

## THE ISSUE OF THE LATIN AND DACIAN ORIGINS OF THE LANGUAGE AT THE DAWN OF ROMANIAN CULTURE. THE EMERGENT FORMS OF ROMANIAN LITERATURE

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**Abstract:** *This paper deals with a topic as complex as it is interesting and relevant. Analyzing the issues of Latinity and Dacism as sources of the Romanian language, providing an overview of the various theories addressing the Romanian ethnogenesis and defining several Romanian historiographical works as emerging forms of Romanian literature, the article provides a general perspective on the dawning of Romanian culture, its sources and specificities. The Romanian language and culture are described in a scientific way, in accordance with historical truth.*

**Keywords:** *Latinity and Dacianism; ethnogenesis; chronicles; religious writing; migrationist theory*

### 1. THE CHRONICLERS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE "TRANSYLVANIAN SCHOOL" ON THE LATIN VERSUS DACIAN DILEMMA

In the introduction [*Predoslavia*] to *Letopiseşul Ţării Moldovei* [The Chronicle of the Moldavian Country], chronicler Grigore Ureche states that the Romanian language is a neo-Latin language, showing that many of our words come "From the Romans, who are Latin", since "we call « pâine » what they call « panis »; « carne » what they call « caro »; « găina », what they call « galina »" (Ureche, 1958:67)<sup>1</sup>. All the later efforts of humanists were designed to follow in the same line and the idea was further developed by several generations of scholars. The issue of the Romanian ethnogenesis and of the Latin origins of the Romanian language vastly preoccupied Miron Costin, Constantin Cantacuzino, Dimitrie Cantemir, and towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the main figures associated with the "Transylvanian School" (in Romanian, "Şcoala Ardeleană") – a cultural movement and school of thought, having authored a series of history books, grammars, and dictionaries – reinforced these early ideas concerning the origins of Romanians and their continuity of settlement in

Dacia. Petru Maior, the most scientific mind among the representative figures of the School, formulated the pertinent conclusion that the native language developed on the basic patterns of popular Latin. He acknowledged the influence of Slavic on the Romanian language, but also demonstrated that it hadn't changed its grammatical structure. Petru Maior envisaged the further elaboration of orthographic norms required by the necessary switch to the Latin alphabet and compared the vernacular with other romance languages, demonstrating that it hadn't been altered significantly. A more radical perspective was articulated by Samuil Micu Klein, calling for the purification of the Romanian language of non-Latin elements and the artificial introduction of the ablative case. However, he justifiably advocated the replacement of the Cyrillic alphabet with Latin lettering and co-authored, in 1780, a grammar called *Elementa linguae daco-romanae sive valachicae* with Gheorghe Şincai. In the context of this high-spirited and often passionate cultural background, a few prominent theories came into shape.

### 2. THEORIES ON THE EMERGENCE OF THE ROMANIAN PEOPLE AND LANGUAGE

There are three main theories concerning the geographic space in which the Romanian ethnogenesis took place, referring to the actual

<sup>1</sup> Original fragment: „De la râmleni, ce le zicem latini, pâine, ei zic panis; carne, ei zic caro; găina, ei zic galina.” Our translation.

territories having harbored the Romanian people and language during the first stages of their formation.

**2.1. The North-Danubian theory.** Advocates : Dimitrie Cantemir, Petru Maior, Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu. The Romanian people and the Romanian language came into being in the territories on the left shore of the Danube. However, this theory does not account for the formation of the South-Danubian dialects.

**2.2. The Romanian ethnogenesis occurred simultaneously on the Northern and Southern shores of the Danube.** Advocates: A. D. Xenopol, Nicolae Iorga, Sextil Pușcariu, A Rosetti. The Northern Dacian-Romanian elements have been of a greater importance.

**2.3. The migrationist theory.** Advocates: Franz J Sulzer, Robert Roesler, J. C. Engel. The Romanian people was born on the southern shores of the Danube, in a territory somewhere between Bulgaria and Albania, from where it migrated to Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. According to this theory, the Romanians arrived after the Hungarians and Saxons. This theory distorts and mystifies historical truth.

### 3. EMERGENT ROMANIAN LITERARY TEXTS

**3.1. The Relevance of Ureche, Costin and Neculce's chronicles.** Apart from the said approaches concerning the "Latin versus Dacian" dilemma, the emerging indigenous culture was mostly composed of historiographical literature. *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei* [The Chronicle of the Moldavian Country] is a first turning point in relation to the previous chronicles written in Slavonic.

Concision is deemed virtues narrationis, the most important characteristic of the historiographical style. The text is mainly defined by its moralizing intent. "Involuntary expressiveness" (Negrici, 2017) thus becomes a major feature of the narrative discourse, and the style relates closely to the spoken tradition. The chroniclers approach the issue of the Latin lexical fund of the language, they discuss historical topics, describe mentalities, and therefore become a source of inspiration for the Romanian "Forty-Eighters" – a significant group of 19th century unionist literati.

Grigore Ureche presents a dramatized version of history, as seen from a moral, Christian perspective. The chronicler uses irony, antitheses, sayings, direct speech. Ureche's style is not

scientific, as the matters considered are "brought to life" by evocative narrations and descriptions. Alexandru Piru notes that as a storyteller, Grigore Ureche avoids rhetoric ornamentation, is severe in style and excels at moral portraying, as he is able to sketch a portrait or a wider scene in a few simple, essential lines, by employing a method which is very similar to the technique of engraving (Piru, 1962; 1970). Sometimes, the characters linger in the reader's memory due to the famous catchphrases attributed to them by the chronicler (e.g., Alexandru Lăpușneanu). Pompiliu Constantinescu notices that Grigore Ureche spotlights heroic elements in a way that resembles Titus Livius' (Constantinescu, 1928-1938/ 1989). When he analyzes Stephen III of Moldavia's eulogy, Eugen Negrici details the impact of Latin historians on Ureche's writing, consisting of the overall presence of moral considerations, the chronicler's solemn remarks and the text's well-balanced organization, as well as of the factual tension of determinations (Negrici, 2017). Nicolae Manolescu (1990) considers that Grigore Ureche's sentences reflect the difficulties generated by the switch from the oral to the written culture, a polarization which gives way to anacolutha, to cumbersome syntactic constructions and word-order discontinuities.

Miron Costin is "our first war correspondent". His texts are memoirist in character. In this case, the chronicler mainly provides an account of the "workings of the world" ("viița lumii"), because his purpose is to introduce the Romanian culture to "this type of written material called lyrics" [„acest feliu de scrisoare, care se cheamă stihuri"] and hence comes to articulate a treaty on prosody. Eugen Negrici writes that in contrast to Grigore Ureche, who frequently lacked historical data and had to research different aspects, Miron Costin, on the contrary, felt the need to select the most important information in an immense inventory of terrible events, political mutations, and fascinating historical figures (Negrici, 2016:47, 123-124). Both Iorga and Călinescu mention the fact that for its last part, Costin's chronicle becomes a true novel, in the sense that fantasy and the author's emotional or personal inputs are dominant (Iorga, 1969; Călinescu, 2003).

Ion Neculce transcribes 42 legends which are strongly impregnated with the spiritus loci (the anima, the spirit of the place). The chronicler's bet is on the sensational dimension of events. His texts are malicious, vindictive pamphlets. George Călinescu writes, in reference to Neculce's work, that "As you read Neculce's chronicle, a name

pops into your mind: Creangă<sup>2</sup> (Călinescu 2003), that is to say, with Neculce, there's a mixture of peasant wisdom and townsmen's culture. Valeriu Cristea similarly states that Ion Neculce is the scholar who guided the first steps of cult literature away from folklore (Cristea, 1974:176). Ergo, the chronicler managed to enter the Romanian history of literature following the path of legend and folk history. Neculce mostly relied on folk narratives, from which he collected stories, rumors, proverbs, superstitions. Ștefan Ciobanu demonstrates that Neculce is an extremely skilled portrayer, as the characters he builds are not static, but described in full motion and evolution (Ciobanu, 1989:290-300). The personalities of rulers particularly shift in spectacular ways.

Dimitrie Cantemir was uncommonly erudite. The style of his Hieroglyphic History [Istoria ieroglifică] is allusive, ironic, sometimes gnomic, some other times philosophical. Nicolae Manolescu thinks that "Cantemir's work is both naive and sophisticated, elementary and refined"<sup>3</sup> (Manolescu, 1990:77.). Elvira Sorohan notes that the Sensus allegoricus (allegorical meaning) is grounded with Cantemir on the use of different morally significant masks. Thus, the masks do not conceal personalities, but rather reveal typologies (Sohoran, 1978:37, 105, 109, 111; 1998:294).

**3.2. The religious dimension of human existence (15th to 18th centuries).** The emergence and development of the Romanian culture was directly connected to the evolution of religious ideas. In the Romanian principalities, like everywhere else, the medieval man was religious. His existence was guided by faith and the hope of salvation. The Middle Ages man had a more acute perception of the fleetingness and instability of human life, of ethical and religious values. Predominantly religious, the medieval culture hence produced religious texts and was strongly influenced by religious elements. Men lived their lives according to religious principles, but at the same time held onto certain superstitions.

All these observations are also present in Miron Costin's philosophical poem *Viața lumii* [The Workings of the World]. Written between 1671 and 1673, in verses of 13 to 14 syllables and comprising 130 lyrics written in Cyrillic lettering, it was later published by Bogdan Petriceicu

Hașdeu in Latin characters. The poem contains pessimistic reflections on the fate of man and the universe, their evanescent, precarious and unpredictable essence, as well as optimistic musings concerning man's ability to escape fate by deed and thought. The sources having inspired Costin are David's Book of Psalms and The Ecclesiastes, while the theme might have been provided by Quintus Curtius. Also, there are distinct elements in the poem which can be traced back to folk funeral laments, to proverbs or regional aphorisms. The composition is structured in four main parts: there is an introduction to the topic, an argumentation, a lamentation (an *ubi sunt* sequence very similar to one of François Villon's), and an epilogue.

Another important scholar of the period is the Moldavian Metropolitan Dosoftei. Striving to find the best Romanian equivalences for the original biblical texts, he translates David's psalms into Romanian. His purpose is primarily pragmatic, ecclesiastic, but the translator is also preoccupied with the rendition of prosody and versification, with the quality of the writing style. The remarkable delicacy, vigor, musicality, expressivity, and solemnity of the verses, as well as their overall sententious aspect, are evident. Poetic visions are terrifying. The religious poet prefers morally infused verse, which thereupon become true lyric confessions. Dosoftei is a bold experimenter and a virtuoso of rare rhymes. The author of *Psaltirea pre versuri tocmită* [The Versified Psalter] often follows an autochthonous folkloric pattern, as well as the Polish model provided by Kochanowski.

Another Metropolitan of vast erudition was Antim Ivireanul [Antim from Iveria], the Metropolitan of Bucharest. A pragmatic personality, he printed numerous books for priests, an illustrated chronograph, etc. His most important work is *Didahiile* [The Teachings]. In these "teachings", the author proves his awareness regarding the conventional nature of the language. He addresses his listeners directly, capturing their interest by means of special metaphors: "the toil of teaching", "the bait of words"<sup>4</sup> (Ivireanul, 2011). Word-order is sometimes overstrung in his sentences; Greek expressions are used as a means of persuasion. A religious event or character is always spotlighted in the sermons in such a way as to be placed in the right light for moral parables to spring out of the design. Direct contact with the

<sup>2</sup> Original fragment: " Când citești cronică lui Neculce, un nume îți năvălește în minte: Creangă." Our translation.

<sup>3</sup> Original fragment: "opera lui Cantemir este naivă și sofisticată, elementară și rafinată." Our translation.

<sup>4</sup> Original fragments: „mreață a învățaturii”, „undita cuvintelor”. Our translation.

audience is achieved through portraying pamphlets and panegyrics. Antim Ivireanul is not a mediocre theologian or compiler. He is a true scholar able to process his sources, trying to make his speech as accessible to the public as possible.

Like all medieval scholars, Antim Ivireanul is a man of the church. His cultural efforts as a typographer, engraver and painter are all impacted on by the spirit of the Middle Ages. At this period, any work of art is meant, first of all, to fulfill a religious purpose. Extremely knowledgeable about the Bible, Antim Ivireanul is an ecclesiastical orator able to master all the keys of his instrument: solemnity, familiarity, its parabolic, poetic and messianic character.

Vaarlam, the author of *Cazania* [The Sermon] (1643), also called The Romanian Book of Learning, also uses a scholarly style in his writings. *Cazania* is defined by its simplicity and its concise, commonplace language. Compiling a series of sermons, the book illustrates the same type of literary rhetoric. Some episodes involving saints are narrated, so as to reach the listener's heart quickly. Legends and fairy tales of ethical and religious significance are also included, in this case following the patterns of folk stories.

Deeply involved in various fields of life and knowledge (social, legal, political), the Church had a significant impact on education in the Middle Ages (as monasteries and convents often housed schools), but especially on culture: most cultural activities were hosted by monasteries, including the transcription and printing of books of worship or teachings.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

In sum, the concerted effort to demonstrate the Latin character of the Romanian language, the emergence of indigenous literature as a development of historiographical writings, the first attempts at expressiveness and the consolidation of certain classical rhetoric practices in religious texts were the dawn of Romanian culture and spirituality and found scriptural forms and techniques that

made it possible for these early writings to be preserved in time.

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