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Том III



5-7 ноември 2026 г.

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ELENA DALLES AND PHILANTHROPY IN BELLE ÉPOQUE: HERITAGE, SOCIAL IMPACT AND CULTURAL LEGACY

Prof. Dr. Hab. Silviu Miloiu[1]

Abstract: *This article examines Elena Dalles and her family's philanthropy within the broader history of women's philanthropy, tracing its evolution from rural education, healthcare, and social welfare to cultural patronage. It argues that personal loss redirected an established tradition of giving, transforming private wealth and family memory into an enduring cultural legacy for Romanian society.*

Keywords: *women's philanthropy; Elena Dalles; cultural patronage; family memory; Romania.*

JEL: N34; J16; Z11; I31

1. Introduction

Few modern age female philanthropic legacies reveal as vividly as that of Elena Dalles the ways in which private wealth, familial loss, and a powerful sense of social obligation could be transformed into public institutions. Remembered above all for the testamentary endowment that eventually gave Bucharest the Ioan I. Dalles Foundation, Elena Dalles belonged to a wealthy commercial and landowning family whose charitable activity long preceded the tragedies that gradually extinguished its direct line. To understand the significance of Elena Dalles's testamentary philanthropy, however, one must first recover a dimension of her life that later narratives, understandably fascinated by the creation of the Dalles Foundation, have tended to overshadow: the Dalles family possessed an established culture of giving well before bereavement became the defining feature of Elena's life.

This paper explores female philanthropy in Belle Époque and post-World War I Romania through the life, social engagement, and cultural legacy of Elena Dalles (1849–1921), highlighting her role within a broader network of elite, transregional, and transborder charitable practices. Born into a merchant family, Elena Dalles exemplifies, as this article seeks to demonstrate, a form of civic philanthropy situated at the intersection of migration, social welfare, and national modernization.

Methodologically, this research is based on systematic archival investigation conducted primarily at the Archives of the Romanian Academy, the Dâmbovița County Archives, drawing on wills, property records, correspondence, and institutional documentation. By integrating archival evidence with gender and

[1] silviu.miloiu@valahia.ro, Valahia University of Targoviste

cultural history approaches, the paper argues that feminine philanthropy played a crucial role in shaping Romania's social infrastructure, cultural heritage, and civic identity during the Belle Époque, while also facilitating the symbolic integration of naturalized families into the Romanian nation-state. A significant part of the research was also conducted through the Arcanum Newspapers digital press archive, whose full-text search facilities allow systematic investigation across newspapers, periodicals, and other digitized publications by personal name, date, title, location, organization, and event. Searches using variants such as *Elena Dalles*, *Ioan Dalles, Dalles, Bucșani*, and *Fundația/Fundațiunea Ioan I. Dalles* were used to identify references across different chronological contexts. Because digitized historical newspapers are dependent on OCR and older Romanian orthography, retrieved material was critically evaluated against the reproduced newspaper pages and, where possible, correlated with records of the Romanian Academy and other documentary evidence contained in the research corpus.

Elena Dalles's life and philanthropic activity offer a useful lens through which to examine the changing possibilities for women's agency in modern Romanian society. Although women remained largely excluded from formal political and institutional participation, elite women could draw upon property, wealth, social networks, philanthropy, and testamentary authority to establish a presence in the public sphere. Dalles's support for educational, healthcare, religious, and community institutions raises broader questions about the extent to which philanthropy enabled women to negotiate the gendered boundaries between private responsibility and public action. These activities unfolded, moreover, within a society characterized by profound inequalities in education, healthcare, and welfare, particularly in rural communities, and within an agrarian order marked by significant tensions between landowners and the peasantry. The 1907 peasant uprising brought many of these tensions dramatically to the surface. Placing Dalles at the intersection of gender, philanthropy, property, and social inequality therefore provides a means of investigating both the possibilities and the limits of elite female agency in modern Romania.

2. Philanthropy and Modernization in Belle Époque Romania

Elena Dalles philanthropy need not be interpreted as a calculated pursuit of prestige. Rather, following Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1986), the repeated conversion of economic resources into socially valued forms of giving generated symbolic effects irrespective of the donor's subjective intentions: recognition, legitimacy, distinction, and, ultimately, the durable association of the Dalles name with public benefaction and cultural advancement. Robert D. Putnam 's approach shifts attention from the donor's accumulation or conversion of capital toward the social relationships and collective capacities that philanthropy can help create or reinforce. In the interpretation summarized in Putman, social capital inheres in relations among individuals and consists particularly of social networks, norms of reciprocity, and trustworthiness, which enable participants to cooperate more

effectively in pursuit of collective objectives. Putnam's formulation that „social capital inheres in relations among individuals“ is particularly appropriate for interpreting the Dalles family's position at Bucșani. Their philanthropy did not consist exclusively of transferring money or constructing buildings. The school, church, assistance to villagers, communal celebrations, and other interventions helped establish and reinforce relationships between the landowning family and the surrounding community. In Putnam's conceptualization, trust and cooperation are mutually reinforcing, while networks of civic engagement and norms of reciprocity provide foundations from which social trust can develop. The reported behaviour of the Bucșani villagers during the 1907 uprising, when later accounts state that they defended rather than attacked the Dalles estate, can therefore be explored cautiously as possible evidence of the accumulated trust, reciprocity, and social ties generated through a longer history of local interaction.(Häuberer, 2011)

As Joan Marie Johnson argues, the expansion of modern philanthropy after 1870 coincided with the growth of nationally organized women's movements. Wealthy female donors provided essential financial resources that enabled civic organizations to expand their activities in suffrage, education, labor reform, and reproductive rights. Philanthropy thus functioned not merely as charity, but as a form of civic investment that facilitated modernization and institutional change. (Johnson, 2017) Dündar et al. argue that civic philanthropy cannot be understood solely as a rational response to social needs. Their study of NGO volunteers shows that helping behaviour is predominantly driven by intrinsic motivations, spiritual values, and solidarity. Even within modern civil society organizations, philanthropic engagement remains rooted in moral commitments, suggesting that the growth of civic philanthropy during modernization depends not only on institutional development but also on enduring cultural and ethical values.(Dündar et al., 2025) Similarly, Eva Fuchsová, Jitka Laštovková, and Michaela Jánská argue that philanthropy functions as a formalized expression of civic solidarity and remains essential even in advanced welfare states. Their study demonstrates that economic prosperity generally increases philanthropic giving, but that wealth alone cannot explain philanthropic behaviour. Cultural values, education, regional traditions, and civic norms also shape the development of philanthropy, suggesting that the growth of civic philanthropy is both an economic and socio-cultural dimension of modernization.(Fuchsová et al., 2018) Oppedisano conceptualizes philanthropy as a form of social entrepreneurship whereby individuals, especially women, mobilize economic resources to create organizations addressing public needs. Rather than merely redistributing wealth, entrepreneurial philanthropy generates long-term social infrastructure and contributes to civic participation, economic development, and modernization.(Oppedisano, 2004) Maria Luddy demonstrates that nineteenth-century Irish women's philanthropy was deeply rooted in religious culture and expressed through voluntary associations, religious congregations, and charitable institutions. These organizations provided welfare for vulnerable

groups while simultaneously expanding women's participation in public life, illustrating how philanthropy functioned as an important component of civil society during processes of modernization and state formation.(Luddy, 1988) The Armenian experience demonstrates how civic philanthropy functioned as a mechanism of modernization and state-building. Women's charitable organizations created institutional networks for education, welfare, and humanitarian relief, while simultaneously training a generation of civic leaders who later participated in formal politics and governance during the First Republic of Armenia. (Hovhannisyan et al., 2025)

Against this broader European and transnational background, philanthropy acquired particular significance in Belle Époque Romania, where accelerated modernization coexisted with pronounced social inequalities and with an institutional capacity that remained insufficient in important areas of education, healthcare, rural welfare, and social assistance. Private benefaction consequently occupied a space between traditional charity and emerging forms of organized civil society. Wealthy individuals, religious communities, voluntary associations, and increasingly women's organizations contributed resources to schools, hospitals, orphanages, churches, and cultural initiatives. (Negru, 2014) Such interventions should not be interpreted as substitutes for state-led reform especially since landowners still owned two thirds of the arable land(Cepraga & Suditu, 2021). Rather, they complemented an expanding but still incomplete public infrastructure and provided members of the social elite with opportunities to intervene in questions increasingly understood as matters of public concern.

The limits of this philanthropic model were particularly evident in the countryside, where charitable intervention could alleviate poverty or improve access to education and healthcare without fundamentally changing the unequal distribution of economic resources and land. The social tensions underpinning this rural order became dramatically visible during the peasant uprising of 1907 (Marin, 2017; Rosetti, 1907). In this respect, Romanian philanthropy should be understood simultaneously as an agent of modernization and as a practice embedded within the inequalities of the society it sought to improve.

Women occupied an increasingly important position within this changing philanthropic landscape. Elena Dalles belonged to a broader tradition of Romanian female philanthropy that included Queen Elisabeth (Badea-Păun, 2012), Queen Marie (Ion, 2025), Elena Cuza (Isac & Ichim, 2014), Alexandrina Cantacuzino (Negru, 2014) and numerous less prominent women active through charitable, educational, religious, and cultural associations. Their participation formed part of the gradual assertion of women in Romanian public life, rather than an abrupt movement from domestic seclusion to public action. Philanthropy offered one of the socially legitimate channels through which women could mobilize wealth, property, networks, organizational abilities, and moral authority beyond the household. In doing so, they contributed not only to immediate charitable

relief but also to the construction of the social infrastructure required by a modernizing society. This Romanian experience therefore resonates with the processes identified comparatively by Luddy, Johnson, and Oppedisano: philanthropy could simultaneously address deficiencies in welfare provision, facilitate women's participation in civil society, and create durable institutions through which female agency acquired a public dimension.

3. Family Origins, Social Mobility, and Transregional Networks

The history of the Dalles family in Romania should be situated within the broader mobility of Greek and other Balkan merchant populations into the Romanian Principalities, a process that long preceded the family's emergence but gained particular economic and social significance during the nineteenth century.

The Romanian urban environment was historically shaped by the presence of mobile populations including Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Bulgarians, Germans, and other groups whose settlement was connected variously to commerce, craftsmanship, political circumstances, religious networks, and regional migration. The case of the city of Pitești, for instance, illustrates this diversity particularly well: nineteenth-century sources record Armenians, Jews, Bulgarians, Greeks, Serbs, Hungarians, Germans, and Roma alongside the Romanian majority, while archival evidence reveals their participation in the economic, social, confessional, and cultural development of the town. Greek migration belonged to this larger process but possessed characteristics. Greeks arriving in the Principalities included both individuals connected to Constantinopolitan political and administrative networks and migrants, including Greeks and Aromanians from regions south of the Danube, whose activities were predominantly commercial and entrepreneurial. They became visible as merchants, leaseholders, money dealers and property owners and, over time, entered administrative, judicial, electoral, and political life (Nițu Burlușanu, 2002).

This process was therefore not simply one of immigration, but of gradual economic establishment, social integration, institutional participation, and civic contribution. The Pitești evidence offers a revealing microhistorical parallel: by 1838 the town contained 56 Greek families comprising 226 individuals, engaged in occupations ranging from leaseholding and commerce to innkeeping and other urban economic activities; later, members of the Greek community also occupied administrative and judicial positions, while electoral lists from 1879 recorded 75 Greeks entitled to vote across the city's three electoral colleges. Particularly relevant to the Dalles case is the connection between economic success, integration, and benefaction. Members of Greek-origin communities increasingly directed accumulated private resources toward institutions serving the urban population. In Pitești, donors of Greek origin contributed to churches, schools, a public library, hospitals, professional education, and other communal institutions. Figures such as Ioan Mavrodolu, Paraschiva Ștefu Nicolau, Ion Nicolopol, Maria Teiuleanu, Theodor Naum, and Dumitru N. Caramitru illustrate how economic and social

incorporation could eventually develop into forms of civic philanthropy. (Nițu Burlușanu, 2002)

The Dalles family emerged from precisely this world of mobility, commerce, property accumulation, and gradual integration, yet its trajectory also demonstrates how economic incorporation could be followed by civic identification and, ultimately, by the conversion of private wealth into philanthropy. The founder of the family's fortunes in Romania was Ioan G. Dalles (1816–1886), who is described in contemporary documents as a Greek merchant. A court decision from 1883 explicitly referred to him as „the Greek Ioan G. Dalles," providing one of the clearest documentary references to his ethnic origin[2]. Although the exact circumstances of his arrival in the Romanian Principalities remain still unknown, his settlement can be understood within the wider context of Greek commercial migration that intensified during and after the Phanariot period. Greek merchants played a major role in the economic life of the Principalities, as aforementioned, facilitating commercial exchanges and contributing to the development of market networks that connected the Romanian lands to the eastern Mediterranean world. However, a Macedo-Romanian (Aromanian) identity cannot be entirely excluded, given the well-documented movement of numerous Vlachs from the Aromanian communities of northern Greece, particularly Macedonia and Epirus (Cain, 2013; Drăghiceanu-Berciu & Coman, 2012) .

The commercial success of Ioan G. Dalles was built primarily upon the grain trade. From a young age, he became involved in commercial activities and gradually developed into one of the most important grain merchants of his generation. His business connections extended to prominent members of the Greek and Macedonian merchant communities, among them Hagi (Iane) Anastasescu, a wealthy merchant from Giurgiu of Macedonian origin. In 1870, Ioan G. Dalles married Elena Anastasescu, the daughter of his business associate. The marriage brought together two prosperous merchant families despite a considerable age difference between the spouses: Elena, born in 1849, was thirty-three years younger than Ioan Dalles[3]. This union symbolized the consolidation of economic and social ties among the prosperous Greek and Balkan merchant elites established in Romania.

It remains unclear whether Ioan G. Dalles had been married before his marriage to Elena Anastasescu. The archival evidence nevertheless points to the existence of an older daughter, Maria (Marie) Dalles. A file preserved in the Dâmbovița County Archives contains a series of French-language letters written in 1885 by Maria, who explicitly addresses Ioan G. Dalles as her beloved father and repeatedly expresses gratitude for his affection, care, and continuing support.[4] Two interpretations remain possible. The more plausible is that Maria was an older daughter of Ioan G. Dalles from an earlier relationship, possibly an earlier

[2] Dâmbovița County Archives, Dalles Family Collection, file 3, 1881–1883.
[3] The Archives of the Romanian Academy, Folder Elena Dalles, vol. 11.
[4] Dâmbovița County Archives, Dalles Family Collection, file 9, 1885.

marriage, which would reveal a previously little-known branch of the Dalles family. A second possibility, which cannot yet be entirely excluded, is that Dora Dalles used Maria or Marie as an additional name in her correspondence with her father. The surviving evidence does not presently establish such an identification, however, and the correspondence itself consistently presents the writer as Maria or Marie. Until further documentation concerning Maria's mother, civil status, or a possible earlier marriage of Ioan G. Dalles is identified, Maria is best treated provisionally as an older daughter of Ioan G. Dalles, while the precise circumstances of her birth and parentage on the maternal side remain unresolved. The marriage of Ioan G. Dalles and Elena Dalles produced three children: George Dalles (1871–1873), Dora Dalles (1875–1892), and Ioan I. Dalles (1879–1914).[5]

The transformation of the Dalles family from merchants into members of the Romanian landed bourgeoisie occurred through strategic investments in property. A decisive moment came in 1862 when Ioan G. Dalles purchased the Bucșani estate from Princess Cleopatra Trubetzkoi (born Ghica). The estate included approximately 1,400 hectares of arable land and a large manor house surrounded by an extensive park.(Mărculescu, 2020) Through this acquisition, Dalles joined the ranks of the major landowners of Dâmbovița County and secured a social status comparable to that of the traditional Romanian elite. The purchase illustrates a broader pattern of integration whereby successful immigrant merchants converted commercial wealth into landed property, thereby gaining prestige and influence within Romanian society.

The family's growing integration into Bucharest's urban elite was also manifested in its extensive real-estate investments. Beyond the Bucșani estate, Ioan G. Dalles acquired numerous properties strategically situated in the capital's commercial center, particularly on Lipscani, Gabroveni, and Șelari streets and on I. C. Brătianu Boulevard. Among his Lipscani properties was the building that today houses the Little Paris Museum. These properties generated considerable rental income and positioned the family among the capital's affluent economic actors. Such investments reveal the dual character of the Dalles fortune, combining traditional landownership with participation in the increasingly modern urban economy of Romania.[6]

The second generation completed the family's integration into Romanian society. Ioan I. Dalles, educated in Paris and holding a doctorate in law, embodied the cultural aspirations of Romania's modern bourgeois elite. Upon his return to the country, he practiced law, participated in political life through the Conservative Party, and became actively involved in cultural and philanthropic initiatives. His education abroad, professional career, and public engagement reflected the values of the Romanian elite at the turn of the twentieth century and demonstrated the successful incorporation of a family of immigrant origin into the political, social, and cultural structures of the Romanian nation-state. Dora Dalles was

[5] The Archives of the Romanian Academy, Folder Elena Dalles, vol. 11.
[6] Dâmbovița County Archives, Dalles Family Collection, file 4, 1892–1914.

similarly sent to Paris with her mother to continue her education, but returned in poor health. The illness she contracted ultimately led to her premature death at the age of seventeen.[7]

The process of civic incorporation extended to the second generation of the family. In February 1902, the Romanian Parliament was considering a bill granting Ioan I. Dalles Romanian naturalization (împământenire) with exemption from the usual residence requirement. On 20 February, *Adevărul* reported that the Senate had received the previous day a series of legislative proposals, among them one concerning the „naturalization with exemption from the residence requirement of Messrs Ioan I. Dalles“ and several other applicants („Informațiuni,“ 1902) . The reference is particularly significant because it demonstrates that Ioan's subsequent participation in Romanian public life rested upon a formal process of juridical incorporation rather than simply upon the family's long residence and economic integration in the country.

Naturalization of the Dalles family was accompanied by a strong identification with Romanian society and its institutions. The Dalles devoted substantial resources to local development, education, religion, health care, and culture. Their philanthropic activities included the construction of schools and churches at Bucșani, support for poor villagers, donations to cultural projects, and, ultimately, the creation of the Ioan I. Dalles Foundation, one of the most important cultural institutions in interwar Bucharest. Through these initiatives, the family demonstrated loyalty to Romanian society while contributing directly to the country's modernization and cultural advancement. Their trajectory from Greek and Aromanian merchant origins to membership in the Romanian economic, social, and cultural elite illustrates the successful integration of immigrant entrepreneurial families into the national framework of modern Romania.

The death of Ioan G. Dalles on 4 January 1886 marked a turning point not only in the history of the Dalles family but also in the life of his wife, Elena Dalles. Widowed at the age of thirty-seven, she assumed responsibility for the management of the family estates, the upbringing of her two surviving children, and the preservation of a substantial fortune accumulated through decades of commercial and agricultural activity. Her husband's death thus profoundly altered her position within both the household and the wider social order, transforming her from the wife of a prominent merchant and landowner into the head of one of the leading landed families of Dâmbovița County.[8]

At the time of her husband's death, the Dalles family possessed extensive properties, including the large estate at Bucșani and numerous valuable commercial buildings in Bucharest. The management of these assets required considerable administrative abilities, particularly in a period when women rarely occupied leading positions in economic life. Contemporary records indicate that the estates, rental properties, and agricultural revenues continued to function

[7] The Archives of the Romanian Academy, Folder Elena Dalles, vol. 11.
[8] Dâmbovița County Archives, Dalles Family Collection, file 4, 1892–1914.

effectively after 1892, suggesting that Elena Dalles successfully oversaw the preservation and administration of the family fortune.[9]

Widowhood also placed upon her the responsibility of raising Dora Dalles and Ioan I. Dalles. Sources describe how she educated her children in a spirit of generosity, religious devotion, and concern for the welfare of others. Growing up on the Bucșani estate, the young Dora and Ioan frequently visited poor villagers, widows, orphans, and elderly inhabitants, offering assistance and gifts. Such practices reflected the values promoted within the household under Elena's guidance and anticipated the philanthropic ethos that would later characterize the family.[10]

The years following her husband's death reveal important dimensions of female autonomy in late nineteenth-century Romania. Although Romanian society remained largely patriarchal, wealthy widows enjoyed a degree of legal and economic independence that enabled them to manage estates, conduct financial affairs, and participate in public life. Elena Dalles exercised these rights actively. Rather than transferring responsibility for the family's affairs to male relatives, she retained direct control over the estate and remained the central authority within the household. Her position demonstrates how widowhood could, in certain circumstances, create opportunities for women to exercise agency otherwise unavailable to them during marriage.[11]

The handwritten account books of the Dalles estates make it possible to observe philanthropy not only through the large donations publicized in the press, but also at the level of everyday financial practice. Elena Dalles maintained property-based registers in which expenditures were entered chronologically, identified by purpose and accompanied by the corresponding sums, suggesting close and systematic supervision of the family patrimony. The surviving pages are particularly revealing because ordinary expenses connected with the management and maintenance of the estates appear alongside payments with a social, religious, or charitable character. In the 1907 register, for example, individual entries of 40, 80, 100, 110, 120, 150, 200, and 250 lei, among others, are carefully recorded, while another page contains payments including 40, 45, 50, 55, 70, 100, 150, 167, 200, 280, 300, and 700 lei. Philanthropy thus appears not merely as a succession of exceptional public donations, but as a recurrent and budgeted component of estate management. The registers consequently present Elena Dalles as both a careful administrator of substantial economic resources and a socially engaged property owner who repeatedly redirected part of those resources toward people and institutions connected with the communities around the estates. The estate registers reveal the infrastructure behind Dalles philanthropy: before wealth could become a school, a church, assistance to villagers, or eventually a cultural

[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

foundation, it had to be carefully administered, accounted for, and deliberately redirected from private revenues toward social purposes.[12]

The successive bereavements that afflicted the Dalles family further deepened this process of personal transformation. In 1892, Elena Dalles lost her daughter, Dora, at the age of seventeen. Together with her surviving son, she responded to this tragedy by supporting the construction of a school bearing Dora's name and by financing the church of Bucșani, dedicated to Saints Constantine and Helen. These initiatives illustrate how private grief was gradually translated into public benefaction, as personal and familial commemoration became intertwined with a broader commitment to the local community. Philanthropy thus served a dual purpose: it perpetuated the memory of deceased family members while transforming that memory into enduring institutions of religious, educational, and social significance.[13]



Figure 1. Gheorghe D. Mirea, Portrait of a Lady (Portret de femeie), depicting Dora Dalles. The painting is preserved in the storage collection of the Prahova Art Museum. Although catalogued under the generic title Portrait of a Lady, the work has been identified in the course of the present research as a portrait of Dora Dalles (1875–1892), daughter of Elena and Ioan G. Dalles.

[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.

The final and most devastating blow came in December 1914 when her son, Ioan I. Dalles, the last surviving heir of the family, died unexpectedly. Contemporary testimonies describe a grieving mother who devoted herself almost entirely to charitable activities. She personally prepared clothing for the poor, distributed food and assistance to needy families, and continued to support individuals suffering from economic hardship. The death of Ioan transformed philanthropy from an important aspect of family identity into the central mission of her remaining years.

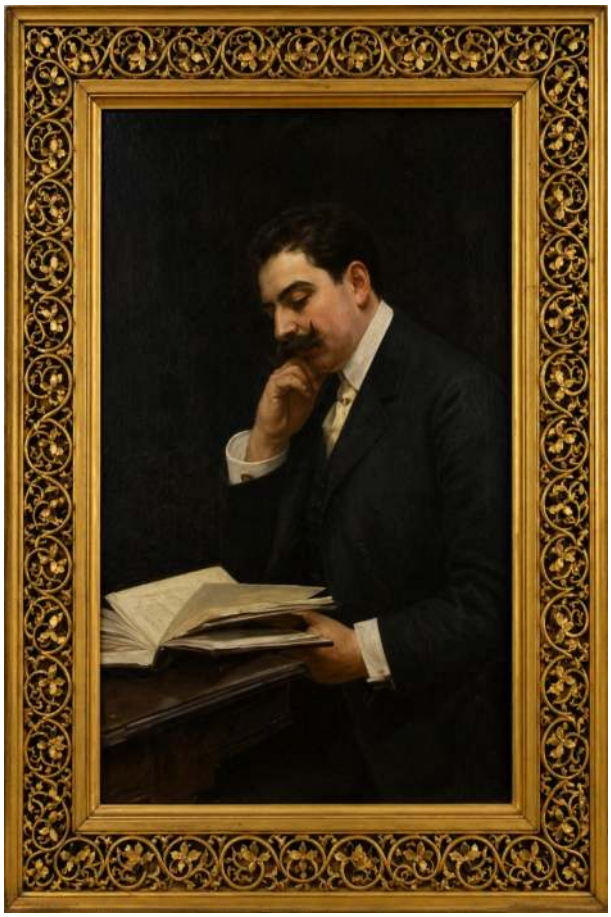


Figure 2. Portrait of Ioan I. Dalles (1879–1914), son of Elena and Ioan G. Dalles. The painting is preserved on the ground floor of the Ioan I. Dalles Foundation in Bucharest. The composition depicts the sitter beside an open book or manuscript, within an elaborate gilded ornamental frame. My archival research has established that the painter was also Gheorghe D. Mirea.[14] *Photograph by the author.*

As sole survivor of the immediate Dalles family, Elena Dalles emerged as the guardian of both its wealth and its memory. Her legal autonomy enabled her to determine the future destination of the family's considerable assets, while her

[14] The Archives of the Romanian Academy, Folder Elena Dalles, vol. 11, letter of Teodor Seimeanu to the President of Romanian Academy, 14.11.1932.



Figure 3. Statue of Ioan I. Dalles (1920), by Oscar Späthe (1875–1944), in the Dalles Family Park, Bucşani. Photograph by the author.

social authority allowed her to shape an ambitious philanthropic vision. This culminated in the testament drafted in 1918, through which she redirected much of the Dalles fortune toward hospitals, schools, churches, scholarships, orphan care, and cultural institutions. The testament demonstrates that the experience of widowhood and personal loss did not marginalize her from public life. On the contrary, it transformed her into one of the most significant female philanthropists in modern Romanian history, capable of converting private wealth into a lasting public legacy.

4. Elena Dalles: Female Agency, Social Responsibility, and the Making of a Philanthropic Legacy

The philanthropic reputation of the Dalles family has generally been associated with the testamentary donation through which Elena Dalles made possible, among other initiatives, the establishment of the Ioan I. Dalles Foundation in Bucharest. This emphasis is understandable, since the Foundation became the most visible and enduring institutional expression of the family's patronage. It nevertheless risks obscuring a much older tradition of philanthropic engagement. Available evidence indicates that charitable giving, support for community institutions, and a paternalistic relationship with dependants and tenants formed part of the family's public identity well before the death of Elena's last surviving child, Ioan I. Dalles, in December 1914. This philanthropic tradition can be traced at least to the 1880s and became particularly visible during the following decade through

substantial investments in education, religion, and healthcare. The Foundation should therefore be viewed not as the beginning of Dalles philanthropy, but as the culmination and most prominent institutional expression of a tradition that had developed over several decades.

An early indication of Elena Dalles's reputation for generosity appears in a public letter dated 8 June 1888. Chr. G. Trandafirescu explained that he had agreed to rent from Elena a commercial property at an annual rent of 2,000 lei and had paid an advance of 400 lei. Circumstances beyond his control subsequently prevented him from fulfilling the agreement. Instead of enforcing the financial claim available to her, Elena Dalles reportedly relinquished her claim to the rent and, more strikingly, returned the 400-lei advance. Trandafirescu considered the gesture sufficiently remarkable to make it public and thanked her in the press, describing her conduct as evidence of an „honourable and honest character". Strictly speaking, the transaction was not a philanthropic donation, but its publicization is revealing. It demonstrates that generosity was becoming part of the social image associated with Elena Dalles at a relatively early date.(Trandafirescu, 1888)

More substantial evidence emerges from the family's activities at Bucșani in Dâmbovița County, where the Dalles estate became the centre of an extensive programme of local benefaction. The importance of this evidence is difficult to overstate. Later accounts sometimes represent Elena's generosity as essentially commemorative, interpreting it primarily through the deaths that successively affected her family. The contemporary material from Bucșani shows, however, that the Dalles family's philanthropy possessed an established local and social dimension that cannot be reduced to mourning. Education, religious life, assistance to individuals, and improvement of village institutions were all objects of Dalles patronage.[15]

The clearest example is the school at Bucșani. A contemporary report reproduced in the dossier states explicitly that Dalles, owner of the Bucșani estate, had erected the school entirely at her own expense, at a reported cost of almost 40,000 lei (corresponding to an estimated €1.42 million in September 2026). The institution was formally inaugurated on 24 September 1898. The scale and ceremonial character of the inauguration demonstrate that this was conceived as a substantial public benefaction rather than merely an estate school serving the immediate needs of the proprietor. The county archpriest officiated at the religious ceremony with several priests, while those attending included the prefect G. Nicolaescu (Lăzărescu Tănase et al., 2025), the school inspector, the county engineer, teachers and mayors from neighbouring communities, members of the Dalles family, and numerous peasants. The municipal council formally expressed its gratitude to Elena for her generosity. („Din Târgoviște," 1898)

The school, moreover, formed only one component of a considerably larger programme. The same contemporary report states that Elena had already

[15] Dâmbovița County Archives, Dalles Family Collection, file 4, 1892–1914.

constructed a church at Bucșani, again from her own resources, at an estimated cost of 120,000 lei. The difference between the sums is revealing: the church reportedly required three times the expenditure made on the school. Taken together, the two projects represented approximately 160,000 lei (estimated €5.68 million) of private expenditure directed towards religious and educational infrastructure. The newspaper regarded these expenditures explicitly as sacrifices undertaken for noble public purposes and presented Elena Dalles as an example worthy of imitation by other proprietors.(„Din Târgoviște," 1898)

The language employed in these reports is especially revealing for a history of Romanian philanthropy. One account described the Dalles family as being „among the foremost benefactors of our villages" („printre cei mai de seamă binefăcători ai satelor noastre"). It attributed Bucșani's possession of a „beautiful church" and an unusually good school directly to the family's benevolence (Culaiu, 1898). Such statements provide evidence not simply of what the family donated, but of how these actions were interpreted by contemporaries. „Benefactor" had become part of the family's recognizable public identity.

The ambitions attributed to Elena extended still further. At the time of the school's inauguration, the press reported that she intended to complete her work of local improvement by financing a town-hall building and a hospital, once again from her own resources. („Din Târgoviște," 1898) Elena Dalles's engagement with healthcare philanthropy was more substantial than an isolated charitable donation. Contemporary press material identifies her as a founding member of the Queen Elisabeth Polyclinic (Policlinica „Regina Elisabeta"), established in Bucharest on 16 February 1896 under royal patronage to provide free medical assistance to the poor. Her involvement therefore placed her within an organized network of female and elite philanthropy concerned with the development of urban medical welfare. The institution expanded rapidly, from 4,150 patients and 12,956 consultations in 1897 to 16,091 patients and 41,024 consultations in 1902.(Santiago, 1904) Elena Dalles's commitment was also financial: another contemporary report lists „d-na Elena Dalles" as contributing 1,000 lei to the Polyclinic („Ultimele Informațiuni," 1903), while other entries in her financial register prove a long-term commitment in this regard.[16] Her participation in the institution is thus particularly important for understanding the breadth of her philanthropic activity. Alongside the school and church at Bucșani, it demonstrates that her philanthropy extended beyond estate-based paternalism into organized urban civil society and institutional healthcare, well before the deaths and memorial philanthropy that later came to dominate the historical memory of the Dalles name. It also demonstrates that her philanthropic activity extended beyond rural and estate-based benefaction into the developing sphere of organized medical charity. The size of the gift is noteworthy when read within the list of donors in which it appears. It places Elena among the substantial contributors to the institution and demonstrates that her philanthropic

[16] Ibid.

horizon extended beyond Bucșani into the increasingly organized world of urban medical and charitable institutions.

The combination of these activities reveals an important characteristic of late Belle Epoque Dalles philanthropy. It functioned simultaneously at local and national or metropolitan levels. At Bucșani, giving was rooted in the traditional relationship between the major landowner and the rural community. In Bucharest, meanwhile, Elena participated in institutions whose charitable activity was organized through associations, committees, donations, and public subscriptions. She therefore occupied a position between an older model of estate-based paternal philanthropy and the expanding associational philanthropy characteristic of Romanian urban society around the turn of the century.

The sources also demonstrate that philanthropy at Bucșani should not be interpreted solely as Elena's individual activity. The press presented the Dalles family collectively as benefactors and eventually associated her son, a promising young member and MP of the Conservative Party, with this tradition. A later contemporary description of social life on the estate states that Elena Dalles and her son were both renowned for their generosity and popularity and that those experiencing hardship could expect assistance from them. The same report again pointed to the school and church as material evidence of their charitable disposition. („Diverse," 1910; „Medaliații," 1910)

This relationship assumed forms beyond conventional institutional donations. The source material describes assistance to local inhabitants in daily life, including help connected with marriages, gifts, and material assistance. Later recollections also describe the provision of timber for the construction of villagers' houses. Such practices belonged to the paternalistic culture of the great rural estate, but the degree to which they shaped the public reputation of the Dalles family is particularly noteworthy.[17]

The social and paternalistic dimensions of the relationship between the Dalles family and the local community emerge particularly clearly from accounts of a large celebration organized at Bucșani on 15 August 1905. The festivities were held in the extensive Dalles park, modelled on Bucharest's Cișmigiu Park, and featured illuminations, fireworks, entertainment, and a ball in the local school building. The park was open free of charge, with the expenses borne by the proprietors, and the newspaper reported the presence of thousands of peasants from Bucșani and nearby villages. The report portrayed Elena and her son not as remote estate owners but as participants in the community's social life. It explicitly praised their generosity and popularity and held them up as an example for other landowners who remained indifferent to the needs of their estates and villages. („Bucșani," 1905). By temporarily transforming spaces associated with the estate and its philanthropic activities into venues of collective festivity, such events provided opportunities for interaction between the landowning family and the

[17] Ibid.

wider community. They also gave public and ceremonial expression to the Dalles family's position within local society, combining patronage, sociability, and elite representation.

The relationship between patronage and social authority becomes even clearer from evidence concerning official recognition of the family's work. In an article significantly entitled „O răsplată cuvenită" („A Deserved Reward"), the Dalles family is presented as one of the most important benefactor families of the Romanian countryside. The article describes a special ceremony at Bucșani at which Elena and her son Ioan received from King Carol I the „Răsplata Muncii", First Class Award. The county prefect came personally to present the insignia, accompanied by Constantin Fusea, president of the county council, and the ceremony took place in the presence of the villagers. Schoolchildren sang „Mulți ani trăiască" as the decorations were conferred. The press explicitly interpreted the distinction as a reward for the support the Dalles family gave to the state and community.(Culaiu, 1898) Such royal recognition is important because it transforms the significance of the donations. The church, school, and other forms of assistance were no longer merely transactions between estate owner and village. Through the award and the public ceremony surrounding it, Dalles philanthropy was incorporated into a wider discourse of social responsibility and service to the Romanian state. The philanthropic landowner was implicitly portrayed as complementing state activity by using private wealth to construct institutions that the rural public authorities could not always adequately provide.

Further official recognition followed at the individual level. In 1909, Ioan I. Dalles, identified in the contemporary press as MP for Dâmbovița, was awarded the Order of the Crown of Romania (Coroana României), with the rank of Commander. Although the published list of decorations does not explicitly attribute this distinction to his philanthropic activity, the award indicates the broader public and political recognition that Ioan I. Dalles had acquired by this time and complements the honours bestowed on mother and son for their benefactions at Bucșani. („Decorațiile de La 10 Mai," 1912)

The evidence therefore requires a qualification of interpretations that associate Dalles philanthropy primarily with family tragedy. There is no doubt that successive bereavements profoundly reshaped the character and direction of Elena Dalles's later giving. The death of her infant George, then of her teen daughter, Dora Dalles, on 7 November 1892, was followed by the loss of her last surviving child, Ioan I. Dalles, on 22 December 1914, at the age of thirty-five. The latter loss provided the immediate emotional context for the testamentary project that ultimately resulted in the establishment of the Ioan I. Dalles Foundation.

The Romanian Academy's later account explicitly interpreted the Foundation as the response of a grieving mother who sought to perpetuate her son's memory through the creation of a cultural institution bearing his name.[18] Yet the

[18] The Archives of the Romanian Academy, Folder Elena Dalles, vol. 11.

earlier evidence demonstrates that bereavement did not create Elena Dalles's philanthropic disposition. Rather, family tragedy redirected and transformed an already well-established practice of giving. Long before 1914, her philanthropy encompassed education, religion, healthcare, assistance to local communities, and participation in organized urban charity. After the death of Dalles, this existing commitment acquired a more explicitly commemorative and cultural purpose, culminating in the transformation of private wealth and family memory into an enduring public institution. In this sense, bereavement should be understood not as the origin of Dalles philanthropy, but as a decisive turning point in its evolution from sustained social benefaction toward memorial and institutional philanthropy.

Indeed, the chronology is crucial. By 1898 Elena had already financed important religious and educational infrastructure and contributed to urban medical philanthropy. The school and church at Bucșani represented investments of approximately 160,000 lei according to contemporary reporting, while she was considering additional spending on a hospital and administrative building. Further descriptions show that the family's role encompassed both institutional patronage and direct assistance to villagers. The historical significance of the later foundation therefore lies not in the birth of a philanthropic impulse, but in the transformation of an existing charitable tradition.

This distinction allows us to identify a meaningful evolution in the Dalles family's practices. Their earlier philanthropy was predominantly community-oriented and paternalistic. It was tied to a specific territory, Bucșani, and to direct relations with a rural population. Its chief monuments were a church and school, both institutions around which village society was organized. At the same time, Elena's contribution to the Policlinica „Regina Elisabeta" reveals that she was already moving into a more modern institutional model of philanthropy based on financial donations to organized charitable bodies.

After the successive deaths within the family, and most decisively after the loss of Ioan I. Dalles, this earlier tradition acquired a further dimension: commemorative philanthropy. Rather than providing only for a village community or an existing charitable organization, Elena Dalles ultimately employed the family's urban property and accumulated wealth to create an institution designed to survive both herself and the Dalles family. The Foundation Ioan I. Dalles was consequently less a sudden response to tragedy than the final institutionalization of values already visible in the family's behaviour decades earlier.

4.1. Elena Dalles: From Bereavement to Institutional Philanthropy

The depth of Elena Dalles's bereavement following Ioan's death is unusually well documented in contemporary sources. On 5 January 1915, less than two weeks after his death, *Universul* published a notice in which Elena publicly acknowledged the numerous expressions of sympathy and condolence she had received: „Mrs Elena I. Dalles, deeply moved by the countless expressions of sympathy shown for her beloved son, IOAN I. DALLES, and by the profound

sorrow expressed at his loss, offers her heartfelt thanks to all those who surrounded her with these expressions of sympathy during the difficult moments through which she has passed.“ The notice is significant not only as an immediate record of Elena’s bereavement, but also as evidence that Ioan’s death elicited a wider social response. Published long before the retrospective narratives associated with the establishment of the Dalles Foundation, it captures the moment at which a profoundly private loss entered the public sphere through a collective expression of sympathy and its formal acknowledgement by Elena herself.(„Anunțuri,“ 1915)

The philanthropic question confronting her after December 1914 was therefore also fundamentally a question of inheritance: what purpose should the wealth accumulated by the family serve when there was no longer a direct line to inherit it? Before that question received its definitive answer in Elena's testament, Romania's entry in the summer of 1916 into the First World War created an entirely different field for charitable intervention. The sources demonstrate that Elena responded to wartime needs through direct financial contributions, thereby continuing an older pattern of philanthropy while broadening its geographical and social reach. One contemporary account records a contribution of 100 lei by Elena to the wartime hospital associated with the Cercul Avocaților (Lawyers’ Association). („Donațiuni Pentru Spitalul“Cercul Avocaților“,“ 1916) The donation placed her among a considerably larger group of private individuals and institutions contributing to medical assistance during the war. More substantial was her contribution to Familia Luptătorilor, an organization devoted to assisting the families of mobilized Romanian soldiers. The report preserved in states: „Mrs Elena I. Dalles, a large landowner, contributed through the newspaper *Universul* to the „Familia Luptătorilor“ (Families of the Soldiers) the amount of 2.500 lei.“ The newspaper itself added the revealing judgement: „This generous contribution speaks for itself.“ („Informațiuni,“ 1916) The item occurs in the issue dated 29 October 1916, making it particularly useful as direct contemporary press evidence for Elena's wartime charitable activity. The 2,500 lei donation represents something more than a continuation of conventional charitable giving. Before the war, Elena's most visible philanthropy had been connected either with Bucșani or with established institutions such as the Policlinica „Regina Elisabeta“. In 1916 her benefaction became directly connected with a national community mobilized by war. „Familia Luptătorilor“ extended assistance to those affected by military mobilization, and Elena's participation therefore linked aristocratic or landowning philanthropy with the social consequences of mass warfare.

Elena Dalles’s wartime philanthropy also extended to the children of soldiers. In Târgoviște, the women’s committee of the local Orthodox Society established a kindergarten with a canteen for the children of men serving at the front, which at the time of the report was caring for one hundred children in the „Fusea“ house, placed at the committee’s disposal by the prefecture. The published list of benefactors records Elena Dalles with a contribution of 500 lei, making her one of the more substantial individual donors to the initiative. This contribution

complements the evidence of her support for other wartime relief efforts, including the Hospital of the Lawyers' Association, and reveals the breadth of her philanthropic engagement during the First World War. („Fapte Lăudabile. Târgoviște," 1916) Her assistance encompassed both medical relief and the social consequences of mobilization, particularly the welfare of soldiers' children and families. The Târgoviște donation is especially significant because it situates Dalles within local networks of female philanthropy and organized wartime relief, showing that her charitable activity was not confined to Bucharest but also extended to the community with which she and her family had longstanding ties.

There was also an important continuity between her pre-war and wartime activities. Healthcare remained one of the objects of her generosity, while support for soldiers' families reproduced on a national scale something that earlier Bucșani philanthropy had done locally: provide assistance to households made vulnerable by circumstances they could not control. What changed was the scale. The village community was increasingly supplemented by the imagined national community as the beneficiary of charitable responsibility.

4.2. The 1918 Testament

The testament drafted by Elena Dalles on 16 May 1918 represents one of the most significant philanthropic documents of modern Romanian history. Written in her residence on Boulevard I.C. Brătianu in Bucharest and prepared by the lawyer Theodor Seimeanu, the will transformed the substantial fortune accumulated by the Dalles family into a comprehensive programme of social, educational, religious, cultural, and charitable institutions. More than a simple distribution of property, the testament reflected Elena Dalles's determination to perpetuate the memory of her deceased husband and children through projects devoted to public welfare and national culture.[19] The will therefore combined commemorative objectives with practical social purposes, ensuring that the Dalles name would remain associated with institutions serving education, healthcare, religion, and culture.

From a legal perspective, the testament carefully specified both beneficiaries and obligations. Elena Dalles appointed her nephew, Mihail M. Căputineanu, as universal heir, granting him the remainder of her movable and immovable property while simultaneously imposing strict obligations concerning the execution of various charitable foundations. The will was therefore not simply an act of inheritance but a legally structured mechanism designed to guarantee the fulfilment of philanthropic objectives after her death.[20]

Among the most important provisions was the donation of 300,000 lei and land in Bucșani to the Eforia Spitalelor Civile for the construction of a rural hospital bearing the name „Ioan I. Dalles." Elena Dalles stipulated that the hospital should be built within two years of her death and modelled, as far as possible, on

[19] Dâmbovița County Archives, Dalles Family Collection, file 1.
[20] Ibid.

the rural hospitals established under King Carol I[21]. The institution was ultimately constructed and inaugurated in 1927, becoming an important medical centre for the local population.

The testament also devoted significant resources to education. Elena Dalles left 100,000 lei to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Instruction for the construction of a boys' boarding school attached to the gymnasium in Târgoviște. The institution was intended to accommodate twenty capable but financially disadvantaged students each year and was likewise to bear the name „Ioan I. Dalles.“[22] Additional provisions called for the establishment of a school at Rățoaia, housed initially in the former manor, and named „Ioan și Dora Dalles“ in memory of her children.

Religious philanthropy occupied an important place within the testament. Elena Dalles allocated funds and land for the construction of churches and clergy residences, particularly at Rățoaia, while also providing donations to several churches in Bucșani, Hăbeni, Giurgiu, Comișani, Lazuri, and Bucharest. The will additionally entrusted funds to the National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women for the care and education of war orphans. Through these provisions, the testament revealed the close relationship between philanthropy, religious obligation, and social welfare in her vision of public service.[23]

The most ambitious aspect of the testament concerned the establishment of a major cultural institution under the supervision of the Romanian Academy. Elena Dalles bequeathed to the Academy two valuable properties in Bucharest, including the family residence on Boulevard I.C. Brătianu and another building on Eugen Stătescu Street. The revenues generated by these properties were intended to finance the construction of a cultural centre that would bear the name of her son, Ioan I. Dalles. According to the testament, the building was to include spaces for artistic exhibitions, lectures, conferences, and educational activities designed to contribute to the intellectual and moral formation of Romanian citizens.[24]

The term „monument“ is particularly significant. Elena did not intend a funerary monument in the conventional sense. Instead, memory was to be perpetuated through cultural utility. The monument to her son would be a living institution, continually renewed by the people who entered it, attended exhibitions and concerts, listened to lectures, and participated in educational activity. In this sense, the transformation of family wealth into cultural infrastructure also represented a transformation of private mourning into public benefit. The provisions of the testament make the ambitions of the project especially clear. The future building was to be sufficiently spacious to accommodate exhibitions devoted to painting, sculpture, architecture, textiles, and national embroidery, alongside musical

[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.

examinations and auditions, declamation, courses, and public conferences. It was also explicitly intended to accommodate activities of the Popular University and other institutions devoted to cultural and intellectual education. The intention was consequently much broader than the patronage of elite art. According to the testamentary wording reproduced in the Academy records, such activities were supposed to contribute to forming the characters of Romanian citizens through their „cultivarea şi educarea lor sufletească“ („the cultivation and education of their moral and spiritual character“).

This language supplies an important clue to Elena's conception of philanthropy. Cultural giving was conceived as a form of social education. The intended beneficiary was ultimately neither the Academy nor a narrow artistic circle, but the public.

4.3. The Dalles Foundation

The death of Elena Dalles in 1921 initiated the more difficult process of converting these testamentary intentions into functioning institutions. Relations between the Romanian Academy and Mihail M. Căpuțineanu, the universal heir, were not entirely straightforward. Delays in transferring the properties assigned to the Academy led it to initiate legal proceedings seeking both possession of the legacies and payment of the revenues generated by the properties in the intervening period. The dispute was eventually resolved through the transfer of the buildings and the settlement of the financial claims. The episode is significant because it demonstrates that testamentary philanthropy depended upon more than the donor’s intentions. Its implementation required legal enforcement, administrative negotiation, financial management, and institutional continuity.

State recognition provided another essential component of this process. In 1922, a royal decree authorized the Romanian Academy, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Instruction, and the Eforia Spitalelor Civile to accept the legacies assigned to them by Elena Dalles. This formal recognition gave the testamentary provisions the institutional framework necessary for their implementation. Yet legal authorization did not immediately resolve all the practical questions surrounding the estate. The Academy still had to determine how the assets under its control were to be managed while questions of ownership, revenue, and the eventual construction of the Foundation remained unsettled.

The proceedings of the Romanian Academy of 1 June 1922 reveal the emergence of an institutional mechanism for safeguarding the cultural bequest. A commission examining funds derived from donations and testaments recommended that the income from the Dalles properties be accumulated separately: „The revenues of the properties bequeathed by the late Elena I. Dalles are to be capitalized in a separate fund under the name ‘Ioan I. Dalles Foundation’“ („Veniturile imobilelor lăsate prin testamentul defunctei Elena I. Dalles să se capitalizeze într'un fond separat sub numele de „Fondaţia Ioan I. Dalles“...“). (Rădulescu, 1922)

The importance of this decision extended beyond bookkeeping. By separating and capitalizing the revenues produced by the bequest, the Academy transformed property into a financial resource assigned to an autonomous and explicitly named institutional purpose. The Fundația Ioan I. Dalles therefore began to acquire an institutional existence before its physical premises were constructed. The deceased donor's intention was being translated into administratively protected capital capable of financing its eventual realization.

The following years demonstrate, however, how difficult the translation of philanthropic intention into urban and institutional reality could be. By 1925, the Academy was considering both the financial requirements of constructing the Foundation and negotiations with the Bucharest municipality concerning the Dalles property on Strada I. C. Brătianu no. 12. Andrei Rădulescu proposed authorizing the Academy's delegation to conduct these negotiations while simultaneously preparing the resources necessary to carry out the testamentary project. The proposal, unanimously approved, illustrates the Academy's understanding that it was not simply administering a valuable urban property but was legally and morally bound to employ it for a purpose specified by its donor. (Bianu, 1925)

Municipal development introduced further complications. At the Academy meeting of 24 May 1928, Rădulescu reported that part of the former Dalles property had been expropriated for the widening of Bulevardul I. C. Brătianu. Various arrangements concerning compensation and exchanges of land were examined, while another proposal envisaged incorporating part of the site with adjacent expropriated property for the construction of a National Opera. These discussions reveal the competing claims that could be placed upon a valuable urban estate in a rapidly changing capital. They also reveal the strength of testamentary constraint. In considering the available alternatives, the Academy explicitly recalled its obligation to construct the Foundation prescribed by Elena Dalles. The donor had therefore done more than transfer ownership. By assigning a specific and permanent purpose to the property, she continued after her death to delimit the ways in which one of Romania's principal cultural institutions could employ her estate. (Rădulescu, 1928)

The solution eventually took architectural form after a protracted process in which testamentary obligation had to be reconciled with the changing urban fabric of Bucharest. The Academy received the compensation for the portion of the Dalles property expropriated for the widening of I. C. Brătianu Avenue in December 1929, thereby activating the testamentary requirement that the Foundation be constructed within two years. The remaining plot, however, was so irregular that, according to G. Balș's report to the Romanian Academy in May 1932, it was impossible to erect the building there under the conditions stipulated by Elena Dalles. The Academy consequently negotiated exchanges of land with the Bucharest municipality in order to obtain a regular building site, a process that could be completed only after the establishment of an elected Municipal Council

and that was not finalized until May 1931. In the meantime, the Academy organized an architectural competition in which Horia Teodoru's proposal was ranked first; Teodoru was subsequently commissioned to prepare the definitive plans and supervise their execution. The competition entries and his final project were publicly exhibited at the Academy during its 1931 general session. Construction proceeded with remarkable speed. The contract was awarded on 13 May 1931 to engineer Emil Prager, who had completed most of the building by the end of the autumn, with painting, finishing, and other works continuing through the winter and spring of 1931–1932. The scale of the undertaking was substantial. Balș reported that the building itself had initially been estimated at 14 million lei; following the tender, the estimate fell to approximately 11.5 million lei, while subsequent modifications and additions brought the final construction cost to approximately 13 million lei. Including the garden, furnishings, professional fees, municipal charges, and other expenses, the overall cost of the Foundation reached 14.9 million lei. By 15 May 1932, however, the Dalles fund had accumulated 18,075,461 lei, derived from the compensation paid for the expropriated land, rents from buildings formerly situated on the property, and bank interest. After construction costs were deducted, 3,175,461 lei remained as an endowment for the maintenance of the institution, demonstrating that the Academy sought not merely to complete the building but also to provide for its financial sustainability.(Balș, 1932)

The completed building thus gave material and institutional form to the unusually broad programme articulated in Elena Dalles's testament. It was conceived not merely as an exhibition space but as a multifunctional cultural institution in which the visual arts, music, public lectures, education, and other forms of intellectual activity could coexist. In this respect, the project surpassed the conventional conception of a commemorative monument. Its purpose was not simply to preserve the memory of Ioan I. Dalles, but to make that memory socially productive and institutionally durable through the continuous provision of cultural opportunities to an open-ended public. The financing of the building and the preservation of a substantial maintenance fund are particularly significant in this respect: they transformed commemoration from a single act of construction into the basis of an institution intended to endure.

Preparations for the inauguration began while the building was still approaching completion. In February 1932, the Romanian Academy envisaged opening the Ioan I. Dalles Foundation during its general session of 15–30 May and defined the new premises in direct relation to the purposes prescribed by Elena Dalles's testament. Alongside a conference hall, the building contained spaces specifically intended for exhibitions of painting, sculpture, architecture, national textiles, and related arts. The Academy therefore conceived the inaugural exhibition not as a ceremonial addition to the opening but as the first practical enactment of the Foundation's cultural mission. A special commission was established to determine its character and oversee its organization, bringing

together prominent representatives of Romanian artistic and academic life under the presidency of Dr I. Cantacuzino, with the participation of G. Oprescu, Jean Al. Steriadi, Anastase Simu, and the Secretary General of the Academy.[25]

The commission's meeting of 10 March 1932 translated this general intention into a concrete curatorial programme. The members decided to assemble an exhibition of important works by Ioan Andreescu, together with drawings and watercolours by Nicolae Grigorescu, subsequently extended to include Ștefan Luchian. The Academy undertook to approach museums, institutions, and private collectors in writing, while Steriadi was entrusted with personal negotiations intended to secure significant loans. Surviving correspondence shows the degree of administrative care devoted to this process. Owners were assured that borrowed works would be preserved under the best possible conditions and in complete security; receipts would be issued when works were delivered, and the objects would be returned at the conclusion of the exhibition. Steriadi was charged with maintaining direct contact with prospective lenders, receiving the works, and issuing the corresponding documentation. Oprescu, meanwhile, was to collect the scholarly information required for the exhibition catalogue. The division of responsibilities reveals an organizational structure extending well beyond ceremonial preparation: selection, provenance information, lender relations, custody, documentation, scholarship, and publication were all incorporated into the planning of the Foundation's first exhibition.[26]

The exhibition was also conceived as an explicitly interpretative undertaking. The commission determined that an illustrated catalogue with photographic reproductions should accompany it. G. Oprescu was to prepare an introductory study on the character and artistic significance of the exhibited works, while I. Bianu, president of the Academy, would contribute a separate introduction explaining the purpose of the Dalles Foundation. A circular issued on 5 April 1932 presented the new institution to potential lenders as a spacious venue for exhibitions of painting and sculpture, conferences, musical performances, and cinematographic presentations. It explained that the inaugural exhibition would focus on major Romanian artists of the recent past, devoting particular attention to Andreescu, whose oeuvre the Academy considered insufficiently known even among specialists in Romanian art history, and to Grigorescu and Luchian as draughtsmen and watercolourists. The planned closing date of 1 July 1932 further indicates that the inaugural display was conceived as a substantial public exhibition rather than a temporary ceremonial installation.[27]

These preparations substantially clarify the cultural meaning of the inauguration on 28 May 1932. The Academy was not merely opening a completed building. It was simultaneously establishing a curatorial and educational programme, mobilizing networks of museums and private collectors, producing scholarly

[25] The Archives of the Romanian Academy, Folder Elena Dalles, vol. 11.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

interpretation, and developing procedures for the custody and documentation of borrowed artworks. The inaugural exhibition thus transformed the building immediately into a functioning cultural institution. The distinction is important: the physical completion of the Foundation fulfilled one part of Elena Dalles's testament, but its activation through exhibitions, scholarship, lectures, and public access fulfilled its deeper philanthropic purpose. From its first public manifestation, the institution connected artistic heritage, expert knowledge, and a wider audience.

This protracted process culminated with the formal inauguration of the Ioan I. Dalles Foundation on 28 May 1932, during the general session of the Romanian Academy. The Academy's official record notes that the ceremony began at eleven o'clock and was attended by Patriarch Miron Cristea, members of the Academy, representatives of the government and the Dalles family, Bucharest mayor Dem. Dobrescu, members of the committee responsible for the inaugural exhibition, and a large invited public. The proceedings combined civic, religious, and cultural elements. The Carmen Society choir performed the royal anthem, a religious service was followed by the blessing of the premises, and the building was opened with an exhibition presenting works by Ioan Andreescu and drawings and watercolours by Nicolae Grigorescu and Ștefan Luchian. The choice was particularly appropriate to the purposes prescribed by the donor. From its first day of operation, the building was being employed for precisely the type of artistic activity envisaged in her testament.(Bianu et al., 1932)

The symbolic meaning of the occasion was articulated most explicitly by the president of the Romanian Academy, I. Bianu. In his inaugural address, Bianu traced the origins of the Foundation to the death of Elena's only surviving son, Ioan I. Dalles, on 22 December 1914, at the age of thirty-five. He described Ioan as a mature man who had completed his higher education and had already participated in public life as a deputy. According to Bianu, when confronted with the inevitability of Ioan's death, mother and son reached an understanding regarding the future use of the fortune intended for him. This „tragic understanding" („înţelegerea tragică"), he maintained, was subsequently incorporated into Elena's 1918 testament. In Bianu's retrospective interpretation, the Foundation was therefore inseparable from the experience of maternal bereavement: wealth that would ordinarily have secured the continuation of the family was redirected toward a permanent cultural purpose.(Bianu et al., 1932)

Yet Bianu did not characterize the Foundation solely as a memorial. He emphasized the public functions assigned to it by the testament, quoting Elena's provision that a „beautiful and spacious building" should be erected with rooms for exhibitions of painting, sculpture, architecture, national textiles and embroidery; for music and recitation; and for courses and public lectures intended to contribute to the formation and education of Romanian citizens. He accordingly presented the completed building both as a monument to Ioan I. Dalles and as a

cultural institution intended to become a „source of light“ in the capital. The significance of the project consequently lay in the conjunction of commemoration and utility. Memory was to be preserved not through a static monument but through repeated acts of cultural production and public education.(Bianu et al., 1932)

The contemporary press reinforced the public character of the inauguration. For instance, on 30 May 1932, *Curentul* reported the event under the title „Inaugurarea fundaţiei academice «Ioan I. Dalles»„ reminding readers that the Academy had erected the building from the estate left by Elena Dalles in memory of her son.(„Inaugurarea Fundației Academice „Ioan I. Dalles“,“ 1932a) *Universul* and *Dimineața*, reporting under the similar title „Inaugurarea Fundaţiei academice „Ioan I. Dalles“, likewise described the presence of prominent participants, the speeches, and the exhibitions accompanying the opening.(*Inaugurarea Fundației Academice „Ioan I. Dalles“*, 1932b; „Inaugurarea Fundației Academice „Ioan I. Dalles“,“ 1932c), while *Ilustrațiunea* presented an interesting collection of photos from the inauguration. („Actualitățile Noastre,“ 1932) The overlap between the Academy's official record and contemporary newspaper coverage is important. By 1932, a project originating in a private testament had acquired a conspicuously public character. The inauguration was presented not simply as the opening of a private charitable establishment but as an event in the cultural life of the capital.



Figure 4. The Ioan I. Dalles Foundation in the 1930s. Source: Archives of the Romanian Academy, Elena Dalles fonds, vol. 11.

The history of the Foundation can thus be understood as the gradual conversion of dynastic inheritance into cultural inheritance. Ioan's death ended the

prospect that the wealth accumulated by the family would pass through the direct line in the conventional manner. Elena's testament constructed an alternative form of continuity. The gift was hers, but the Foundation bore her son's name, uniting donor and commemorated descendant within a single institutional project. Family memory was thereby detached from biological succession and attached instead to a cultural institution intended to endure beyond the lifetimes of both.

To interpret the Foundation exclusively as an expression of maternal grief, however, would obscure the longer trajectory of Elena Dalles's philanthropy. The response to Ioan's death was transformative precisely because it operated upon philanthropic practices and assumptions that had developed earlier. Her support for the school, church, and community at Bucșani had addressed relatively defined local constituencies, while her charitable activities during the First World War responded to the immediate needs created by war, illness, and family hardship. The 1918 testament greatly enlarged the temporal and geographical scale of such benefaction. The Foundation was conceived for an indefinitely renewable public and was expected to continue producing cultural and educational benefits after both donor and original beneficiaries had disappeared.

Elena Dalles's philanthropy may consequently be understood as operating across three overlapping temporalities. The first was immediate relief, visible in personal assistance and wartime giving. The second was community improvement, represented by the religious, educational, and social initiatives associated particularly with Bucșani. The third was institutional perpetuity, achieved most fully through the testamentary Foundation. These were not successive stages in which one philanthropic model simply displaced another. Rather, they coexisted, while the balance between them shifted as Elena acquired the means and, following Ioan's death, the motivation to transform family property into an enduring institution.

A related transformation occurred in the social geography of her philanthropy. Bucșani had provided the principal setting for the family's relationship with a rural community, while charitable activity had already connected Elena to institutions beyond that local world. The testament of 1918 moved the centre of gravity decisively toward Bucharest and the Romanian Academy. In doing so, it altered the principal relationship through which her philanthropy operated: from that between landowner and local community toward one between private wealth and national culture. The Academy was crucial to this transformation because it supplied the legal personality, administrative continuity, financial management, and cultural authority necessary to extend the effects of an individual benefaction beyond the donor's lifetime.

The inauguration of the Ioan I. Dalles Foundation in 1932 therefore represented more than the completion of a building. It brought to fruition a process through which private bereavement was converted into public memory, material inheritance into cultural capital, and the extinction of a direct family line into a mechanism for perpetuating the family name through art and education. The

Foundation was the most durable and visible result of this transformation, but it should be understood within the broader philanthropic programme of its founder, encompassing education, religion, healthcare, wartime solidarity, social assistance, and culture. What distinguished the final phase of Elena Dalles's philanthropy was not the abandonment of these earlier commitments but their institutionalization on a new scale. It was this passage from charitable giving to institutional philanthropy that ultimately made her legacy both durable and historically significant.

Conclusion

The history of Elena Dalles's philanthropy reveals a broader transformation in the relationship between private wealth, family memory, and the public good in modern Romania. Situated within the longer trajectory of a family of Balkan and Greek origin that achieved economic success, acquired property, obtained naturalization, and became integrated into Romanian civic life, her benefactions demonstrate how accumulated private wealth could acquire a public and, ultimately, national function. Philanthropy was not simply a consequence of prosperity. It became a means through which social position was translated into responsibility toward communities and institutions, while simultaneously embedding the Dalles family more deeply within the society in which it had settled.

Elena's philanthropic activity preceded the personal tragedies that marked the later history of the family. Her giving was already rooted in religious commitment, local responsibility, and concern for education, health, and social welfare. The deaths of George, Dora, and, above all, Ioan did not create this philanthropic disposition, but they profoundly altered its scale, temporality, and commemorative meaning. In this sense, 1914 represented a transformation rather than a beginning. Bereavement redirected an established practice of charity toward a more ambitious objective: the creation of institutions capable of preserving family memory by serving successive generations.

This development illuminates the distinctive relationship between memory and utility in Elena Dalles's philanthropy. Commemoration was not confined to monuments or symbolic gestures. The names of her children were attached to institutions intended to educate, heal, sustain religious life, and promote culture. Family memory was therefore made socially productive. With the extinction of the direct family line, Elena effectively devised an alternative form of succession: biological continuity was replaced by institutional continuity, and dynastic inheritance by social and cultural inheritance. The endurance of the Dalles name would depend not on descendants, but on the continuing benefits generated by the family fortune.

This conclusion also lends substance to the conceptual perspectives outlined at the beginning of this study. In Bourdieusian terms, the conversion of economic resources into socially valued forms of benefaction generated symbolic effects irrespective of whether prestige constituted an explicit objective of the

donor. Philanthropy associated the Dalles name with generosity, responsibility, education, welfare, and cultural advancement, thereby converting material resources into recognition and symbolic capital. Putnam's concept of social capital illuminates a complementary process. Particularly at Bucșani, schools, churches, direct assistance, and communal initiatives were not merely transfers of resources. They also created and reinforced relationships between the Dalles family and the surrounding population. Philanthropy could therefore operate simultaneously as material redistribution, relationship-building, and a mechanism of social incorporation.

The Dalles case also supports scholarship that understands women's philanthropy as an important sphere of civic agency. Elena did not simply distribute portions of a private fortune. She selected beneficiaries, assigned properties, defined social purposes, imposed testamentary obligations, and enlisted established institutions to carry those purposes into the future. At the same time, this activity cannot be explained solely as a product of modernization or rational institution-building. Religious conviction, moral obligation, solidarity, attachment to place, and family memory remained integral to her philanthropic practice. Her trajectory thus illustrates how older traditions of Christian and communal charity could be expanded rather than displaced by modern forms of organized philanthropy.

The testament of 1918 represented the fullest expression of this transformation. It moved Elena's benefaction beyond individual assistance and local intervention toward institutional perpetuity. By assigning property to defined purposes and entrusting its administration to established institutions, she sought to extend the effects of her decisions beyond her own lifetime. The lengthy implementation of the testament after her death demonstrates, however, that large-scale philanthropy was not simply an act of generosity. It depended upon legal instruments, property rights, financial management, negotiations with public authorities, and institutional stewardship. Donor intention had to be translated into durable structures capable of surviving the donor.

The Ioan I. Dalles Foundation embodied the culmination of this process. It transformed the memory of an individual and the grief of a family into an institution directed toward an indefinitely renewable public. Its significance therefore exceeded commemoration. The Foundation joined private memory to public culture, making remembrance dependent upon the continuing production of educational and cultural value. Rather than perpetuating Ioan's memory through a static memorial alone, Elena attached his name to an institution whose exhibitions, lectures, concerts, and educational activities could repeatedly renew that memory through public use. Her philanthropic trajectory can thus be understood as a movement from immediate relief to community improvement and ultimately to institutional permanence, without the emergence of later forms eliminating the earlier ones.

Seen within the longer history of the Dalles family, this philanthropic achievement also formed part of a broader process of social incorporation.

Commercial success generated wealth; settlement and property ownership produced rootedness; naturalization and participation in public life reinforced civic belonging; and philanthropy transformed private prosperity into enduring relationships with local communities and national institutions. The history of the Dalles family therefore complicates any rigid opposition between migration and belonging. Originating in the mobile commercial world of the Balkans and eventually becoming deeply embedded in Romanian economic, social, and cultural life, the family demonstrates that integration was not a single event but an intergenerational process involving settlement, legal incorporation, social relationships, participation, reciprocity, and contribution.

This historical experience gives the Dalles story particular resonance today. At a moment when migration has again become one of Europe's most politically contested questions, the history of a family shaped by mobility encourages a longer view of the relationship between migration and belonging. The point is not to turn the Dalles experience into a simple historical argument for a contemporary political position, nor to project present-day categories retrospectively onto nineteenth-century actors. Rather, the case cautions against interpreting origins as permanent social destinies. Those regarded in one generation as foreigners, newcomers, or recently naturalized inhabitants may, in succeeding generations, become deeply woven into the economic, civic, and cultural fabric of the societies in which they have settled.

The contemporary relevance of the Dalles family consequently lies in encouraging us to think about belonging as a historical relationship rather than a fixed condition. Societies are shaped not only by those whose families have inhabited them for generations, but also by those who arrive, settle, participate, establish relationships, invest, and assume responsibilities toward the communities of which they become part. The Dalles experience illustrates a particularly striking progression: migration became settlement, settlement became belonging, and belonging generated forms of civic responsibility whose effects outlived both the original migrants and their descendants.

Elena Dalles's historical significance therefore lies not simply in the monetary scale of her benefactions but in the transformations that her philanthropy made possible. Economic resources generated social and symbolic capital; religious and moral commitments acquired institutional form; bereavement became public memory; private property became social and cultural infrastructure; and the extinction of biological succession produced an alternative form of continuity. The apparent ending of the Dalles family thus became, paradoxically, the foundation of its most enduring presence. Private loss was transformed into public memory, dynastic inheritance into cultural inheritance, and the fortune of a family whose history had begun with migration became part of Romania's social and cultural patrimony. The ultimate significance of Elena Dalles's philanthropy lies precisely in this conversion of private inheritance into public legacy and in the reminder

that belonging is not only inherited: it is also constructed through relationships, responsibility, participation, and contribution.

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