



ORIGINAL PAPER

Treasure as an essential element of public diplomacy. A preliminary case study on the example of Romanian actions

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Abstract:

Treasures of the past play an important role in the broader process of learning about one's own past, but they have also played and continue to play an important role in the international arena. In this capacity, they are an important element of a country's public diplomacy - this theme has been evident in international politics since at least the 19th century, when, with the development of archaeology and history, more and more such finds, often very spectacular, began to be exhibited in numerous museums as an element of national pride, but also as a good cultural ambassador for one's own country. In such a capacity, the Romanian state had already been using one of its greatest treasures - the one excavated in Pietroasa in 1837 - since the 1860s. In the capacity of a kind of cultural ambassador, the treasure was used at world exhibitions in Paris and Vienna, while also being the subject of much political discussion.

The object of the article will be to analyse the exhibition policies of Romania - that is, to identify the places where it was decided to exhibit the greatest national treasures; in addition, to indicate both the motives and the political benefits of such action between the 19th and 21st centuries. Due to limitations, only a preliminary analysis will be made of the currently vital issue of restitution of cultural property, also an important element of public diplomacy.

Keywords: *Romania, treasures, public diplomacy, museums, treasures recovery.*

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With the advent of the modern era, interest in past eras began to grow. The Renaissance awakened interest in the past. At first, individuals who gradually began to build their own collections of antiquities were interested in collecting traces of the past, whereas from the beginning of the 18th century individual states began to invest more and more boldly in building their own collections of antiquities. While initially there was a proverbial boom in the acquisition of antiquities from the area of the Mediterranean Sea, a little later the construction of own collections based also on the evidence of one's own past began. It was on this wave that the foundations of, for example, the British Museum, and later its equivalents in other parts of Europe, were laid. Thus, one might be tempted to say that the Age of Enlightenment put the issue of acquiring monuments of antiquity on the proverbial agenda; every state, to a greater or lesser extent, began making efforts to acquire important testimonies of the past, treating it almost as an element of national honour.

Undoubtedly the catalyst for further interest and the element that brought antiquities into the orbit of broader diplomacy was the peace treaty ending Napoleon Bonaparte's unsuccessful expedition to Egypt - the peace of 4 July 1801 provided for the surrender to the British of much of the artefacts acquired by the French during the Egyptian expedition. The desire to acquire more artefacts at a fairly easy cost, evident in the treaty concluding the Egyptian expedition, was also due to a change in attitudes towards science more broadly in Britain - it was at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that the British government decided to introduce a policy aimed at making science and art more accessible (Hooek 2017, 55). As a result of the expanded demand for the acquisition of knowledge, it also became noticeable that there was an increased interest from the part of interested parties to acquire more artefacts in order to satisfy the public's expectations as well. Due to the favourable circumstances, the British sought to acquire as many artefacts as possible from the French, which they ultimately succeeded in doing so. Among the most important acquisitions in this case was the Rosetta Stone. With the development of archaeology, demands for the surrender of artefacts began to rise with an increasing frequency when final peace agreements were concluded.

A second element of a political and diplomatic nature was the use of artefacts already acquired or found to popularise one's own country. One of the first such uses was the display of an Irish artefact (the Brooch of Tara) at the 1851 EXPO by the Irish jeweller Waterhouse in a wave of interest in Celtic art (McEvansoneya 2011, 80). While the 1851 exhibition can be seen as a kind of 'internal' British affair, the object's subsequent display at the next general exhibition in Paris can already be seen as part of a broad public diplomacy aimed at presenting an artefact from the British Isles to the French public. Understandably, the original motivation was probably a desire to attract more clients, but the fact itself should nevertheless be noted as being trend-setting in this field. The participation of the brooches from Tara was justified here insofar as an integral part of the Paris exhibition was a section (organised as a separate exhibition) of fine arts - within which the artefacts were also presented at subsequent exhibitions.

Romania decided to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the presentation of the new country's achievements on the international stage, deciding to participate in the World Exhibition of 1867, which was organised in Paris. The decision to participate was taken in 1865, with the receipt of an invitation from the French government. For the Romanians, it was important that they were able to take part in the event on its own as a separate exhibitor and not as part of the Ottoman Empire, as was the case, for example,

with their participation in the London Exhibition of 1851. Given the requirements of public diplomacy, this was a *de facto* recognition of at least the formal suzerainty of the Romanian state. The Romanians quite readily agreed to participate in the exhibition by quickly appointing their chief commissioner, who became Alexandru Odobescu, already a well-known historian and archaeologist at the time (Odobescu 1976, 42). Subsequent expositions of the treasure outside Romania took place in the United Kingdom (1867/1868), where it was exhibited at the South Kensington Museum [now the Victoria and Albert Museum], and in Paris on the occasion of the World Exhibition in 1900. This was for a long time the last intentional exhibition of the treasure outside Romania. During the Great War, the treasure was sent to Russia for safekeeping, there seized by the Bolsheviks, and for a long time the possibility of presenting it internationally disappeared.

After the recovery of the Pietroasa treasure and other important Romanian artefacts (1956), they were temporarily displayed in Romania during the temporary exhibitions. The provisional solution was due to the fact that the National Museum of Romanian History was to be commissioned as the final home for most of Romania's treasures - the decision to set it up was still taken in 1969, but work progressed slowly, as befits a socialist economy, and the museum only opened its doors in 1971. Thus, it can be considered to some extent a return to the solutions used back in the 19th century, until EXPO 1900 in Paris, when the treasure from Petroasa was sent abroad for the last time for these purposes.

Romanian treasures in all were shown abroad, except of course for those temporarily confiscated by the Bolsheviks, again from at least 1925 (Romanian Art Treasures 1965-1966, 4). The first such exhibition was organised in Geneva and Paris, an exhibition presenting medieval Romanian art. It was prepared by the greatest Romanian historians, Nicolae Iorga, Vasile Pârvan and Gheorghe Balș, whose experience guaranteed the quality and reception of the exhibition among the public.

The first such exhibition outside Romania is known to have taken place in 1965/1966, but its composition/content was not very extensive. In the UK, the venue was the Royal Scottish Museum. Stefan Buzas, on the Romanian side, and Alan Irvine, on the British side, were responsible for preparing the exhibition. The institution selecting the artefacts and coordinating their shipment to the UK was: Romanian State Committee for Culture and Arts, which also played a decisive role in the preparation of the next exhibition (Romanian Art Treasures 1965-1966).

The Romanian authorities decided to send their most important artefacts on another *tour* in 1970 and 1971. The exhibition first visited Paris. This took place between 25 May and 1 September 1970. the exhibition was held at the *Petit Palais*, where, as the Romanians recalled, it was received with full pomp and attentiveness. It was a summation of the hitherto good relations between the two countries, which had been foreshadowed by the visit paid to Bucharest by French President Charles de Gaulle in 1968. An additional aspect strengthening the reception of the exhibition in France, was the patronage of both the French President Georges Pompidou and the then President of the Romanian Council of State, Nicolae Ceaușescu; in addition, the Romanian dictator paid a visit to Paris during the exhibition (15 VI -17 VI) (România Libera, 16 VI 1971, 4). A visit to the exhibition was not on the agenda of the visit of Nicolae Ceaușescu himself, but as a cultural event, a visit to the *Petit Palais* was on the schedule of the Romanian leader's wife Elena on 16 June 1971. The Romanian press duly noted the satisfaction of her companion at the success of the exhibition of

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Romanian monuments in Paris. This success was further emphasised by the statement of the French Minister of culture, Edmond Michelet, expressing his satisfaction at the possibility of hosting such an important exhibition in France (România Liberă, 17 VI 1971, 3). The exposition of Romanian monuments in France was also part of the French cultural programme, which also included other monuments of material culture, from Tutanachamon's tomb to pre-Columbian art, on display in the "Petit Palais". According to French journalists, the exhibition was conceived as a presentation of the different material cultures and their heritage, including spiritual heritage; inhabiting Romania throughout history. On the Romanian side, the selection of the artefacts for the exhibition was to be made by the archaeologist Radu Florescu. (Dunca 1970, 26). It is worth noting that this was a premiere in terms of exhibiting elements of the Apahida treasure, discovered only the previous year. Also in this connection, the French press even described the Romanian exposition as the event of spring 1970 in Paris. The correspondent of the daily *Le Monde* emphasised the excellent selection of the artefacts on display, reflecting well the complexity of the ancient cultures present in Romania, which in turn was well received by the Parisian public, providing a good showcase for Romanian culture (Contemporanul, 29 V 1970, 10). The exhibition finally lasted until the beginning of September 1970, receiving excellent reviews from the local press, which in turn was scathingly reported in Romania itself, e.g. in the correspondence of Ioan Grigorescu [n.b. later Romanian ambassador to Poland] (Scânteia 4 IX 1970, 6).

The next stop was Stockholm (on which occasion the patera research mentioned elsewhere reported by M. von Heland (1973) took place. A Romanian publication of April 1970 indicated that the last stop of the touring exhibition would be Copenhagen, but the final visit to the Danish capital was not realised. It was eventually decided that the last Western capital (presumably in exchange for Copenhagen) where the exhibition would be shown would be London. The British were interested in the possibility of hosting/taking over the exhibition in June 1970, and it was decided that it would be held at the British Museum, as the institution most predestined to do so. The exhibition was due to open on 29 January 1971 (NA, FCO 34/107;2). Invited to open it was, from the Romanian side, M. Macovei, chairman of the Romanian State Committee for Culture and Arts. On the British side, the exhibition was originally intended to be opened by Lord Lothian the then Under-Secretary of State at the UK Foreign Office (Peter Kerr, 12th Marquis of Lothian).

The organisation of the exhibition in London was made possible by the British-Romanian cultural exchange programme concluded in 1968. On the London side, the supervision of the event was entrusted to the British Council, as the organisation responsible for coordinating cultural exchange, and the British Museum as the host institution for the exhibition. According to the assurances of the Romanian ambassador to the UK, the exhibition was to show the British public the best that Romania had to offer. Moreover, in discussions with the British, it was emphasised that the exhibition was prioritised in both Paris and Stockholm, from which delicate resentments towards the British arose, especially in the context of the rather limited space for the deployment of the exhibition.

It was finally decided on 13 January 1971 that the exhibition from the British side would be opened by Anthony Royle, then Under-Secretary of State in the British Foreign Office, the participation of a member of the British Cabinet was to reassure the Romanian side of the importance that was attached to the exhibition and to ensure the

participation of members of the Romanian government in the opening of the exhibition (NA, 34/107; 3).

From the analysis of the documents, it appears that procedural issues were a relatively big problem, because as the Romanian side felt somewhat undervalued by the limited exhibition space, they wanted to compensate for this through a more elaborate event setting. This in turn did not very much correlate with the vision of the exhibition presented by the British Museum. The Romanians asked for representatives of the royal family to be present at the event. However, in this case, the tight schedule of *the Royals*, and the very late date of the event, was an obstacle.

The exhibition was accompanied by the publication of a corresponding catalogue, for which articles on individual monuments were written by the greatest Romanian specialists in specific fields (historical eras). The final version of the catalogue contains texts also published in France and Sweden, nevertheless with additional articles and an appropriate introduction, signed by Trevelyan. On the Romanian side, Dumitru Stănescu was responsible for the exhibition, while the curator on the British Museum side was Hugh Tait. The exhibition catalogue includes 489 material culture artefacts from a chronological range from the Middle Neolithic to 1711. The exhibition catalogue begins with the famous 'thinker' figurine excavated near Constanta, still widely used today in the souvenir industry, at least in Romania. The exhibition prepared was indeed a cross-section through the most important monuments of the aforementioned eras providing an excellent showcase for Romania.

Among the most important artefacts are the figurines of the aforementioned 'thinker' and his wife, constituting a whole, there were also the famous Geto-Dacian helmets from, among others, Cotofenești, further the rhyton from Poroina, the treasure from Agighiol, the Celtic helmet from Ciumești and the greatest treasures from the Migration of Peoples Age, the treasure from Pietroasa and part of the no less rich treasure from Apahida. (Treasures 1971). Most of these artefacts are now on display in the treasury of the National Historical Museum in Bucharest.

The British press emphasised, as did the French press previously, the great value of the exhibition, which represented a unique opportunity for the local public to admire such a quantity of important historical artefacts. It was also stressed that the transportation to Britain of such a quantity of important archaeological artefacts was done in secret for security reasons. (Contemporanul, 12 I 1971). In Britain, the exhibition lasted until 25 March 1971.

The early 1971 exhibition was not the only cultural event organised by the British Museum that year. In general, it can be noted that the Romanian-British rapprochement clearly visible in the late 1960s and early 1970s served many aspects of the development of mutual relations. Suffice it to mention, for example, the settlement of issues related to the establishment of aviation relations between the countries concerned at that time (see previous conference), a kind of extension of the aforementioned settlement was also the acquisition by the Romanians of the opportunity to purchase British BAC 1-11 aircraft and their subsequent licence production. Also, as can be seen, the agreement on cultural cooperation, at least at the turn of the mentioned decades, can be regarded as a success; especially as already in November 1971 the respectable doors of the British Museum hosted Romanian art again, this time in a slightly later edition. This time the exhibition was hosted by the ethnographic department of the London institution, and the theme was Romanian folk art. Unlike the previous exhibition presenting historical treasures, which, due to its importance, lasted a

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relatively short time; this time the exhibition was to last much longer - six months. (Scînteia, 23 November 1971, 6). The exhibition opened on 19(?) November 1971 and presented to the British public, among other things, traditional Romanian clothing, patterned textiles and other broad aspects of folk art. The correspondent of the party newspaper Scînteia stressed the great interest on the part of Londoners in the new exhibition. The opening on the British side was attended by John Wolfenden, then director of the British Museum, who also gave the opening speech; Sir William Harpham, director of the cultural centre "Great Britain - Eastern Europe, and Allan Olivier, director of "Europe Publication Ltd." was also present. In common with other exhibitions of a similar nature, especially in the pre-internet era, the exhibition attracted widespread interest from most students at London art schools, as the exhibits provided excellent models for credit theses. Another aspect of cultural diplomacy, was to lead, also in November 1971, to the publication by the prestigious Oxford University Press of the collection Romanian Short Stories, containing a selection of the most interesting fiction texts of a cross-section of Romanian authors. (Scînteia, 23 XI 1971, 6).

In the years that followed, Romanian artefacts were presented several times outside the country, nevertheless sometimes it can be doubted whether the originals were really presented during these exhibitions . It can be said with a high degree of probability that the exhibition of the early 1990s that took place in Germany presented copies of the treasure from Pietroasa, made in Paul Telge's workshop in 1884.

In the context of successive major exhibitions promoting Romania, mention should also be made of the event held in 2010 in Rome, under the title: *Ori antichi della Romania. Prima e dopo Traiano/Ancient Gold Jewelry from Romania. Before and after Trajan*. It was presented between 17 December 2010 and 3 April 2011 in the Trajan Forum in Rome. As in other cases, the exhibition material came from the treasury of the National Museum in Bucharest, while the criterion for selection was to demonstrate the links between Romania and Italy. It should be noted that the size of the exhibition was rather modest, especially when compared to the others analysed in this study - 140 artefacts produced between the 17th century BC and the 6th century AD were on display. It is difficult to identify the most important of the exhibits on display. From modern point of view, and also taking into account the non-artistic circumstances associated with Romanian national treasures, the Dacian gold royal bracelets, which already have their own history in which there was a criminal element and a diplomatic struggle for their recovery, should be considered important artefacts (The History of Romania in One Object: The Dacian Gold Bracelets). The official opening of the conference took place on 16 December 2011, at a special press conference attended by Romanian Minister of Culture Hunor Kelemen, Undersecretary of State at the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Bogdan Aurescu and Italian officials, albeit of a slightly lower rank than the Romanian delegation. The official opening to the public took place the following day. Incidentally, the exhibition was accompanied by additional events - on the occasion of the closing of the exhibition on 3 April 2011, a meeting took place with teams of re-enactors, who presented units from the time of Septimius Severus that were rarely recreated by re-enactment teams. As an additional attraction aimed directly at the Romanian diaspora, additional guided tours in Romanian were organised from 26 March to 3 April, i.e. at the end of the exhibition; this was an important way of meeting the needs of the local Romanian community.

The next such prestigious exhibition was not directed abroad until more than half a century later, when an event commemorating the 140th anniversary of the

establishment of Spanish-Romanian relations was organised in Madrid. The exhibition was open from 1 October 2021 to 27 February 2022 on the grounds of the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid. (<https://www.archeotravelers.com/en/2022/02/20/exhibition-the-archaeological-treasures-of-romania-the-dacian-and-roman-roots/>)

More than 800 historical objects were presented in the Spanish capital, coming mainly from the holdings of Romanian museums, especially the National Historical Museum, but also from Spanish museums, providing valuable material of a comparative nature. The main intention of this exhibition was to show the many relations between east and west Europe, against the background of the heritage of common history such as the Celtic and Germanic peoples and the Roman Empire. Thus, it can be seen that the main idea of the exhibition remained the same, without changing over 160 years - to show to the Western public the close ties between Romania and the West, as a testimony to the Western aspirations of the Romanian political and intellectual elite. The exhibition was curated on the Romanian side by Ernest Oberländer-Târnoveanu and on the Spanish side by Andres Carretero Perez. Comparing this exhibition with the one previously discussed and organised half a century earlier, it should be noted that it was a little more cross-sectional, presented more monuments than before, but what can be considered as its relative weakness, of course only in relation to its predecessor, was the lack of presentation of all the relevant treasures. Thus, the treasure from Pietroasa or Apahida was only partially presented, but nevertheless those parts of the treasure which referred to the Gothic heritage were selected for display.

It must be stressed that, in this case, the exhibition was given due prominence, as is perfectly evident when analysing the exhibition catalogue, which this time opens with messages from King Felipe VI of Spain and President Klaus Iohannis of Romania, emphasising the historical community of the two countries concerned. The selection of artefacts on display, also presented a shared history, with an emphasis on elements potentially linking Spain and Romania. This time, the focus was on a slightly greater internationalisation of the event, which was also evident in the preparation of the materials promoting the exhibition - the event catalogue is available in both Spanish and English versions.

In summary, it should be noted that archaeological treasures occupy a prominent place in public diplomacy for several reasons. First of all, it is always an element that attracts the attention of the public, which is the target of such diplomatic efforts. Such activities could be seen, for example, in the 19th century, when the largest Romanian treasures were willingly sent to familiarise the societies of the great powers with the newly established state and its political and cultural ambitions. It is an opportunity to familiarise the public with the most important cultural objects, and one can promote one's own interpretation of historical phenomena and, of course, of artefacts, setting them in a specific archaeological context. Examples of such activities were the exhibitions in Madrid and Rome, which attracted the attention of the highest state agents, including, for example, the King of Spain. The occasion was the anniversaries of the establishment of diplomatic/cultural contacts between the countries concerned - it was also an excellent opportunity to address a slightly different addressee, namely their own diaspora - in this respect, this phenomenon can also be interpreted as an element of maintaining ties with the home country. Another element that should be mentioned and was present in Romanian public diplomacy was the desire to maintain good cultural relations with the countries where relevant exhibitions were organised,

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while carrying out activities in other fields of activity. This was the case, for example, in the United Kingdom, where, almost contemporaneous with the exhibition activities presented, discussions were held with a view to, for example, obtaining a licence for the BAC 1-11 aircraft.

As can be seen, the use of monuments in public diplomacy is very wide-ranging and certainly deserves a wider examination of the issue.

Authors' Contributions:

The authors contributed equally to this work.

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