

ALA SAINENCO, *Ipotești: dilemele unei identități* [Ipotești: The Predicaments of an Identity] (Bucharest: Eikon, 2024)

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The most recent volume authored by Ala Sainenco comes in the wake of the author's interest in capitalising the Ipotești Archive, in studying the local history or in recording Eminescu's genealogy. In *Ipotești: dilemele unei identități* (Ipotești: The Predicaments of an Identity), with numerous documents supporting her claims, she thoroughly reconstructs the complex trajectory of the patrimonialization of the house where Mihai Eminescu lived. This implicitly outlines the history of an extremely significant patrimonial development for the references of the national Romanian imaginary: from a place of familial memory to becoming a landmark for national culture.

Even from the *Foreword*, the author briefly presents the history of the Ipotești house starting with the year 1847, when it is purchased by the poet's father, Gheorghe Eminovici, and up until 1992, when Petru Creția advocated for the establishment of a Mihai Eminescu National Centre for Studies within Mihai Eminescu's childhood space. Thus, by making use of the printed press of the time and documents from the archive, Ala Sainenco recreates the path "from the Ipotești of Eminovici and Eminescu, to the Ipotești of Perpessicius and Petru Creția," illustrating the change in significance of the Ipotești estate, from a domestic medium to a cultural one. Moreover, the author discusses how the official ideology influences the representation of this place of memory from the national poet's biography – "Governments and regimes succeeded one another, perspectives over things changed, the biography and work of Eminescu were reinterpreted, the memory of the Ipotești house retains this period as well," implicitly suggesting that, from a different perspective, the history of this construction from the village in Botoșani can be used as a seismograph for political transformation, coordinated from the "centre."

The chapter *Un muzeu, o casă de citire și o școală primară la Ipotești* (A Museum, a House for Reading and a Primary School in Ipotești) reconstructs the first initiatives to patrimonialize the poet's parental house, beginning with the earliest attempt in 1919, led by a Committee from Botoșani. Efforts to transform the house into a museum, undertaken by the local intellectuals, were hindered by the obstinacy of the estate's owner, Gh. Isăcescu, and later his son-in-law, Dr. C. Papadopol. The latter refused to sell or donate the house, despite N. Iorga's willingness sell part of his personal library to cover the purchase costs. On the contrary, he went as far as partially demolishing the original building. The protests of intellectuals and students, extensively quoted in the volume, act as a litmus test in order for understanding how Mihai Eminescu was perceived in the collective mentality, namely, how he was haloed. The partial demolition of the familial construction was sanctioned as a "sacrilege," a "crime of

desecrating relics,” perpetrated by “a criminal hand” that, save of a gesture of reparation, would become “a criminal soul.” After the Papadopol family gave into media pressures, the house was... “*expropriated for a cause of public utility and cultural interest,*” to the Ministry of Cults and Arts, as reflected by the title of the aforementioned chapter, extracted from the law project sanctioned in 1925 by King Ferdinand. However, by 1927, the measures outlined in the law had yet to take effect, with the need for expropriating not only the building but also the surrounding land still being flagged.

Other projects initiated by the people of Botoșani are highlighted. They are repetitive in nature (Ala Sainenco notes that they were “the same, resumed in concentric circles, from year to year, from decade to decade”), focusing on fundraising efforts to build a museum and a bust of the poet, some of these being organized in commemorative contexts—such as the 40th anniversary of Eminescu’s death. Also in 1929, the proposal to build a *Church “in the old Romanian style at Ipotești”* near the family chapel emerged. Regarding this initiative, Ala Sainenco corrects the widespread public belief that the church’s construction project belonged to Cezar Petrescu and Nicolae Iorga. She proves that either Archpriest Al. Simionescu or Prefect P. Irimescu was the actual initiator of the plan for the new church. By re-establishing the historical truth, the role of the two Moldavian writers in the history of Ipotești is not minimised, their entrepreneurial spirit is demonstrated through their financial support and the endorsement provided by their personal authority, which helped finalize the church’s construction. The church was consecrated on 22 September 1940, on a festive occasion reminiscent of the Putna Celebration of 1871.

The chapter *Muzeul de la Ipotești: schimbarea de perspectivă* [The Ipotești Museum: A Change in Perspective] presents the efforts of publicists such as Geo Dumitrescu to demonstrate “the healthy roots” of a *M. Eminescu of the people*, at the end of the 40s. Press interventions regarding the Botoșani county village gradually devolved into the sterility of wooden language. After a contradictory series of reorganisations, temporary shutdowns and reopening from the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> decades, Perpessicius is credited with initiating, in 1969, the faithful reconstruction of the house (as the inter-war building was inauthentic), as well as being the first one to propose the establishment of a “centre for Eminescu documentation.” The two projects were finalised in stages: first, on 15 June 1979, the present museum home is officially inaugurated. The event was announced in the media of the time with the title *We present: The memorial museum from Ipotești*, in an article not lacking ambiguity, as the author points out, questioning several details in the museum’s presentation, from the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> decade. Subsequently, Perpessicius’ second proposal was fulfilled as well, by Petru Creția. After the latter unsuccessfully attempted, in 1991, to create an Eminescu Institute under the patronage of the Romanian Academy, he established, within the Ipotești Memorial, a Mihai Eminescu National Centre for Studies, subordinated to the Ministry of Culture, thus becoming, in April 1992, the first director of the newly founded institution.

In the “grassroots” reconstruction of the patrimonialization process of Mihai Eminescu’s parental house, the cited journalistic texts are often allowed to speak for themselves, with the author’s commentary remaining discreet. The evocative power of the

press excerpts, spanning from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 1990s, undoubtedly justifies Ala Sainenco's restraint. The absence of definitive conclusions attests to the "open" historical nature of the Memorial, a history still being written through the cultural and research activities carried out by the institution.

Thus, in *Ipoțești: dilemele unei identități*, what is outlined is the at times diffuse identity profile of Mihai Eminescu's childhood space. The author implicitly demonstrates that not only are "people subject to the times," but so too are heritage assets, a reality that should spark, among specialists, a heightened attention to the evolution of various national cultural institutions.

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