FAREWELL TO ALEXANDRU

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I said farewell to Alexandru on a sunny Sunday lunchtime at a small station in Mid Wales as he and Suzana boarded a train for Birmingham, thence London, an invitation to Le Mans ringing in my ears. That was in April 2018: how little could we know what the future held. I never saw Le Mans, I never saw Alex again – I recently saw Suzana. They had been to stay with Gocha Tsetskhladze at his large house in Llandrindod Wells and, as ever, I was a willing conscript as travel planner and driver for the visit – the previous days had seen us visit the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth and take a ride on a preserved steam train.

There was a lighter side to Alex, but he was a true academic and scholar: his work was all. Nothing would really interfere, apart from a glass or two of beer. I had met him a number of times previously, though in passing. We really got to know each other in Constanța (and Histria) in 2017 at the Black Sea Congress (suitably based in the Oxford Hotel): we were, with Gocha, the editors of the proceedings and organizers, especially Alex, of the event itself. I was also putting forward the idea of a Festschrift for Gocha in which Alex would be one of the main editors. We also talked of King Michael, two of whose daughters were the first Romanians (should that be Roumanians?) I had met, long before.

From time to time, I would edit Alex's (very good) English; he would edit French (and German) for me.

In contemplating Alex (and Gocha) my thoughts turn to the words of W.S. Gilbert in *HMS Pinafore*, written almost a century and a half ago, to describe the kind of polished performer who was, then as now, their antithesis – the reason that they got on so well together is that both were serious, dedicated and focused, thus with no time for academic politics and little time (fully reciprocated) for the placemen who embraced it. As the Rt Hon. Sir Joseph Porter, KCB, sings:

> I polished up that handle so carefully that now I am the Ruler of the Queen's Navy! … I always voted at my party's call and I never thought of thinking for myself at all. I thought so little, they rewarded me by making me the Ruler of the Queen's Navy!

The glittering prizes, awarded by the usual suspects (the academic machine – or do I mean 'machine-academics'?), may have escaped them, but not the high regard

of their true peers, scholars of equal seriousness, whose profound esteem they enjoyed and who remain loyal upholders of their legacy. Thus, I find these words appropriate:

> The only guide to a man is his conscience; the only shield to his memory is the rectitude and sincerity of his actions. It is very imprudent to walk through life without this shield, for we are so often mocked by the failure of our hopes and the upsetting of our calculations; but with this shield, however the fates may play, we march always in the ranks of honour[1].

And some comments on A.I. Doyle, an old friend of mine, also strike home:

> [A] … life lived unstintingly and unsparingly in the service of scholarship, not simply through his many publications, but also through the generosity with which he shared his knowledge and the fruits of his researches with others. … His knowledge was always at the disposal of the enquiring student. … always courteous in delivering correction, and almost always right[2].

I have an image of the perfect Afterlife: Alex and Gocha are drinking and smoking, both deep in conversation with Minns, Rostovtzeff, Pârvan and Filov, to name but a few.

[1] Winston S. Churchill, eulogy for Arthur N. Chamberlain, 12 November 1940.
[2] *The Library* 18.3 (2018), pp. 376–381.