Armand Auguste Caque was indeed the official engraver of Napoleon III and his involvement in this project shows that the medal had the approval of the emperor. The ribbon (described in the princely decree as a “tricolor cord”) is blue, with two yellow and red (to the exterior) strips on each side. Some medals have a ribbon that has two thinner red stripes and one yellow stripe on the edges. The award certificates are extremely rare. They have the arms of the Principality of Romania and were issued by the Ministry of War. The Firemen’s Museum in Bucharest has perhaps the only genuine surviving certificate, awarded to Captain Theodor Ratescu (Figure 5).

The medal was not awarded during Cuza’s reign due to Ottoman opposition. Several sources claim they were given by Carol I in 1866. In reality, they were awarded by the Regency established after the abdication of Cuza, and before the arrival of Carol I. It was the head of the provisional government, Ion Ghica, who took this initiative. On April 9, 1866, the government established a law that awarded the medals, reasoning that “this is the only worthy reward from our country to its sons who have bled for it.”

The ceremony took place on April 23rd in the courtyard of the barracks on Spirii Hill, in the presence of all the units of the Bucharest garrison and the members of the Regency (Lascar Catargiu, Nicolae Golescu and Nicolae Haralambie). In his speech, Colonel Haralambie said: “wear this medal with pride, you are very few who have it. After you will die, leave it to your families. Future generations will find it and it will show them how a Romanian fulfills his duty to the Motherland.”

Fourteen medals were given on April 23, 1866, of which six were to officers with the rest to lower ranks. Only the medals to officers were named: Colonels Adrian, Zaganescu, and Culoglu, Major Papazoglu and Captains Deivos and Ratescu (ranks as of 1866).

The award ceremony was prepared rather hastily. When the medal was intended to be issued, in 1860, the Ministry of War made a long list with all the personnel who took part in the 1848 battle, with hundreds of names. In April 1866 they did not use that list. An appeal was published in the Official Bulletin for about two weeks before the ceremony, asking all veterans of the battle to come at the Spirii Hill barracks on April 23 to receive their medals. As a result, mostly officers were present as many of the lower ranks do not read the newspapers.

On September 8, 1878, Carol I signed a decree granting all veterans from the 1848 battle the right to wear the Medal of Military Virtue. When the Firemen’s Statue was erected on Spirii Hill on September 13, 1901 (this monument survives in front of the Marriott Hotel in Bucharest), 17 veterans were still alive and were invited as guests of honor.

The Medal for Loyalty and Courage (1864/1877/1903)

The Medal for Loyalty and Courage is a round silver medal with a diameter of about 33mm and a weight of 17-18g. The obverse (Figure 6) shows the bust of Cuza, facing to the right, surrounded by the text ALESSANDRU ION I 1864, while the reverse (Figure 7) contains the text DEVOTAMENTU SI CURAGIU” (loyalty and courage) surrounded by a laurel wreath. The obverse has the initials of the engraver under the bust (C. T. or C. F.), most likely the same Armand Auguste Caque. The medal was attached to the ribbon by a laurel wreath on which there are marks of the manufacturer. The color of the ribbon was half red (the right side) and half yellow.
It appears this medal was meant to reward civilians who took part in rescue operations at the end of May 1864, when the Dambovita River flooded the capital and the water reached a height of up to two meters in the area near Brosteni, Amtim, Izvor and other neighborhoods bordering the river. It was never established officially but Cuza gave it to a small number of people as a personal award. One recipient (who also got Cuza’s Medal of Military Virtue) was Colonel Solomon, according to C. Istrati. Istrati suspected there was also a bronze striking of the medal but only silver ones are known today.

The story of these medal does not end in 1864. On May 26, 1877 at the start of the Romanian War of Independence, Carol I awarded by decree 14 Medals of Loyalty and Courage (of which eight were described as golden class and six as silver class) to soldiers for their bravery during the Ottoman bombardment of the Romanian town of Calafat in the first action of the war on April 26, 1877. These were the first awards of the War of Independence, and Carol I curiously bestowed a medal that did not exist officially instead of the Medal of Military Virtue that was legal since 1872.

The explanation for this can be found in a report of General Alexandru Cernat, the Minister of War, who indicated that the statute of the Medal of Military Virtue included a complex procedure that was very difficult to honor during wartime. The medal could be awarded for bravery, but it entailed a long process requiring the meeting of a special commission and much paperwork. To simplify the procedure, a decree published in the Official Bulletin on May 28, 1877 stated that the Medal of Military Virtue could be awarded during wartime by the prince for those acts of bravery cited in a daily order of the army. Probably 14 Medals for Loyalty and Courage were awarded in 1877 as a temporary solution until the statute problem was solved. We can assume that Carol wanted to re-establish Cuza’s medal but later saw no need for it due to the change in the statute of a similar award that already existed. No original example of the 1877 variant of the medal is known, but its existence cannot be excluded.

In 1903, Carol I officially established a Medal for Loyalty and Courage (Figures 8 and 9) (he eventually continued all the projects of Cuza). The model was similar to the original, it had three classes and was intended as a bravery award for policemen. The ribbon had a red stripe in the middle and two blue ones on the sides. Few policemen were given this medal, and it is one of the rare awards from Carol’s long reign.

This silver medal is very similar to the one for Loyalty and Courage. Only the text on the reverse is different VIRTUTEA / MILITARA (Military Virtue) and the attachment to the ribbon is made through a princely crown, later copied by the royal awards of Carol I. The color of the ribbon is unknown but if it was retained by Carol’s version then it must have been red with thin blue strips on each side. It was awarded unofficially, in low numbers, to soldiers who took part in the flood relief efforts in 1864.

Carol I established the medal in 1872, adding his portrait on the obverse (Figures 10 and 11). It was the highest award for bravery during the War of Independence and remained as such for lower ranks (officers were awarded the Order of Michael the Brave instead) during both world wars. It survives to this day as both an order and a medal and is one of the most prestigious distinctions of modern Romania.
The Iron Cross

Very little is known about this award. A medal in the shape of an iron cross dating from Cuza’s reign is mentioned for the first time by numismat C. Istrati in 1914, who wrote that he got it from its producer, jeweler Mauriciu Fain in Bucharest (who is also a possible manufacturer of Cuza’s Order of the Union). Istrati described it as having the same shape as the later Crossing of the Danube Cross, with a size of 4.86 cm (height) and 4.60 cm (width) and weighing 5.81 grams. The central medallion has an Orthodox cross on one side (Figure 12) and the monogram AI on the other (Figure 13). Istrati attributes the monogram to Cuza and claims it is identical to the one found on a silver cigarette case from his reign, offered by the prince as a gift to one of his friends. However, the monogram on the cross is different from the one found on the Order of the Union.

The design suggests it was meant as an award for the clergy.

One of these crosses is held by the Military Museum in Bucharest and was described in an article published in 2010. The authors state that the old scripts of the museum claimed the cross dated from the time of the Romanian War of Independence (1877-1878) and attributed the monogram to Czar Alexander I of Russia.

A very similar cross was sold in a 2010 auction of the German auction house Kunker. The Kunker version is made of bronze and has an almost identical monogram, except that the Orthodox symbol is replaced by the heraldic lion of Bulgaria (Figures 14 and 15). Orthodox crosses are engraved on all four arms of this medal. The auction house attributed the medal to Alexander of Battenberg, the first prince of modern Bulgaria (1879-1886). The cross can’t be found in any catalogue of Bulgarian medals and the monogram does not match any of Battenberg’s.

The little available information doesn’t allow any conclusion on the origin of this cross. It can be an obscure