Plastic Arts Terminology in the Writings of Gh. Asachi

Mariana FLAIŞER*

'*The painting is art of particular essence that has its own object, procedures and words*' (Fr. Brunot)

Key-words: *fine arts, terminology, painting*

In the Romanians' culture, the comments on the plastic arts (architecture, sculpture, and painting) appeared much later in relation to the phenomenon of European art[1].

Regarding the Romanian painting, either religious painting or secular painting, there are writings since the 19th century which addresses the elements on the value of pictorial creations, representation procedures, manner and technique work. Even if the first notations on plastic arts, music or theatre seen in the press of that time, in various other writings were considered by Titus Cerne[2] 'personal impressions, absolutely devoid of the lowest horizon of rational analysis and critical aesthetic' (Cerne 1898 I: 291), for the beginning of the 19th century they represented 'in nuce' the language of art criticism, the core of terminologies of various arts. It should also be noted that these 'personal impressions' of writers from the first half of the 19th century, Gheorghe Asachi, H. Rădulescu, Dinicu Golescu, A. Mureşanu, Al. Odobescu, N. Philemon, were based on the belief that the progress of a nation, the Romanian nation, could be achieved only through culture, by development of arts, of the taste for beauty. In this cultural context, Gheorghe Asachi is among the first Romanian scholars who, given his encyclopaedic formation and especially *art studies*[3], advocates for civilization and progress of a nation by cultivating the arts: 'The civilization began to rely on a nation when, in

* The "Gr.T. Popa" University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Iasi, Romania.

[1] We mention that in the France of 17th century France, the establishment of *Academia de pictură şi sculptură* (1648), of *Academia naţională de muzică* (1677), generates a flowering of theoretical studies on the arts and, as a natural consequence, the discovery of a specialized language in the arts domain in general and painting in particular. Voltaire is proposing the introduction of 'workshop words' în *Dicţionarul Academiei* (1760), and J.J. Rousseau writes a music dictionary. Denis Diderot speaks about painting in *Saloane* and music in *Nepotul lui Rameau* (cf. Munro 1981: 47).

[2] Titus Cerne of Iasi (1859–1910) was professor of music, choral conductor, composer. He is the author of the first *Dicţionar [românesc] de muzică*, Stabilimentul grafic 'Miron Costin', 2 vol., Iaşi, 1898.

[3] Gheorghe Asachi studied painting in Vienna and Rome 'from where he brought a collection of original or copied paintings from the museums he had visited' (cf. *Preface* signed by N.A. Ursu in Asachi 1973: XXV).

BDD-A1128 © 2013 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 13:00:09 UTC)

addition to sciences, fine arts flourished, because as the positive sciences enlightens the mind, also arts tame and ennoble the heart, clarify the good taste and garnish the human life' (Asachi 1981: 672).

From the nobility and enthusiasm of the statements from newspaper articles, Gheorghe Asachi moves to action. As a result of his endeavours, Mihaileana Academy is established in Iasi (1835), where there is '*a class of line drawing, topography and architecture, the historic drawing and zugrăvitură* (Asachi 1981: 474) *class'*, it is established a *pinacotecă* (Pohonţu 1967: 8) and a *litografie* at the *Institute Albina*. It is beyond dispute the role of Gheorghe Asachi of initiator of historical lithographs, lithographs that were appreciated not only by contemporaries (CR 1833: 125–126) but also by generations of the centuries that followed[4]. Through these 'tabloane', Asachi tried to achieve 'a true history of Moldovia in pictures' (Asachi 1973: XXVI). Asachi is the creator of the '*first national theatre and the first philharmonic conservatory*' (Asachi 1981: 810), author of the *Manual of linear drawer with illustrations* ('Manualul desenatorului liniar cu figuri'), if we refer only to the relationship of the great scholar with the fine arts (Asachi 1981: 474). The fine arts, the Romanian plastic arts owe much to Asachi at the beginning of their history. The specialists in art history emphasize the role of Gheorghe Asachi in the monumental art domain[5]. The *Obelisk of Lions* in Copou and *Stefan cel Mare Statue* are two emblematic monuments of Iasi that appear also thanks to Gheorghe Asachi[6]. Gheorghe Asachi was convinced that 'the establishment of monuments and bronze and marble tombs' (Asachi 1981: 760), 'capo of arts creations, statues and tabloane ... make the ornament of *politie*'[7]. The lithographs, paintings collection brought from abroad, encouragement of the Moldovan painters or those foreign adopted by the Moldavians, creation of fine arts schools were fundamental factors that led to the cultural progress and modernization of thinking, of aesthetic sense of the Romanians in the first half of the 19th century.

It should be noted that, in this era, in the Romanian space, it is observed a communion of ideas, attitudes and initiatives. Personalities who are providential for the national culture, Gheorghe Asachi, H. Rădulescu, B.P. Haşdeu, N. Philemon, Odobescu and others make to occur and develop almost simultaneously the media, schools of art, theatre, universities. For example, in the painting, drawing domain, two books are published in Bucharest and Iasi, one is a translation of Carol Walenstein, *Drawing and architectural elements* ('Elemente de desen şi arhitectură') and one written by Gheorghe Asachi, *Manual of linear drawer with illustrations* (Asachi 1981: 413).

[4] Nicolae Iorga in the paper *Gheorghe Asachi ca tipograf şi editor*, from "Analele Academiei Române", series II, XXXIV, the Memories of the History Section, Bucureşti, Librăriile Socec Sfetea, 1912, in *Anexe* presents the complete liste of the lithographies (*Desemnuri şi stampe*) achieved by Asachi.

[5] See Ţucu, 2008: 3 and Niculescu 1954: 105-115.

[6] It seems that we owe to plastic imagination of Asachi sketches that were at the basis of Fremiet's sculpture Fremiet *Ştefan cel Mare.*

[7] Speaking about the monuments of the Italian cities that he visited, Gheorghe Asachi dreams to make a 'Pantheon populated by statues of the gentlemen' (cf. Ţucu 2008: 2).

BDD-A1128 © 2013 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 13:00:09 UTC)

For the Romanian terminology of fine arts from the early 19th century, a comparative study between the *Manual of linear drawer with illustrations* of Gheorghe Asachi and *Drawing and architectural elements* of C. Walenstein would have been very interesting. Unfortunately, to our knowledge, the work of Asachi it cannot be found in the libraries of Iasi. Based on the mentioned texts, the writings of Asachi and Walenstein, we can appreciate that there are no major differences in terms of terminology of painting as a whole.

From the notes of the two authors regarding the 'non-facilitations' encountered in finding some '*technical sayings*' we infer that also in the arts domain, the terminological deficiencies constituted significant obstacles to the expression of ideas and impressions. Gheorghe Asachi notes in this regard that the Romanian language from the early 19th century 'is not able to accurately concoct the ideas of those special branches of science ideas and *măiestrii* (artistry)' (Asachi 1981: 577). In his article entitled *Neology* (Neologie), Gheorghe Asachi suggests that the gaps in the specific languages to be solved by creating new words or neologisms borrowings[8]. As a result of these beliefs in his works, plastic chronicles, description of several paintings, monuments, travel impressions in literary writings, Gheorghe Asachi proves to be sparing in choosing the appropriate terms for new concepts in the arts domain. The neologisms are glossed or explained: '*cariatide* ('female figures on the belt of the house is thatched and statue'); *obelisc* ('pole, sharp at the peak'), *vestibul* ('porch'), *pilastruri* ('foursquare columns'), *arce* ('arcs'), *con* ('head of sugar cut'), *coloritul carnagiunei* ('of meat'), *pietre sepulhrare* ('of grave'), *cilindre* ('alphorn') of *papir scrise*, *sculturei* ('diggings')'[9].

An important class of terms in the fine arts domain (painting, architecture, sculpture) is represented by the common Romanian vocables that knew in the history of Romanian language meanings enabling the embedding of these words in the corpus of terms under discussion. For example the verb *a scrie* (to write) with the meaning of *a picta* (to paint) that Asachi, in the poem *La Pictor*, repeatedly uses it: '*Scrie*-mi pictore ghibace / Pe-a mea doamnă departată / Te rog, însă *scrie* acele / Gemeni arcuri înmîndrite… / *Scrie*-n tinerica faţă' (Asachi 1973: 81–82) [*Write* me insightful depicter / On my far away lady / But, please, *write* those / Beauteous twin springs ... / *Write* in the young face]. Being of popular source, the term *writing* for painting is commonly found in the old Romanian language. In the *Bible from Bucharest*, 1688, *zugravul de icoane* ('the depicter of icons') is called '*writer of shadows*' (Munteanu 1990: 92–94). In Nicolae Costin there is a paragraph in the *Chronicle* where it is talking about a '*scrisoare (writing* where it could be seen the faces of *osăbi* captains with the ones of gentlemen with great skill *scrise (written)*... that *zugrăvitură* and *writing* with the latter time fell and were deleted' (Costin 1976: 201). In the Romanian language, O. Densuşianu analyzed the semantic identity between *a scrie* ('to write'), *a zugrăvi* ('to depict') and *a picta* ('to pain'), stating that 'Before introducing the Hellenism word *a zugrăvi* ('to depict'), and Romanians

[8] 'None of the sciences and masteries (arts n.n.) did not reach yet at the fullness. But as the development of ideas and knowledge requires new or borrowed woven words with that duty we want to be honest scales and systematic in their choice' (cf. Asachi 1973: 585).

[9] Asachi 1981: 340, 355, 386, 387, 438, 679, 748, 442, 532.

BDD-A1128 © 2013 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 13:00:09 UTC)

from the North and South of the Danube were served by the same notion' (Densuşianu 1968: 594) .

The synonyms *a scrie* ('to write') and *a zugrăvi* ('to depict') found in many modern Romanian writings continue to be used in some works of art of depicting and, certainly, in the language of painters. The earliest references to the art of depicting and painters are met in the early 17th century in codices, in some manuscripts[10], in various archival documents. Gheorghe Asachi uses especially terms like *zugrăvie* ('depicting'), *zugrăvire* ('depict'), *zugrav* ('depicter'), *a zugrăvi* ('to depict'), as proof that in the era, the mentioned words had a wide circulation: *zugrăvea* ('was depicting') in fiery colors, *zugrăvea* ('was depicting') the churches, *art of zugrăvire* ('depicting') from nature, *zugrăvia* ('depicting') of the church style, class of *zugrăvitură* ('depicting') (Asachi 1973: 43; Asachi 1981: 672, 673 678 473). The neologisms *pitore*, *pictore* ('depicter') (lat. ital.) are met at Asachi, Eminescu (Eminescu 1970: 144), Andrei Mureşanu (Mureşanu 977: 127, 160). Asachi, in the poem *La Pictor* the artist uses the expression *pictor ghibace* ('insightful depicter'), and in the peom *Iarna* ('The winter') he writes about *pictori plini de sumeţie* ('depicters full of haughtiness') (Asachi 1973: 81, 103).

The verb *a pictura* ('to depict') is an adapted loan from the Italian, 'the walls of all rooms were beautifully picturate' (Asachi 1981: 44). The movement along with old Romanian terms with corresponding neologisms is not only the characteristic of Asachi's writing. The lexical doublets mentioned, sometimes longer synonyms series are explainable appearances motivated by the phenomenon of modernization of the Romanian language. Among the examples of this kind, there may be mentioned the vocables *meşteşug* ('craft'), *măiestrie* ('artistry') and *artă* ('art'). Asachi prefers the term *artă* ('art') and the phrase *arte frumoase* ('fine arts') or the loan translation *frumoasele arte* ('beautiful arts') to the synonyms *Terminologia frumoaselor arte în scrierile lui Gheorghe Asachi* that were circulating in old Romanian language and continued to be used in the following centuries until modern times with other connotations. In the plastic chronicles, in the impressions from *Călătoriile în Italia*, Asachi writes 'the academy of *frumoaselor măiestrii* ('beautiful artistry')', *frumoasele arte* ('fine arts'), *artele frumoase* ('beautiful arts') (Asachi 1981: 354, 443, 671). If we look at the phrase *frumoasele arte* ('fine arts') and the synonyms *meşteşug* ('craft'), *măiestrie* ('artistry') as they appear in the Romanian lexicography, a first record is found in the lexical inventory of the *Lexiconulde la Buda* ('Lexicon of Buda') (LB 1825: s.v.): '*meşteşug, măiestrie* ... work by ordinary hand (*ars opificum*), more skillful work (*ars artificum*)'. Later, in *Vocabularul franţezo-românesc* by P. Poenar and *Vocabularu romanu* of I.D. Negulici appear the terms *arte liberale* ('liberal arts') and *frumoasele arte* (Negulici 1848: 50; Poenar 1840: s.v.) ('fine arts'). Starting with the *Dicţionarul Universal al limbei române* by Şăineanu and *Dicţionarul enciclopedic* of Candrea, *arta* ('the art') şi *frumoasele arte* ('fine arts') are defined in almost the same terms, being able to easily recognize the French model who rise to those notations (Candrea 1931: s.v.). Therefore, all the nuances that the term *artă* (art) has

[10] The paper in manuscript of Antim Ivireanu (1709) with 514 portrets and three sketches [it is considered] the first Romanian book of 'ermine' type (cf. Olteanu, Constantin 1969: 153–154).

BDD-A1128 © 2013 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 13:00:09 UTC)

gained over time and in different contexts, do not exclude the original meaning of *meşteşug* (craft).

Asachi, whose studies of depicting makes him familiar with the terminology of *arte frumoase* (beautiful arts) has the merit to place in the Romanian language of that time technical terms, terms of workshop, managing to print the lexical register of the domain innovative trends. At Asachi we encounter phrases like *frumuseţea coloritului* ('beauty of coloring'), *figuri în mărime naturală* ('figures in natural size'), *lumina şi umbrele* ('light and shadows'), *desen liniar* ('liniar drawing'), *acurateţa şi armonia penelului* ('accuracy and harmony of the brush'), *colorit transparent* ('transparent color'), *tablou desinat* ('drawn painting'), *fineţa desenului* ('finesse of the drawing'), *stampă* ('prints'), *desemn de acvarelă* ('drawing of aquarelle'), *eschisă litografică* ('lithographic eschise').

The same efforts to structure the language of modernizing the terminology of arts is also observed in the Tara Romaneasca. Walenstein, in the work cited, uses an extremely high language for the early 19th century. We find in *Elemente de deseniu şi arhitectură* from 1837 terms like *lumină artificială* ('artificial light'), *lumină şi umbră* ('light and shadow'), *perspectivă aeriană* ('air perspective'), *penel* ('brush'), *vopsele himice* ('humic paint'), *roşu mineral* ('mineral red'), *sepia* ('sepia'), *cobaltul albastru de India şi Prusia* ('India and Prussia blue cobalt') (Walenstein 1837: 22, 23).

In an age where plastic or music chronicles were original productions, especially the words used by Gheorghe Asachi, Walenstein and other contemporaries, in journalism and other writings on art, there were absolute lexical news that prefigured the terminology of theatre, music or plastic arts. At Asachi there are *French* and *Italian* origin neologisms, which is understandable if we think about the fact that the flowering of the arts in the Romanian space coincides on one side with a pronounced French[11] influence in Romanian culture in general, on the other hand, we must consider the direct contact of Asachi with Italian, the Italian arts.

This explains the presence of the Latin-Roman neologisms in Asachi : *coloane dorice* (< ital. lat.; 'doric columns'), *canelate* (< fr.; 'grooved'), *barelieful* (< fr; 'bas-relief'), *coloanei* (< fr. ital. gr.; 'column'), *a litografia* (< fr.; 'to lithograph'), *penel* (< ital.; 'brush'), *capitel* (< lat. ital.; 'capital'), *acurateţe* (< ital.; 'accuracy'), *arcade* (< fr.; 'arcade'), *colonadă ionică* (< lat. fr.; 'ionic colonnade'), *tablou desinat* (< fr.; 'paint drawn'), *cariatidă* (< fr. ital. gr.; 'caryatid'), *peristil* (< fr. gr.; 'peristyle'), *cadre* (< fr. Rus.; 'cadre'), *piedestaluri* (< fr. ital.; 'pedestals'), *eschisă* (< ital. fr.; '*eschisa*'), *litografică*, *desemn* (< fr.; 'lithography, drawn'), *de acvarelă* (< fr. ital.; 'aquarelle'), *galerie de cadre* (< fr. ital.; 'gallery of cadres'), *fineţa desenului* (< fr. lat.; 'fineness of the drawn'), *mauzoleu*[12] etc.

[11] Moreover, the studies on Romanian theater terminology and music terminology in Romanian language in which some chapters make reference to the role of Asachi in modernizing these stylistic varieties, highlight that 'the terminology used is of French origin adapted to the Romanian language ... to modernize and enrich the Romanian language through the loan of romanic language' (cf. Haja 2005: 101). Regarding the musical terminology of 19th century, in the pages of *Albina românească* and not only see *Terminologia muzicii în limba română*, Casa Editorială Demiurg, 1997, p. 99 and sqq.

[12] Ţucu (2008: 2) states, among others, that 'describing the tomb of Mihai Sturdza (monument established in 1842), in a memo *«Mauzoleu»*, Asachi enters this word in the specialized terminology.

BDD-A1128 © 2013 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 13:00:09 UTC)

If some of the terms used by Asachi in the fine arts domain, the following retreated through archaisms : *zugrăvitură*, *zagrav*, *tabloane*, *curnagiune*, *văpsea* (for color), others suffering adapting processes, were imposed in the Romanian language of painting and are circulation also in the present time: *colorit*, *acurateţe*, *penel*, *colorit transparent*, *fineţea desenului*, *letografie*, *obelisc*, *mauzoleu*, *desen*, *galerie*, *basorelief* etc.

In conclusion, the role of Gheorghe Asachi in the Romanian culture is not just about the creation of institutional structures in which the arts develop and evolve. Although perhaps this should be remembered and recalled knowing that sometimes history is unjust and the merits of illustrious predecessors of Romanians[13] goes in oblivion. The importance of Asachi's writings consists of their role in shaping and modernizing the Romanian literary language, the terminology of special languages. Whether it is the arts (theatre, music, painting), or journalistic or literary works, the Asachi's role in the widening of terminologies through neologisms is undeniable. This really deserves to be highlighted to have a clear picture of the complexity of the personality of Asachi in the Romanian culture in the first half of the 19th century.

Bibliography

Asachi 1973: Gheorghe Asachi, *Opere*, vol. I: *Versuri şi teatru*, Bucharest, Editura Minerva.

Asachi 1981: Gheorghe Asachi, *Opere*, vol. II: *Nuvele istorice, varia*, Bucharest, Editura Minerva.

Candrea 1931: I.A. Candrea, *Dicţionarul enciclopedic ilustrat*, Bucharest, Editura Cartea românească.

Cerne 1898: Titus Cerne, *Dicţionar de muzică*, vol. I–II, Stabilimentul grafic Miron Costin, Iasi.

Costin 1976: Nicolae Costin, *Letopiseţul Ţării Moldovei, de la zidirea lumii până la 1601 şi de la 1700 la 1711*, *Opere I*, Iasi, Editura Junimea.

Densuşianu 1968: O. Densuşianu, *Opere*, vol. I, Bucharest, Editura pentru literatură.

Eminescu 1970: Mihai Eminescu, *Despre cultură şi artă*, Iasi, Editura Junimea.

Haja 2005: Gabriela Haja, *Terminologia teatrală românească*, Iasi, Editura T.

Iorga 1912: Nicolae Iorga, *Gheorghe Asachi ca tipograf şi editor*, Excerpt of *Analele Academiei române*, series 11, tom XXXIV, memories of the Historical Section, Bucharest, Librăriile Socec Sfetea.

Munro 1981: Thomas Munro, *Artele şi relaţiile dintre ele*, Bucharest, Editura Meridiane.

Munteanu 1990: Eugen Munteanu, *Tipuri de calcuri lexicale. Biblia de la Bucureşti şi versiunile preliminare contemporane cu exemplificări din cartea înţelepciunii lui Solomon*, "Analele Ştiinţifice ale Universităţii «Alexandru Ioan Cuza»", Iasi, Serie nouă, Lingvistică, t. XXXVI.

[13] Saddened by non-recognition of its merits by the greatest of that time in the article '*Spre amintire*', Gheorghe Asachi, making a synthesis of the most important works of culture, says: 'Who doesn't known that in 1813 in the climax of Phanariot regime, I have been the first who introduced the Romanian language in the royal school of Iasi. Who have started in Romania the advertising and with his name revived in the country the Romanian sense? Who opened in 1828 the national schools in Sf. Trei Ierarhi? Who brought back the Romanian poetry in its versification and prosody rules under the principles of classical literature...? Who is the first who illustrated the history of the country through tabloane and descriptions (s.n.)? Who opened, without subsidy, the first national theater and the first philharmonic conservatory... listing these facts constituting the moral wealth that we have gathered under fifty years ... and ... as tribute for the development of Romanian nationality ... a deposit it on the altar of the country' (cf. Asachi 1981: 810).

BDD-A1128 © 2013 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 13:00:09 UTC)

Mureşanu 1977: Andrei Mureşanu, *Reflexii*, Cluj, Editura Dacia.
Negulici 1848: I.D. Negulici, *Vocabularu romanu*, Bucharest.
Niculescu 1954: Remus Niculescu, *Începuturile sculpturii statuare româneşti*, in "Studii şi cercetări de istoria artei", 1, no. 3-4.
Olteanu, Constantin 1969: Ştefan Olteanu, Şerban Constantin, *Meşteşugurile în Moldova în Evul Mediu*, Bucharest, Editura Academiei.
Poenar 1840: P. Poenar, *Vocabular franţezo-românesc*, Bucharest, Tipografia Colegiului Sf. Sava.
Pohonţu 1967: E. Pohonţu, *Începuturile vieţii artistice în Moldova*, Bucharest, Editura Meridiane.
Şăineanu 1929: Lazăr Şăineanu, *Dicţionar universal al limbei române*, Bucharest, Editura Scrisul Românesc, 4th edition (princeps editions1896).
Ţucu 2008: Corina Ţucu, *Gheorghe Asachi – iniţiator al operelor de artă ilustratoare ale imaginarului istoric* în *Revista Euromentor* (euromentor.ucdc.ro).
Walenstein 1837: C. Walenstein, *Elemente de deseniu şi arhitectură*, Bucharest.
LB 1825: *Lexicon românescu, latinescu, ungurescu, nemţescu*, Buda.
CR 1833: *Curierul românesc*, no. 5, p. 125–126.

Abstract

Concerns for inclusion of the "workshop" words from the arts area in dictionaries can be found, in a more systematic form, in the activity of French encyclopaedists. In the Romanian culture, Gheorghe Asachi, Heliade Rădulescu, Andrei Mureşan, Nicolae Filimon, Alexandru Odobescu, etc. have an important role in shaping the arts terminology, in fixing these "technical saying". Aware of the fact that a truly civilized nation can only be that where the *fine arts* are cherished and cultivated, Gheorghe Asachi, through this entire journalistic activity, through the efforts to organize the artistic education and create Romanian theatre, can be considered a true Mecena of the national culture. Undoubtedly, the role of Gheorghe Asachi is not just the creation of institutional structures in which the arts should develop and evolve. In an age where plastic or musical chronicles constituted inedited productions, especially the words used by Asachi and his contemporaries in journalism and other writings on art were absolute lexical news that prefigured the theatre, painting or music terminology. The Italian neologisms or those of French origin and together with popular terms are common in the writing of Gheorghe Asachi and represents a lexical reality that deserves to be commented to highlight the major contribution of Gheorghe Asachi in the shaping of arts terminology and modernizing the Romanian literary language.

BDD-A1128 © 2013 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 13:00:09 UTC)