutarea unei colecții pierdute – Colecția lui Mihail Kogălniceanu'. Studii și Cercetări de Istoria Artei: SCIA. IV. 89–93



Figure 4. Catalogue of Hakky-Bey's Egyptian and Greco-Roman antiquities collection, May 31–June 2, 1906. *Antiquités*, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 1906



by Muhammad Khaznadar to the Tunisian Pavilion at the 1867 Paris World Fair.³⁵ Moreover, as Beyza Uzun discusses in her article part of this edition, the catalogues published in Constantinople served the emergent Imperial Museum. Other examples include the catalogue, in German, produced for the sale of Mihail Kogălniceanu's collection (Figure 3), and the one assembled for the Hôtel Drouot auction of Hakki Bey's collection (Figure 4). Further research into collecting and heritage practices within the Ottoman Empire could potentially reveal more such catalogues.

35 Moumni 2020.

Papazoglu's motivations for publishing the 1864 catalogue of his museum become clear from the foreword, in which he frames the act as both an expression of patriotic zeal and a response to personal antagonisms:

So that everyone can see my faith, and the zeal with which I have searched for the antiquities of our country, in places discovered by me and unknown to her [N.T. the country]; so that the Nation can see that I have devoted my entire life, with the highest zeal and pleasure, to the archaeology of my country and so that I may later combat the venomous enemy of the progress of the Museum, the restless enemy of everything that a Romanian has done well, the stranger to the principles of fraternity and our national love, the honourable gentleman Cesar Boliacu.³⁶

Here, the instrumentalization of objects as artefacts serving the nascent Romanian nation, is entwined with heritage as a vehicle for self-promotion and professional rivalry.

The word museum appears prominently on the catalogue's front page, accompanied by Papazoglu's portrait, which had already been widely reproduced in newspapers and in other works he published. The portrait emphasizes his military persona, displaying medals and decorations received from both the Russian and Ottoman Empires. The catalogue's motto underscores its patriotic purpose: 'Everyone with what one can/ To help one's country/ With sweat and with everything/ And even with one's life.'³⁷ Notably, the catalogue contains no illustrations. Instead, it offers descriptive and often narrative object entries, with provenance details mentioned sporadically. This format provides a clear view of the taxonomies Papazoglu used to classify, organize, and display his collection. Immediately following the foreword, the catalogue lists its divisions and classifications, which closely resemble those in the heritage preservation and legislative proposal he submitted to the Ministry of Cults and Public Instruction that same year:

The naming of the Divisions of Antiquities and Rarities that form the Museum of Lieutenant Major D. Papassoglu:

- I. Medals, gold, silver and brass
- II. Gold and silver coins
- III. Bras coins that divide into 6 sizes
- IV. Roman jewelry and small sculpted stones
- V. Different adornments for both sexes
- VI. Bronze, stone and burnt clay statues, and busts likewise
- VII. Stone sculpted plaques, of burnt clay, cast and of other metals
- VIII. Earthenware vases, metal and stone
- IX. Different antique weapons, from the oldest centuries
- X. Large stones with various sculptures, busts, roofing tiles and big bricks

36 Pappasoglu 1864, 3.

37 *ibid.*, 2.

- XI. Different petrified bones and plant elements
- XII. Different natural rarities in stone, wood, plant, bones and insects
- XIII. The mineralogy of the Romanian Mountains, diverse metals
- XIV. Antique Church objects
- XV. Oriental rarities from Asia, Egypt and Persia
- XVI. Different iron, bronze, bone and stone instruments
- XVII. Varied manufactured and textile rarities from Romania
- XVIII. Old library only with printed books
- XIX. Manuscripts on paper and parchment
- XX. The painting in oil, copies and lithographs gallery³⁸

Closely examining the object categories Papazoglu enumerates, one is struck by the impression of a universalist vision, reminiscent of a *Wunderkammer*, regarding what might be considered worthy of the labels ‘antiquity’ and ‘rarity.’ His taxonomies operate simultaneously on material criteria (metal, bone, stone, burnt clay, etc.) and on typological ones, ranging from coins and sculptures to manuscripts, paintings, and mineral specimens. Category no. 15, interestingly titled ‘Oriental rarities from Asia, Egypt, and Persia’ and positioned between ecclesiastical objects and instruments made from bone, metal, and stone, is the focus of this discussion. In the context of 19th-century Romanian nation-building, which placed heavy emphasis on tracing and exhibiting the Latin origins of the Romanian people, and given Papazoglu’s own militant nationalism, it is striking to find in his collection a section explicitly labelled ‘*despărțirea XVI. Rarități orientale în Asia, Egipt, și Persia.*’

The Egyptian subsection presents a heterogeneous mix: mummies, sarcophagi, small statues of deities, and stone scarabs, alongside an ‘Arab sabre holder/girdle made from silk with buckles and gilded ornaments,’ bronze adornments, bracelets, earrings, and hairpins ‘as the Arab ladies wear,’ white clay vessels, and a ‘colored tin ink holder/fountain made in Jerusalem.’³⁹ This conflation of Egyptian antiquities with Arab, Ottoman, Islamic material culture invites questions about Papazoglu’s conception of ‘Oriental rarities.’ Why, for example, are Egyptian artefacts placed within the same geographical frame as Persia and ‘Asia’? And what accounts for the differences in representation between the Persian and Asian subsections? This leads to a crucial discussion about the *geographies of collecting*, one that engages the (art) historical taxonomies within Islamic art, and its subsequent divisions between Persian, Mughal, Ottoman.⁴⁰ As Frédéric Hitzel notes when engaging with the Turkophilia phenomenon, while distinctions were often made between Iranian and Arab art, the notion of a distinct ‘Turkish art’ was largely absent; what was commonly described as ‘Persian art’ could encompass Arabic and Byzantine elements as well.⁴¹

38 Pappasoglu 1864, 6–7.

39 *ibid.*, 59–65.

40 Gadoin 2022, argues that Persian was more of an umbrella term used by late 19th century and early 20th century British collectors to refer to Islamic art.

41 Hitzel 2011.

Figure 5. Examples of objects present in the Oriental rarities section of the Muzeul Papazoglu catalogue

Weapons	Smoking and coffee paraphernalia	Texts and tesbihs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swords of steel (Ro taban) • Gold embroidered horse breastplate • Iron riffle with silver reliefs and precious stones • Yatağan with precious stones inlay • Old dagger with ivory handle and sculptures on its iron, and coral (Ro mârgean) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amber mouthpieces with gold decoration, worked in enamel with Constantinople scenes • Gilded wire zarfs with flowers en ajour • Faceted crystal nargileh with sculpted flowers • Gilded wire coffee pot (Ro ibric) from the 14th century Sultan Murad I tughra • Fincans (Ro filigene) of the finest porcelain with Oriental flowers on them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different pairs of amber tesbihs, black coral and others • Lead plaques with various symbols with Arab characters as in the Ottoman Quran • Long and narrow paper strip which wraps around a small roll, on which it is written with golden Arabic characters • Islamic calligraphy panels (levha)

The types of objects Papazoglu assigns to category no. 15 include weapons, smoking and coffee paraphernalia, select religious artefacts, and jewellery. His tone in describing them is predominantly factual and itemized, without rhetorical flourishes or explicit hierarchies of value. Notably, many of these items were part of everyday life in the Ottoman provinces of Wallachia and Moldavia, as documented in 17th–18th-century archival records. Furthermore, in *‘despărțirea XVII-a. Diferitați rarități de manufacturi și țesături din Rumîn. Rarități,’* Papazoglu uses Ottoman-Turkish terms to designate objects he nonetheless classifies as Romanian: *‘teasu’* from Turkish *tas*, *‘antirie’* from the Turkish *entari*, *‘peșchire’* from the Turkish *peşkir*, and *‘imamele.’*⁴²

Similarly, other sections contain artefacts with Eastern associations. In section 5, dedicated to adornments for both sexes, he lists earrings and bronze bracelets from Arabia.⁴³ In the next section, he describes a red granite statue, representing a ‘Chinese mandarin sitting down,’ and a large, bronze Cleopatra holding the braided snake on her arm and waist, followed by a black bronze statue of Osiris. In section 8, which covers earthenware and metal-ware vessels, Chinese porcelain decorated with landscapes and flowers appears alongside Ottoman brass ewers (orig. Ibri) with gilding and blue enamel.

The weapons category is equally diverse: a sword inscribed with Arabic lettering and fitted with an ivory hilt shaped like a seal; an ‘old Arabian’ sword inlaid with red coral (orig. *mârgean*) and ivory; a pair of agate stones from the hilt of a sword found in the Adrianople citadel and attributed to Sultan Murad (orig. *Sultan Amuratu*) and Turkish pistols said to have been used by the *Arnavut* participants in the 1821 revolution.

Working with the catalogue as both a source and as a discursive text led me to the discovery of numerous artefacts that could have been classified under ‘Oriental rari-

42 Papazoglu 1864, 67.

43 *ibid.*, 27–8.

ties,' yet Papazoglu chose instead to assign many of them to material- or function-based categories, rather than to geographical ones. This choice complicates the question of whether his interest in Islamic and Ottoman-era objects can be fully understood through the lens of Orientalist discourse.

A comparative reading of the language Papazoglu employs to describe objects in the 'Oriental rarities' section and those in 'Varied manufactured and textile rarities from Romania' underscores his use of the catalogue as an instrument of knowledge production. Similarly to the 'Oriental' rarities, the items attributed to Romania were described in similar terms: type of object, material from which it was made, any distinctive marks present, possible manufacturer. The types of objects collected by Papazoglu is consistent with other examples of European collections of Islamic and Ottoman-era artefacts.⁴⁴

In the afterword to *Objects and other. Essays on Museums and Material Culture*, James Clifford argues that

the collector will be expected to label them, to know their dynasty (it is not enough that they simply exude power or mystery), to tell "interesting" things about them, to distinguish copies from originals. (...) Accumulation unfolds in a pedagogical, edifying manner. The collection itself, its taxonomic, aesthetic structure, is valued.⁴⁵

Writing to a certain Mr. Wiess from Severin, Papazoglu notes having sent a copy of his museum catalogue to the director of the museum in Peste, stressing the importance of knowing the country's significant historical monuments and, notably, of recognizing the presence of a substantial 'Oriental' section within his own museum.⁴⁶ The letter contains no suggestion of relational geographies, no attempt to situate 'Oriental' material in relation to local Romanian history, yet its inclusion in his heritage discourse indicates its perceived importance.

This raises a key interpretative question: how does 'Oriental' fit into Papazoglu's museum? Rather than being peripheral, the category emerges as a crucial lens for understanding shifting attitudes toward Ottoman-era and Islamic artefacts in the late 19th century Romania. In this context, his ascription of value to Islamic and Ottoman-era artefacts, and his meticulous cataloguing of them as part of a public-facing knowledge project, becomes significant. The catalogue acts not only as a record but also as a purveyor of prestige, both for Papazoglu personally and for the emerging Romanian national heritage.

Therefore, Papazoglu is not merely a private collector amassing eclectic objects. He is a voluntary participant in the formation of institutional heritage practices, fulfilling the expectations Clifford outlines: knowing an object's origins, situating it within a politically charged historical framework, and instrumentalising it as a branding device. In

44 For a discussion on the emergent interest in Islamic art see Gadoin 2022; Gierlichs 2019; Giese, Volait, Braga 2019; Venoit 2000; Eldem 2015; Türker 2014; Volait 2021; etc.

45 Clifford 1985, 238.

46 Romanian Academy Library, Manuscript Section, Papazoglu archive, S32(2), Bucarest.

doing so, he bridges personal legacy with national representation, embodying the tensions and possibilities of heritage-making in a post-Ottoman, Westernizing Romania.

3. Bridging the *Wunderkammer* and Modern Museum Gap: Is Papazoglu a Late Ottoman Empire Collector?

Placing Papazoglu's private collection within established histories of collecting reveals it as underpinning the transition from a *Wunderkammer*, where one can find various elements of Naturalia, to the modern understanding of a museum. The question of whether his choice to collect Ottoman-era and Islamic artefacts was a byproduct of Romania's Westernizing trajectory remains open. Attempts to trace direct links with contemporary Ottoman collectors through correspondence did not lead to meaningful results. Archival records instead point to his professional and intellectual networks being rooted primarily in French, Russian, and German archaeological circles. The opening of the Hagia Irene as a collection of antiquities and of weapons was known in the Danubian Principalities, especially due to being mentioned by Dimitrie Ralet in his travelogue.⁴⁷ However, it is not clear in the available archival material to what extent Dimitrie Papazoglu was aware of the emergent heritage institutions in Constantinople and their presence in Romanian travel literature.

Papazoglu records in his 1866 self-narrative brochure that his collection was visited by architect Ambroise Baudry and archaeologist Gustave Boissière, both members of the French *Comité archéologique* sent by Napoleon III and recommended by Alexandru Ioan Cuza's secretary, Arthur Baligot de Beyne.⁴⁸ His later selection, in 1870, as a member of the Archaeological Society in Moscow further confirms his integration into a transnational scholarly milieu with established practices of engaging with Islamic and Ottoman era art.⁴⁹

Whether Papazoglu was aware of, or influenced by, the emerging heritage institutions in Constantinople, such as the Hagia Irene collection of antiquities and arms, noted by Dimitrie Ralet in his travelogue, remains unclear. Still, his activity coincided with a wider European appetite for Islamic art, which Mercedes Volait situates within a series of landmark exhibitions between 1851 and 1910, including the Exhibition of Arab and Persian Art (Paris, 1885), *Les Arts musulmans* (1893, 1903), the Stockholm General Art and Industry Exhibition (1897), the Algiers *Exposition d'art musulman* (1905), and Munich's *Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst* (1910).⁵⁰ These events codified Islamic art within the European display lexicon, framing it both as an object of aesthetic admiration and as a commodity within a globalizing art market.

47 Ralet 1858.

48 The two were present in Romania, by order of Napoleon III, in order to excavate the archaeological site of Troesmis. See on this Kucsinschi 2021.

49 Odobescu 1961.

50 Volait 2021.

Additionally, Hitzel discusses the collections of Duke of Blacas, acquired by British Museum in 1866; the Iznik ceramics removed by Auguste Salzmann from Rhodes Island, the Charles Schefer's collection of illuminated manuscripts, Hakky Bey, and especially Dikran Kelekian.⁵¹ To what extent did the contacts with members of French archaeological missions in Dobrudja translate into Papazoglu being knowledgeable of the loan show organized by the *Union centrale des beaux-arts appliqués à l'industrie* in 1865 and the burgeoning interest in Islamic art in European collections? Volait's framing of the 'commodification and translocation of material culture from a region caught up in a declining Ottoman Empire called to modernize in the face of expanding European imperialism' raises another question: to what degree can Papazoglu's practices be subsumed under this paradigm?⁵²

The foreword to his 1864 catalogue, while acknowledging the presence of foreign archaeologists, reframes their activity as part of a predatory process: foreigners, he argues, present a distorted image of Romanians 'as Slavs and barbarians with no name, that we shouldn't let old and precious documents preserved over the centuries to be estranged from us by usurers.'⁵³ In this catalogue, he underlines the importance of not leaving the archaeological discoveries and acquisitions of artefacts in Romania in the hands of foreigners because 'they buy them incessantly for their private collections and the museums of foreign states. I wanted to put an end to this evil; that is why I submitted to the Honourable Minister of Interior and the one of Public Instruction, but have seen nothing done, and no measures to end this wasteful evil have been taken.'⁵⁴ Here, Papazoglu reminds the Ministry of Cults and Public Instruction that he had compiled a legislative project intended not only to enact protection and conservation measures for the antiquities of Romania, but also to carbon copy the taxonomies in his museum to a national level.⁵⁵

Oana Damian and Renata Tatomir contend that the Papazoglu collection was of an intellectual antiquarian type, comparable to those assembled by Mihail Ghica or General Gheorghe Mavros. The presence of Egyptian artefacts in these collections is attributed by Tatomir and Damian to both a prevailing trend among private collectors in the Danubian Principalities and the geographical proximity to the Ottoman Empire (sic!), as well as to broader collecting fashions in Europe and the Russian Empire. They further argue that we are dealing with an antiquarian type of collecting practices, dependent upon the taste and personality of the collector, who gathered miscellaneous

51 Hitzel 2011.

52 Volait 2021, 15.

53 Papazoglu 1864, 5. Orig. 'cu atâta mai multu trebuie noi care am trasu adesea catigorisirea istoriciloru că sântem slavi, sântem barbari și în sfârșitu navem nici un nume, să lăsăm aceste prețioase documente ce ni le păstrează atâtea veacuri pământulu a se înstreina peste frontierele nostre dea către Zărăfii.'

54 Papazoglu 1864, 4.

55 Serviciul Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale (SANIC), Ministerul Cultelor și Instrucțiunii Publice, D.126—1864, fols. 106—13.

pieces and with uncertain provenance, some from outside Romania.⁵⁶ According to Damian and Tatomir, quoting Miron Ciho, Dimitrie Papazoglu's Egyptian artefacts had been purchased in 1852 from a merchant called I.A. Kheun or J.A. Khneum.

Aurica Ichim provides additional insight into Papazoglu's museum, mentioning that the objects were also gathered during his military career when he was stationed across Wallachia, in a garrison that was active along the left bank of the Danube.⁵⁷ Ichim further adds that the pieces seemed to have been collected from the houses of ordinary people, during Papazoglu's archaeological excursions in Wallachia and that many of the weapons were discovered during the urbanization projects initiated during the reign of Alexandru Ioan Cuza or recovered incidentally.⁵⁸ In 1909, his collection was divided and dispersed post-mortem, among various institutions such as the State Archives, the Library of the Romanian Academy, the National Art Museum (nowadays the National Peasant Museum), the National Museum of Antiquities, the Geology and Palaeontology Museum, and the Petrography Laboratory.⁵⁹ When the selected objects from the Papazoglu collection became part of the National Art Museum founded by Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcaş, the museum inventory recorded provenance details for some of the artefacts. For example, a *saban* described as a brass *tepsi* with inscriptions, dated 1691, is recorded to have been commissioned by Antonie voivode to be donated at the Târşor Monastery, an earthenware vessel dated 18th century seems to have originated from a cellar under the Old Post building in Bucharest, on Doamnei street. Stones sculpted in the shape of a turban are registered in the Samurcaş inventory as originating from the Brăila cemetery, which leads to speculations that they were tombstone fragments.⁶⁰

Mircea Dunca has identified that, in the present-day National Museum of Art of Romania, only a Qajar dagger can be securely attributed to Papazoglu's collection. Other Persian artefacts once thought to belong to him were actually part of later transfers from the Tzigara-Samurcaş Museum. Basing his conclusion on a manuscript inventory dated 1909 of the Papazoglu collection remitted to the National Museum of Art and Industry, Dunca summarized the contents and added that under number 954 there is 'a big dagger and its sheath covered with red cloth with golden embroidery.'⁶¹ This artefact, now in the Oriental Art Department of the NMAR, is a Qajar dagger, originating approximately from the end of the 18th century, with an ivory handle and watered steel blade, decorated on both sides with a scene representing a feline hunting a deer. The dagger is signed, probably Hasan (Figure 6).

Dunca argues that the lack of provenance details for this piece reflects limited familiarity with Persian material culture, especially in contrast to Ottoman artefacts. The erroneous description of two other Persian objects from the same ethnographic

56 Damian and Tatomir 2019, 97–8.

57 Ichim 2013, 204.

58 *ibid.*, 206–7.

59 Papazoglu 2000, VI.

60 National Museum of the Romanian Peasant archive, Tzigara-Samurcaş museum inventory, 1909, 116–23.

61 Dunca 2013, 38.

Figure 6. End of 18th century Qajar dagger, signed Hasan, National Museum of Art of Romania collection, inv. 880/19869



Figure 7. Safavid armor plate with gold damascened inscriptions, catalogued as ‘a fragment of an Arab shield,’ National Museum of Art of Romania, inv. 1517/20523



museum, but with a different provenance, leads Dunca to a similar conclusion: a Safavid armour plate with gold damascened inscriptions was catalogued as ‘a fragment of an Arab shield’ (Figure 7), a *nargileh* with ceramic base was described as ‘Chinese porcelain’ (Figure 8). The latter is in fact a 17th century Safavid hookah base in the shape

Figure 8. 17th-century Safavid hookah base in the shape of a kendi, with a later addition of the silver mount; National Museum of Art of Romania, inv. 461/19438



of a *kendi*, with a later addition of the silver mount; 'its underglaze Chinese style decoration including a deer by a fence and under a cloud, painted in two shades of blue, as well as the Chinese-like square mark on the bottom, may have caused the confusion.'⁶² Cross-referencing the inventory manuscript in the National Museum of Art with the Papazoglu donation to the Tzigara-Samurçuş Museum of Ethnography, National Art, Decorative Art and Industrial Art would clarify whether these misidentified objects originated from his collection.

While it can be argued that private collections from the beginning to mid-19th century in the Danubian Principalities/Romania were predominantly focused on Greek, Roman, Egyptian antiquities, Dimitrie Papazoglu was not singular in amassing Ottoman era and Islamic artefacts. The archive of the Ministry of Cults and Public Instruction for the year 1867 contains a protocol between Cezar Bolliac and Ilie Ciocarovici for a donation of artefacts to the National Museum of Antiquities, Bucharest. The protocol details the contents of the donation, a total of 46 objects.⁶³ Swords attributed to Ottoman sultans such as Sultan Selim (not specified which one), Suleiman are listed next to pistols, *yatağans* and swords that seemed to have belonged to 1821 Revolution members, namely Sava Bimbaşa, Jianu Haidouk or Hagi Prodan.⁶⁴ Moreover, in a letter dated 1892, a certain Titus Daşchevici from Dorohoi offers to sell to Dimitrie Papazoglu a series of silver coins, along with a drawing in blue ink which reveals that they were Ottoman coins.⁶⁵

In conclusion, the collection of Dimitrie Papazoglu offers a unique opportunity to engage with the emergent heritage making practices in the Ottoman Empire and its successor states, facilitated by the active choice to amass Islamic and Ottoman era objects. Contextualizing his collecting strategies within the mid-19th century material turn, the impact of a nationalist narrative in tandem with a Euro-centric civilizational discourse, Papazoglu seems to posit a counter-narrative. His dynamic and ambivalent discourses, including those towards the Ottoman Empire, and desire to belong to the grand narratives of heritage, could be speculated as driving forces behind his 'Oriental rarities.'

The objects range from weapons, textiles, Qurans, metalware especially copper and tin, zarfs, coffee pots, to porcelain cups, carpets, calligraphy scissors, pieces of adornment, and so on. Furthermore, placing his 'Oriental rarities' among more conventional objects interrogates how these objects reconcile with a militant Nationalist agenda, and the civilizational discourse concerning heritage practices. Mircea Dunca discusses the ethnographical meanings of the Papazoglu collection as it becomes part of the National Art and Industry Museum, Damian and Tatomir define Papazoglu as an antiquarian, considering his paradoxical eclecticism, and Aura Ichim simply portrays him as an amateur for the exotic, based on his archival correspondence.⁶⁶ My current work-

62 Dunca 2013, 38.

63 SANIC, Ministry of Cults and Public Instruction Fond, D.112_1867, fols. 77–9.

64 SANIC, D. 112_1867, fol. 78.

65 Romanian Academy Library, Manuscript section, Arhiva Papazoglu, S12/MXXX.

66 Ichim 2013, 205.

ing hypothesis is that ‘Oriental’ antiquities for Papazoglu became a strategic heritage practice, aimed at both putting Romania on the map of heritage, next to ‘the good world,’ and amassing as many object categories in a universalist drive.

Papazoglu frequently stated, including in the foreword of his catalogue, that the collected objects had a provenance that could be traced to Wallachia and Moldavia. This translates into a significant issue to be considered, which is the symbolic transference of Ottoman legacy of material culture from items of daily activity to museum artefacts. However, attempts to trace the Ottoman era objects present in the two provinces while and if they enter various mid-19th century collections and the meaning of this process within the historical context of the nation building and Westernization path, are made more difficult by the fragmented nature of the archives, and their absences. Consequently, the case study of Dimitrie Papazoglu as a private collector often attempting to become part of the incipient forms of institutionalized heritage in Wallachia/Romania, and his usage of antiquities as a tool for personal branding facilitates exploring the complexities of heritage making.

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