

The Problem of Evil in Early Modern Romanian Literature. Antim Ivireanul, Miron Costin and Ion Neculce

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Abstract

The thesis reconstructs the thought of three key figures in early modern Romanian culture: Antim Ivireanul, Miron Costin and Ion Neculce. The first was metropolitan of Walachia at the beginning of the 18th C. and left a series of sermons- Didahii, the next two were chroniclers of the history of Moldova in an interval which spans roughly from 1650 to 1750. The main thread of analysis concerns their definition of evil, politics, disobedience and historical experience.

The question is whether this elite shared the radical problem of questioning political evil and discerned between right and wrong in the affairs of temporal rule. This would mean to investigate their moral-political projects and to trace any signs of introducing the idea of political responsibility, of questioning the authorities concerning their willingness to establish a civilized, free and prosperous rule, of regarding history as a moral category and as something which involves people as responsible agents. The conclusion aims at establishing the intellectual roots of the attitude towards totalitarian experience of the 20th century.

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Introduction

My thesis reconstructs the thought of three key figures in early modern Romanian culture: Antim Ivireanul, Miron Costin and Ion Neculce. The first was metropolitan of Walachia at the beginning of the 18th C. and left a series of sermons- *Didahii*, the next two were chroniclers of the history of Moldova in an interval which spans roughly from 1650 to 1750. The main thread of analysis concerns the problem of evil- namely how they defined evil and which were the solutions given to it.

The necessity of this inquiry becomes visible when put into longer time frame and in the context of Romanian history. Totalitarianism has brought the problem of political evil to the fore-front of reflection. With it comes the idea of responsibility, of how to judge the moral burden on the shoulders of each factor involved. A long duree analysis of the attitude of Romanian society towards evil is timely for the fact that it is worthy response to the question raised by so many years of passivity under totalitarian rule. A quick answer would be that the basic values which made possible the distinction between good and evil were not firmly established. A second answer, and a possible counter-reaction to the claim that virtually every culture has some sort of reaction to evils such as murder, is that the political culture of fighting for a common good, of distinguishing between private and public interest, of regarding evil done to your neighbor as a threat to everybody's freedom and something which should not be tolerated by the community- all of these were again not firmly established. Ever since the earthquake in

Lisbon in 1755, a basic distinction was developed in Western thought: natural and moral evil.¹ Moral evil was from now on a category by which people designated their own responsibility for historical events. Modernity, therefore, with the new concepts of civil society and government accountable in front of its subjects, also introduces the crucial idea of political responsibility. Karl Jaspers has summarized almost completely the main problem of tyranny in his 1946 text *The Question of German Guilt* by naming four types of guilt: criminal, political, moral and metaphysical.² Political and moral guilt refer first to the whole bureaucratic system; political, however, may also refer to the responsibility of the people as citizens who always have the power to choose their own government. Lastly, metaphysical guilt is the passivity against the injustice done against the others.

These fine nuances are among the best accounts and prescriptions on judging guilt under tyranny, although Hannah Arendt was skeptical about the idea of collective guilt, saying that this would simply mean that there is no individual guilt.³ But to reject the idea of collective German guilt was exactly why Jaspers made these distinctions. Still, justice, by looking for the individual guilt, is different from historical and moral assessment and both the concept of “metaphysical” guilt and the rendering of existence and history as morally relevant so specific for Christianity (in fact for all three great monotheisms) makes this type of inquiry timely and relevant for any historical hypostases of the European context.

¹ Cf., Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy*, (Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 4

² In Romanian translation: Karl Jaspers, *Texte filosofice*, Prefață: Dumitru Ghișe, George Purdea, Selecția textelor: Bruno Wurtz, George Purdea, Traducere din limba germană și note: George Purdea, Controlul traducerii: Vasile Dem. Zamfirescu, (București: Editura Politică, 1986), p. 37

³ “Justice, but not mercy, is a matter of judgment, and about nothing does public opinion everywhere seem to be in happier agreement than that no one has the right to judge somebody else. What public opinion permits us to judge and even to condemn are trends, or whole groups of people- the larger the better- in short, something so general that distinctions can no longer be made, names no longer be named.” Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, (New York: Penguin Classics, 1992 (1962), p. 296

In Romania, a borderland of the civilized world, modernity in the form of the liberal order did not have the premises nor the time to be fully integrated. The premises lacked- first, simply because of geographical position, second, because modernity itself is not a necessary process- the further one gets from its origins- the North-Atlantic and Western European regions- the more it becomes obvious that only increased foreign influence and voluntaristic measures are effective. Time itself was also a problem, as the late beginning of modernization in the second half of the 19th century meant a reform from above, but only until 1947, when Communism began its process of total destruction of the community as political and cultural entity. The consequence of this is that the idea of political responsibility was on the agenda of only a small minority.

But it might be replied that, precisely because this comes up so late in public discourse, the moral-political problem could not be the present in early modern Romanian literature. This assertion can be true only under the following circumstance: that liberal, contractual political theory is indeed an absolute novelty of modernity. This would mean that political responsibility is historically circumscribed, that it is the product of a contingency, that its very context makes its actuality hardly possible in other times and places.

My theory is that what changes in modernity are the language and the specific *praxis*, while the premises were already sown in Classical and Christian culture. For the ancient Greeks, the very humanity of a man rested on whether he had the will and capacity to engage in public action, for a common good, beyond the needs of his household. As Hannah Arendt, in the *Human Condition*, would put it, “to live an entirely private life means above all to be deprived of things essential to a truly human life: to be deprived of the reality that comes from being seen and heard by others, to be deprived of an "objective" relationship with them that comes from

being related to and separated from them through the intermediary of a common world of things, to be deprived of the possibility of achieving something more permanent than life itself.”⁴ Christianity comes with a specific anthropology in which every human is equal in virtue of its creation in the figure and likeness of God. Second, its specific ethics rests on the consequences of the first, namely recognizing the other as equal; but to this it adds the absolute necessity of loving the other, benefiting from the example and actual presence-in the Eucharist- of Jesus Christ, the incarnated Son of God. “God is love and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him.” (*1 Jn. 4:16*)⁵ and “whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (*Mat. 18:18*). Therefore, man’s mission becomes the exercise of love towards the other on earth. It cannot be sufficiently emphasized how crucial and revolutionary this task is- and this for the fact that worldly existence becomes morally relevant. To all this, St. Augustine would add the radical distinction between an ephemeral city of man and futile worldly ambitions and a city of God composed by those who are reborn in Christ and partially anticipated by the body of the Church.

In this way, Heaven, an invisible realm, cannot be created by a polity, by visible material and institutional infrastructures, but only by the inner reality of the reborn soul. What is crucial here is that from now on the sacralization of politics- and therefore the justification of power and its

⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, second edition, Introduction by Margaret Canovan, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998 (1958), p. 58

⁵ “ ‘God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him’ (*1 Jn 4:16*). These words from the *First Letter of John* express with remarkable clarity the heart of the Christian faith: the Christian image of God and the resulting image of mankind and its destiny. In the same verse, Saint John also offers a kind of summary of the Christian life: “We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us”. “Encyclical letter *DEUS CARITAS EST* of the supreme pontiff **Benedict XVI** to the bishops, priests and deacons men and women religious and all the lay faithful on Christian love.”, 25 december 2005, available from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html, accessed on 4 June 2009.

abuses as being the result of divine will- will not be possible and the basis for the permanent skepticism regarding the legitimacy of rulers will be laid.

As such, modernity begins in a culture in which the classical model of the polity is still remembered, while Christian anthropology, the ethics of sacrifice and the desacralization of politics are already established- not always as dominant models, but surely as basic elements which could always be called upon in a certain context. Concepts such as civil society, social contract, accountability of rulers, political responsibility, freedom and universal rights are now easily seen as a result of change of terminology and *praxis* in political theory. It is also clear why the problem of responsibility can be raised even in early modern Romania: because the region was, at least in theory, thoroughly Christian. So, again in theory, the problem of political evil and how to deal with it, has all the premises of being present for the authors of that time. And the second reason for the relevance of the problem is the possibility of tracing back the mentality patterns of totalitarian experience to that period and to see how much of it was made possible by the attitudes of the 17th-18th centuries.

The theoretical approach to the body of sources will therefore be established by some key questions: what is evil for these authors? What is politics? What is disobedience? How should a man deal with negative historical experience? With these question in mind, I will argue that, for Romanian high culture of that time the relationship between the individual and history was problematic and tended rather for evasion than for ethical engagement, while the relationship between man and God was, in contrast, based on traditional Christian tenets with the crucial distinction that worldly authority tended to be interpreted as having a divine origin. No book has dealt explicitly with how these authors viewed these issues. Nicolae Manolescu (1990) has convincing literary analyses on Miron Costin and Ion Neculce. He deconstructs the theory of

heavy baroque influence on early modern Romanian literature, supported especially by George Ivascu (1972), and remarks Miron Costin's reliance on traditional classical, Christian and medieval motifs of the vanities of the world and the on stating the necessity of living a God-fearing existence. For Ion Neculce, he highlights his lack of narrative grandeur and moral discourse. Ioana Em. Petrescu(1981), however is convinced by the idea of baroque influence in Miron Costin's work, stating that the cosmological pessimism of the *Life of the world* is synonymous with the sensibility of the Baroque age, one which responded to the revolutionary Newtonian cosmological model which had shattered the ancient belief in the *Axis Mundi*. In the end she accurately portrays the humanist response of Miron Costin to this pessimism, one which regarded wisdom, moral behavior, faith and written culture as the key instruments of overcoming mortality.

Eugen Negrici (1972, 2004) is probably the best observer of the main patterns of Antim's thought, investigating everything from stylistic features to the useful contextualizations of his main theological and philosophical references. Gabriel Strempel (1972) is also a careful researcher into Antim's personal background and the major biblical and patristic texts which had inspired him. Negrici observes quite accurately that in the end, with all their apparent force, his critiques are always vague regarding temporal rule, while Strempel, in contrast, believes that he was a worthy adversary of the Ottomans and a critical voice towards internal affairs, especially on social disparities. Dan Horia Mazilu (1997) also has some general frameworks on these authors, with a balanced analysis of medieval, humanist and baroque influences

For the theoretical framework regarding typology and figural approach, techniques used by Antim is his attempt to legitimate certain pieces of advice or contemporary situations, Erich

Auerbach (1946) and Paul Evdokimov (1989) provide classic explorations into the figural sensibility and the theological background of Orthodox icons, respectively.

However the main problem is only occasionally touched upon, while syntheses encompassing more than author and comprising an investigation into the political ideas of medieval and early modern Romanian are lacking. Daniel Barbu's study in medieval Romanian culture (2004) - which comes not by chance in an academic career also focused with the post communist legacy in Romania-, aims at the portrayal of the idea of individual responsibility in Romanian Orthodoxy and comes at the surprise conclusion that, until the 19th century, there was only the idea of collective, irrespective of the deeds, salvation for the community of Eastern rite believers. To his theoretical opening, one can add the article written by Dr. Christos Terezis and Eugenia Tzouramani regarding Maximus the Confessor's response to Origen's theory of a God which is consubstantial with his own imperfect Creation and of the final universal restoring of the initial divine harmony for all creatures. Besides him there are little systematic, long-duree, approaches to the moral-political problem of Romanian society.⁶

The method is thus to classify the main ideas of their writings according to the questions mentioned above, while using secondary literature for the historical, theological and literary contexts in order to make better use of the personal interpretation; situating these authors into different historical and intellectual contexts is useful in order to better draw the picture of their world-view and of the internal and external influences on their ideas.

The first chapter will deal with Antim Ivireanul's conception of political evil, with the way he views sin, disobedience and the political, internal and external, actors of his day. The second

⁶ By contrast, there are substantially more studies on the modernization of Romania, most of them having in common the attempt to explain totalitarian experience by tracing back the paradoxes and structural problems of modernization.

chapter is about Miron Costin's antiheroic convictions, his skepticism, heavily inspired by the Ecclesiastes, concerning worldly ambitions and his project, partly derived from traditional Christian ethics and partly derived from Humanism's commitment of using the written word to preserve values and to teach the future readers. The third chapter is about Ion Neculce's curious lack of moral commitment- with the exception of his call for obedience towards the authorities- and his attitude of passive witness to the problems of his day.

Chapter 1: Antim Ivireanul and the problem of political evil

There has been substantial research in Romania on Antim Ivireanul and almost none in other countries.⁷ In the last 40 years, efforts have been made to restore his memory and deeds in two not altogether different contexts: the revitalization of Romanian legacy after the systematic campaign of Communization of the 1950's and the intention of the Romanian Orthodox Church to preserve or restore its gallery of figures and inspiring works. In literary studies, Eugen Negrici and Dan Horia Mazilu provided serious analyses of the style and the intellectual references used by Antim Ivireanul in his religious discourses; In history, Gabriel Ștrempel edited his complete works and did some useful contextual research; Orthodox theologians have gradually rediscovered his contribution and contributed, year by year, in an act which they saw as justice which finally culminated in the proclamation of his sanctitude in 1992. While the monographs cannot, by their nature, encompass a problematization of a certain aspect of an author's thought, most of the other works tend to do a work of restoration, of signaling the value of his contribution; an investigation of this type, e.g. the idea of evil, is seldom attempted and analytic approach is scarcely encountered.

In this chapter I will analyze the concept of evil in his *Didahii* ("Sermons") while referring to his personal, intellectual and historical background; it will be clear that this attempt implies an exploration into this understanding of basic categories of reflection in the context of Christian

⁷ Monographs or different thematic investigations have been made in these works in Romanian: Dan Horia Mazilu, *Introduction to the work of Antim Ivireanul* (București: Minerva, 1999); Eugen Negrici, *Antim. Logos and personality* (București: Minerva, 1971); Gabriel Ștrempel, *Antim Ivireanul* (București: Editura Academiei Române, 1997); Fanny Djindjhasvili, *Antim Ivireanul, Humanist Intellectual* (Iași: Junimea, 1982).

Europe: anthropology, Christology, theodicy, understanding of sin and the relation between religion and politics. My hypothesis is that Antim elaborates on the Byzantine model of the sanctification of world's structures, preaching that disobedience is a grave sin, while his theology and anthropology responds to the needs of an audience which tolerated the harshest critique of sins with the condition that this critique did not touch on the social and political structure.

Historical context

Antim Ivireanul was born in Georgia, c. 1650. Taken prisoner in his youth by the Ottomans, he spends the next years in Constantinople, where he learned the arts of drawing, sculpture, printing, engraving; Greek, Arabic, Turkish. He was brought around the year 1690 in Walachia by the ruler Constantin Brâncoveanu, the one who was to become in collective memory a patron of arts and culture and martyr confessor of the Christian faith; his policy was meant to attract scholars from the Ottoman Empire (mostly Greeks) and the West (mostly from Italy; the most notable being the secretary Anton Maria del Chiaro who also wrote a chronicle of his journey, *Istoria della Moderne Rivoluzioni della Valachia*, Venice, 1718); Antim (originally called Andrei) was therefore a part of this policy. From the start, it has to be said that he didn't arrive in Paradise. Walachia and Moldova had been since 1476 and 1512, respectively autonomous principalities under Ottoman sovereignty. After some initial brave resistance, the might of the Empire took its toll; with the Black Sea ports captured, the trading routes from Leipsig and Lviv were cut off, therefore strangling the small economy of the Romanian territories. Commercial

monopoly was instituted⁸, and heavy taxation started to be collected by the Ottomans in exchange for the illusion of the internal autonomy; unlike the other European provinces of the Ottoman Empire, where the local elite was exterminated after the loss of independence, the Romanian aristocracy remained more or less in power and able to shift the balance in one direction or the other. A certain type of cohabitation developed: Petre Panaitescu demonstrated very well (*Romanian Interpretations: Studies on Economic and Social History*, Bucharest, Universul, 1947) that the Ottomans weren't interested in transforming these regions into ordinary provinces because their strategic importance was secondary; their road lead through Serbia into the heart of Central Europe and there was no need of a heavy military presence and expensive administration in Romanian territories; Besides that, it appeared that the lack of resistance which gradually engulfed the high society in Walachia and Moldova was in favor of a lax regime of autonomy, which permitted the collection of taxes without too much expense for army and administration. The *boyars* (aristocrats) were content with this type of domination as long as their physical existence was not in peril. Only in the latter case did they mobilize.

The situation quickly degraded. Already towards the end of the 16th century, most likely after the lost battle of Lepanto by the Ottoman Empire, it became apparent that a large offensive against Europe was not possible. They replied by increasing the pressure on the provinces and autonomous regions with increased financial burdens⁹. In Romania (as a geographic entity), they also frequently intervened in the local affairs, encouraging or simply changing the local rulers

⁸ Peter F. Sugar, *Southeastern Europe under Ottoman Rule, 1354-1804*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977), p. 126

⁹ Romanian historian A.D. Xenopol says that, from approximately 600 000-800 000 ducats of revenue in the 17th century, two thirds went to Constantinople. Cf. Peter F. Sugar, *Southeastern Europe under Ottoman Rule, 1354-1804*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977), p. 123 There is also some valuable statistical data in Sugar's work: the regular tax increased, in Walachia from 3000 ducats in 1417 to 130 000 in 1700 and 42000 in Moldova. But the *peskes*, the total amount of bribes to the sultan and different Ottoman officials even amounted to 650 000 between 1581 and 1590.

themselves. The candidate would usually pay at Constantinople, secure the exile or execution of his enemy and then try to keep his throne by paying diverse taxes or bribes, which were gradually becoming the main source of power and wealth in the Ottoman empire. The winner would try in vain to subject the peasant population to serfdom and heavy labor (as no other source of income was available); his ruling period- and usually life expectancy after winning the throne- did not exceed three years.¹⁰ Bribes were paid not only to the sultans; but to the wives of the sultans and the viziers (rulers of provinces) as well. Time and again, in the context of threat or just for exploitation, the Turks raided the principalities, killing, burning and enslaving; Many wars were fought on these territories; also the Tatars, Poles, Austrians, Russians, Cossacks paid some “visits”. Life was short and painful: serfdom, drought, famine, plague (probably one of the last places in Europe to have a plague epidemic, around the beginning of the 19th century), cholera, and wars; the villages could hardly be called like that- they were more like temporary habitations in a permanent cycle of moving and settling in an effort to escape taxation and serfdom; there was no rich peasantry or small nobility because property was a luxury of the great nobility, which in turn had to exploit their subjects for political favors or for mere survival as a ruling class. The uprising organized by Mihai Viteazul (“the Brave”) in 1595 came as a logical consequence in the context of an almost intolerable situation¹¹; killed in 1601, he would be virtually the only case of radical opposition after the subjugation which had occurred decades earlier; Still, the Ottomans would inherit a long-term distrust of Romanian rulers.

A hundred years later, the situation was unchanged; after the desperate siege of Vienna, the Ottomans would only fight defensive wars. In Walachia and Moldova, the power of the

¹⁰ Peter F. Sugar, *op. cit.*, p. 117

¹¹ “Istanbul was already sinking into a morass of corruption.”, *Ibid.*, p. 119

aristocracy increased and fiscal burdens were even higher.¹² The current ruler, Constantin Brancoveanu is concerned with the diplomatic balance between Ottomans, Russians and Habsburgs; most of the revenue was used for cultural initiatives, church-building, affirmation of Romanian language and culture. Antim Ivireanul knows how to fit into this context: external pressure and protestant “danger” in Transilvania makes him and the ruler aware of the need to promote Orthodoxy in the vernacular language. At the monastery of Snagov, near Bucharest, several books would be printed in Romanian, Greek, Slavonic. In 1705 he is appointed bishop of Valcea (west of Bucharest, south of the Carpathian mountains), where he continues his work of printing and managing the welfare of the local church. His efforts attract the attention and sympathy of several parts of the elite and, in 1708, with the approval of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, he was elected Metropolitan of Ungrovlahia. In this context, his sermons, *Didahii*, would be formulated in speech.

Discovered in the 19th century, it soon turned out that they were never intended to be published. They are rather the notes taken and memorized in order to be transmitted in the Church at certain occasions. Literary analysis shows that, by the tone, style and grammatical characteristics used, they were listened to and not read.¹³ Gabriel Strempel states that, by their artistic value, they are comparable to other contemporaries of the religious rhetorics: Bossuet, Bourdaloue, Flechier, Masillon, Ilie Miniati. Otherwise, this was a time when Eastern religious rhetorics experiences great flourishing, especially through the performances of Hrisant Notarra, Gheorghe Maiota, Ioan Abramios, and again Ilie Miniati, who was preaching in a Greek church in Italy; however, Strempel says, Antim showed a greater responsibility for the life of his flock and

¹² Gabriel Ștrempel, “Introductory study”, in Antim Ivireanul, *Complete works (Opere)*, Critical edition and introductory study by Gabriel Ștrempel (Bucharest: Minerva, 1972), p. 7.

¹³ Eugen Negrici, *Antim Ivireanul. Logos and personality (Antim Ivireanul. Logos si personalitate)* (Bucharest: Du Style, 1997), p. 8

tried to address more concretely the problems of his time.¹⁴ In fact, as Nicolae Iorga shows, this was a time of a shift of identity, from the nostalgia of Byzantium to the appraisal of Orthodoxy in the Ottoman Empire that occurred among the surviving Byzantine aristocracy (but otherwise integrated, forcefully or not, into the economic and administrative Ottoman system) and of course by the Church itself.¹⁵ So in the 17th century, so close to the time of Antim, the main reference for identity was an “obstinate Orthodoxy”, not Byzantium or modern Hellenism.¹⁶ Therefore, it can be said that the refining of religious rhetoric was a part of this program of preserving the identity through a long-term cultural-religious battle. “Even in Greece”, says Eugen Negrici, “despite its Orthodox isolationism, religious rhetoric, in contrast with other forms of rhetoric, never stopped flourishing.”¹⁷

The references he uses are worth mentioning for the analysis of the style and main themes. The New Testament is an obvious answer; Genesis, Exodus, Kings, Job, Psalms, Wisdom of Solomon, Prophets; patristic literature: Athanasius, Dionysius the Areopagite, Ephrem of Syria, Basil the Great, Theophilactus, archbishop of Bulgaria, Eusebius of Caesarea, John of Damascus and very often John Chrysostom as well as some apocryphal texts.¹⁸ Eugen Negrici is somehow more analytical: for him, the grandeur is taken from the Song of Songs, the prophetic harshness- Jeremiah, the taste for grand images in simple touches- Luke, the sense of mystery and drama- John, the clarity, exegesis, harmony- Basil the Great, John Chrysostom.¹⁹ However, he later says that there are even baroque influences in these sermons, meaning a taste for violent antitheses,

¹⁴ G. Ștrempel, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

¹⁵ Nicolae Iorga, *Byzantium after Byzantium*, Introduction by Virgil Căndea, Translated by Laura Treptow (Oxford: Center for Romanian Studies- Iasi, 2000), pp. 26-27.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

¹⁷ Eugen Negrici, “Baroque suggestions in Antim Ivireanul’s Didahii (Sugestii de baroc in Didahiile lui Antim Ivireanul”, in Ioan St. Lazar (ed.), *Antimiana. Anthology of studies and articles (Antimiana. Antologie de studii si articole)*, Ramnicu-Valcea, Conphys, 2004, p. 34.

¹⁸ G. Ștrempel, *op. cit.*, p. 47

¹⁹ Eugen Negrici, *Antim Ivireanul...*, p. 45.

tension, ornament, polymorphism, refined imagery, but counter-balanced by the didactic approach.²⁰

Whether this signifies the influence of a general European trend not only in style, but also in the cultural program or agenda is an issue which needs further research, as it would have to encompass a comprehensive history of ideas in early modern Europe. This idea is significant because it can hint to numerous influences on his thought. For sure, the Walachian court was no isolated from the outer world; I mentioned earlier the effort to attract foreign representatives, craftsmen and intellectuals; there is also evidence that some events resembling the medieval mysteries were staged at the court, therefore hinting to a possible awareness or dramatic sensibilities of his audience.²¹ But the Baroque feats can also be owed to a certain uneasiness of the one who, after all, was not a native Romanian and therefore didn't know exactly what is the tension of each word; interrogation and repetition are probably the most common rhetorical methods employed by him.²² However, the adaptation process needed first and foremost an attention to the audience. G. Strempel sees, somehow exaggerating, a constant attention to the social situation, to the exploitation of the peasants and frequent expressions of anti-Ottoman feelings²³; it will become clear later that this is not the exact nuance.

It would be somewhat unprofessional to attempt a sketch of the education, aspirations and *zeitgeist* of Antim's contemporaries. It is safe to say, though, that this is a patriarchal, highly stratified, impoverished, deeply traditional and Orthodox society, with virtually no capitalism; but the religious background should not be confused with the highest forms of Eastern theology

²⁰ Idem, *Baroque suggestions...*, p. 34

²¹ Idem, *Antim Ivireanul...*, p. 96. This is further confirmed by del Chiaro, the ambassador mentioned earlier, Miron Costin, the Moldovan chronicler and an anonymous contemporary chronicle.

²² Idem, *Baroque suggestions...*, p. 37

²³ G. Ștrempel, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

and culture; theological education was lacking, cultural exchanges were limited and especially at the level of the ordinary parish priest where the situation was dire. Antim himself has several sermons and other writings directed precisely towards the backwardness of the Romanian Orthodox priesthood. Negrici asserts: “Used to the hoarse yelling of drunkenness, exerting his mobilizing function in orders and his fantasy in intrigues, Antim’s listener was, and could not be otherwise, overwhelmed by the pathetic and refined tone and by its powerful symbolism.”²⁴ Another instance of influence is something which permeates the entire work, namely the constant shift from abstract to concrete. It could be a personal preference or need to adapt to the audience and perhaps even the nature of Romanian language which was only starting to discover high forms of expression and, in fact, was barely beginning to become a true literature. There is a constant tendency to transform abstract idea (mainly moral teachings) into powerful and familiar images; “the visual is sovereign.”²⁵ Finally, the historical conditions cannot but lay a decisive mark; high mortality rates, on the one hand, and the gap separating this world from the Europe of the scientific revolution resulted in existence of the motif of death seen through a Christian paradigm.²⁶

A first source of evil: foreign rulers

Ever since the inauguration speech, Antim Ivireanul doesn’t waste time with hiding the truth. He imagines his flock as being

²⁴ Eugen Negrici, *Baroque suggestions...*, p. 34

²⁵ Idem, *Antim Ivireanul...*, p. 198

²⁶ Cristina Dobre-Bogdan, “Hypostases of Death in Antim Ivireanu’s Didahii (Ipostaze ale morții în Didahiile lui Antim Ivireanul)”, in Ioan St. Lazar, *Antimiana. Antologie de studii și articole*, Ramnicu-Valcea, Conphys, 2004, p. 95

Surrounded between the borders of the foreigners and besieged by so many needs and illnesses which always come, without ceasing, from the rulers of this land (*stăpânii acestor pământuri*).²⁷

It appears that a first source of evil is the Ottomans. Antim begins his office with a brave denouncing of “the rulers of this land”. Yet I wouldn’t go so far as to assert that he may have meant the internal rulers. He regards himself as a humble, unworthy servant of God sent

So that I can be your comfort for the sufferings of the Babilonic captivity of this world, as Jeremiah to the people of God and as Joseph, the 11th son of the patriarch Jacob, to the Egyptians. And to suffer together with you in everything brought by the times, a thing for which I have a duty to guard you unceasingly, day and night, for the use and salvation of everybody, teaching and taking you to the right path.²⁸

Humble servant with prophetic voice... but how far does he go? G. Stempel thinks that the anti-Ottoman hatred is a constant feature in Antim’s work, but still there is no clear mention of them. The cause may lie in the restrictive political conditions he was facing; rival nobility or Church hierarchs could have reported this to Constantinople, where the Patriarchate was excessively careful with the sultan.²⁹ In any case, his inauguration speech places evil first in the political-historical realm, second, to the outside of the individual and even of the kingdom.

This direction comes back much more powerfully in a sermon given with the occasion of the Dormition of Theotokos (Mary, the God-bearer). In the first part he says that she is the holiest of the whole Creation, beauty and goodness themselves; the sun, the brightest sun in the sky, the morning which conquers the darkness of sin, fountain of goodness (f. 17-18); even more interesting is the assertion that “she is the one which reconciled earth with Heaven and man with God”.

²⁷ Antim Ivireanul, *Complete works (Opere)*, Critical edition and introductory study by Gabriel Stempel, Bucharest, Minerva, 1972, f.5. I will refer from now on the papers of the manuscript and not to the pages of the published book.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ In the 16th century it was even the case that, out of fear or in order to preserve their tradition, the Orthodox clerics would learn to coexist with the Muslim rule and radicalize themselves against the Catholic Church. Cf. Nicolae Iorga, *Byzantium...*, pp. 67-68

In Antim's sermon, the invocation of Mary's power to reconcile man and God is not here by accident:

Adored Mary, hope of the sinners, comfort of the ones beaten by the waves of sins, look upon your people, guard your legacy, do not abandon us sinners, but guard and save us from the schemes of the Devil as we are surrounded by sorrow, need, wickedness and trouble. Help us! We are perishing!³⁰

The sorrow of this world seems to be so great, that the very existence (spiritual, most likely) of men is at risk. External, historical danger adds to the invisible fight against the devil and the people need both the protection and the example of the most faithful and holiest of God's creatures. The speech would end with a prayer for the ruler, "elected by Providence" so that he may rule with wisdom the "flock given to him". The famous *symphonia* has to enter the scene.

Definition of man and original sin

As the years pass by, around 1710, he is the height of his influence and his words become more radical, concretely naming more sins and making however vague allusions to the social situation.³¹ The battle becomes more internalized and spiritual. Christianity is hope, faith and love. Hope is to trust in the power of God, but not in the power of man.³² It is clear here that the Christian anthropology rules supreme and there is yet no sign of influence from Western Europe. Gabriela Gabor spots very well some vital features for Antim's definition of evil and man. The

³⁰ Antim Ivireanul, *op. cit.*, f. 19.

³¹ Gabriel Ștrempel, *op. cit.*, p. 52

³² Antim Ivireanul, *op. cit.*, f. 21

one who sins is inspired by the devil, he states very simply.³³ But there is more to this, a quite original account of Creation and, by ricochet, on what is man. He says that God had created two privileged beings, the angel and man, and both sinned through pride because they wanted to be as God. However, man is the only one which received God's mercy, in contrast to the fallen angels, for the following reasons:

1. The first reason... is that the angels did not perish completely and some of them didn't, but men have all fallen for the sin of the first.
2. The second reason... man has trespassed out of weakness of the body, which pushed him more easily to sin. But the angel, not having a body, has trespassed because of his wicked character.
3. The third reason... is that the angel has trespassed through his own free will, but the wicked man was deceived by the snake.
4. The fourth reason... is that the angel was a higher being than man and therefore he was more responsible than man to avoid sin.³⁴

Interestingly enough, it appears from this quote that man does not have total free will, that his body predisposes him to sin and that the source of evil is outside (the snake) and therefore God has offered his mercy and his Son to help him. There is a strange resemblance with the Augustinian doctrine of grace and of the total corruption of the world- strange because there is no evidence that Antim may have taken him as inspiration. It is rather the case that Romanian Orthodoxy had drifted on a different path, with unusual results. Daniel Barbu reveals that in Medieval Romania the Orthodox Church had developed an enduring doctrine according to which every Orthodox would be saved, excluding of course heretics, schismatics and pagans;³⁵ only in the beginning of the 19th century did the Church change this doctrine towards the idea of individual responsibility and this was probably due to Western influence. The alien and

³³ Gabriela Gabor, "An emblem of brâncovenesc time: the image of the prelate (Sacerdotium)", in Ioan St. Lazar, *Antimiana...*, p. 85

³⁴ Antim Ivireanul, *Didahii...*, pp. 122-124

³⁵ Daniel Barbu (ed.), *The Character of the Romanians* (București: Nemira, 2004), p. 25.

dangerous nature of this idea was spotted however much earlier by Maximus the Confessor in the 7th century in his argument against Origen. For the latter, God created spiritual, rational entities with which he had lived in harmony and consubstantiation. When these entities make bad choices because of their free will, they are punished by God to live a material existence, but which would eventually end in a universal salvation or restitution of the original harmony, *apokatastasis*. Maximus introduces a fundamental opposition: it cannot be true that God is consubstantial with his own imperfect creation (therefore with evil too) simply because he is beyond created essence.³⁶ And, Maximus says, while it is true that His creatures are endowed with free will, it is also pivotal to say that the act of Creation is followed by a *withdrawal* of God, leaving the world with a totally different substance, wholly free and wholly responsible; finally it cannot be the case of *apokatastasis* as every soul has to rely on its free will and conscience to save itself. Coming back to Antim, could it be the case that he feels these local developments of Orthodoxy? How far does he go with the idea of individual responsibility? How does he understand his mission in 1710 Walachia?

Byzantine symphonia and disobedience as evil

Let's return to the sermon in which he names faith, hope and love as the cardinal attributes of Christian life. After doing that, he turns to his audience- one can even imagine his gestures- and

³⁶ Dr. Christos Terezis, Eugenia Tzouramani, "The Dialectic Relationship between God and Human Beings in Origen and Maximus the Confessor", in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Vol. 44, Nos. 1-4 (1999), p. 330, 332

says that all of them, (“we”) lack these attributes; “We are worse than pagans!”³⁷ “We” curse about everything, even about the holy Sacraments of the Church. However, next comes something highly significant in the portrayal of his idea of evil- not only do the members of the audience do not respect the Sacraments, fasts and ceremonies, but they also disobey priests, monks, parents, boyars and rulers.³⁸ The order of this enumeration goes through different paradigms- from invisible to visible, from sacred to profane, from theology to political theology. For him, salvation hangs not only on the New Testament statement: “My kingdom is not of this world”, not even to the Church as the formula of the apostolic times, the discrete organization which envisages a fully transcendent eschaton, the kingdom of Heaven which approaches like the “thief during the night”; Andrew Louth, in a recent lecture at CEU, made the case for the rediscovery of the ecclesiology of Ignatius of Antioch- to become “out of this world” but involved in its deification, to become cosmopolitan, detached from worldly rule, to reemerge as group of humble pilgrims, “salt of the earth”. Hans Urs von Balthasar, in his *Living in the service of God*, defined the Church as an alignment in the spring of the service of God for humanity through Jesus Christ and as an effort of the deification of souls in a world with unchangeable and *alien* structures.³⁹

In contrast, Antim Ivireanul wouldn’t perhaps say that these structures are changeable, but he would not regard them as alien. Rather the Eusebian-Byzantine *symphonia* exerts a decisive influence in his political theology. The distinction between Church and State is very close to identity or in any case blurred; the world’s structures are sanctified, public action becomes theologically relevant; Yet it is not just any action, but only one expressed through obedience;

³⁷ Cf. Antim Ivireanul, *op. cit.*, f. 23

³⁸ *Ibid*, f. 24

³⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Living in the service of God*, Translated in Romanian by Marius Ivaşcu (Bucureşti: Galaxia Guttenberg, 2008), pp. 30-34

Tradition, as a set of values, knowledge and rules born in a specific context and therefore historically relative, becomes Tradition as unmovable, unquestionable entity, one referred to by the Church as a vital element in its identity besides the Scripture.

Eugen Negrici spots very well the figural approach used by Antim. Typical for the ahistorical thought of the Middle Ages, this approach, also called typology, calls for the connection of two disparate events through a vertical, common point of reference: Providence. In this way, the first event will signify the second, while the second will include and complete the first.⁴⁰ The Church Fathers used this approach extensively to comment on the Old Testament in order to find anticipations of the coming of Christ; the sacrifice of Isaac could mean the future sacrifice of Christ; the escape from the Egyptian captivity could mean the future escape from the bonds of sin, and so on. But there is a crucial distinction to be made: the typological technique functioned in the time of the Fathers as long as they kept to the idea that Christ is the final and most complete instance of God's service for mankind; from now on, history would develop in the shadow of the Holy Spirit, but only in the shadow and not under the influence of a spectacular coming of the Messiah and not even in the body of an unknown "prophet" from Nazareth. The Revelation in its visible, historical form, is closed. However, there are several examples in medieval Europe and in early modernity (Romania) when contemporary events would be interpreted through reference to the Bible.

Erich Auerbach, in *Mimesis*, detected this tension inaugurated by the figural interpretation, showing that soon there arose the need to compensate for those events which obviously had rational explanations.⁴¹ However, for Antim Ivireanul and for many other medieval thinkers a combination between the uncritical and, paradoxically, literal reading of the Bible and the

⁴⁰ Eugen Negrici, *Antim Ivireanul...*, p. 199

⁴¹ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, translated in Romanian by Ion Negoitescu, Iași, Polirom, 2000, p. 71.

elegance of the allegorical interpretation resulted in the possibility that virtually everything could be regarded as already anticipated in the Bible; not just an internal battle against sin or the life of Christ, but also present-day politics or threats against the established order. In other words, the sacred texts are used for legitimating contemporary values of any kind. In his *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty*, Paul Evdokimov argued that Byzantine icons have more mystical potential than Western similar representations because of their modest lack of corporeality and perspective, their ahistorical details and their respect for the Divine which is rendered as unknowable and not fully representable; But the other side of the coin is visible here: “placed in relation with contemporary people- like the ruler- the legendary figures of the Bible receive an infusion of freshness.”⁴² Indeed, but it can also be said that the rulers will receive in turn the same freshness and even sanctity. The ahistorical thinking, the incapacity to think in a historical perspective and a theological conception of a Providence which is still intervening and of an on-going Revelation lead to a vagueness in which legitimizing of political power is possible. The aristocrats, the ruler, the priests become contemporaries or share the same register as the kings of Israel and the Apostles.

To the furthest limits...

The sermons of Antim Ivireanul seem to be marked by this tension between the Byzantine paradigm of not questioning political rule and an obstinate Orthodoxy which had reacted with the same vigor to sin ever since apostolic times. In an environment of uneducated priests, chaotic

⁴² Eugen Negrici, *Antim Ivireanul...*, p. 200

governance, historical turmoil and that “cosmic Christianity” of which Mircea Eliade says characterized the Romanians⁴³, Antim plays the role of a prophet, shaking long established unwritten rules. In a possible reaction to some accusations of being too preoccupied with worldly affairs, he says:

And not one of you should think in his heart: but what does the priest has to do with our lives? Why doesn't he go with his priestly things and bothers with ours? Well if you didn't know by now, behold as now you will know that I have something to do with every single man in Walachia, from the puny to the great and even to the infants, except the pagans and those which do not share our law; for it is to my care that the Lord Christ has entrusted you, so that I guard your souls as the shepherd guards his sheep and because on my neck hang your souls and it is from me that He will take you.⁴⁴

The picture he paints is bleak. Again using the rhetorical technique of associating himself with everything, he lists the ten commandments and finds the exact opposites done by the people, like in a distorted mirror: “we” praise injustice, mock the name of God, mock the Church liturgical celebrations, mock and beat “our” parents, kill or offend “our” neighbors, live a life of pleasures, steal and rob in the open, oath wrongly and insincerely, desire the wife of another man, let him know about that and threaten him to keep his mouth shut, and finally “we” desire and take the good of the other.⁴⁵

For him, bodily sins are more excusable than the spiritual ones. His thought may seem simplistic, but it has profound influence on understanding his idea of evil and free will: “For the body needs food, but the soul does not need wickedness.”⁴⁶ The lesson of love is fully appropriated by him, asking people to help each other; the popular examples of the burning house or of the robber are invoked here to express the need for action and not just contemplation.

⁴³ According to him, the Christianity of South- Eastern Europe, being profoundly rural, inherited significant pre-Christian symbols and beliefs, resulting in the projection of the Christological mystery to the whole nature and the more or less significant disregard for historical existence. Cf. Mircea Eliade, *Zalmoxis. The Vanishing God*, University of Chicago Press, 1972.

⁴⁴ Antim Ivireanul, *op. cit.*, f .25

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, f .30

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 34

For love is God alone and the one who remains in love remains in God and God in him.⁴⁷

The profoundly mystical and ethical conception of God as love is therefore invoked as a supreme argument for having a Christian life. On a sermon on the occasion of the Feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul, he praised their steadfastness when confronted with suffering and the courage of confession. His discourses follow closely the main precepts- to avoid doing evil, to love, to believe and confess Christ. His thought hangs in a fragile balance, as if in a road of self-discovery in a world in which Christianity ideals are confronted with the paralyzing effect of the corruptness of existence.

Let us do good to our enemies, as Christ teaches us. Let us bear sorrow and wickedness, let us obey to our rulers. Let us listen and praise our fathers. Let us piously listen our priests and monks, as God likes it[...] And we should guard and do all these things, have undoubted hope towards God that here, in this life, we will lead a good and happy life and in the next one He will lift and put us among the righteous.⁴⁸

A worthy comparison can be made here with the ending of Anton Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya", in which the quietness which resettles after the climax is gently interrupted by Sonya's final line: "We shall hear the angels, we shall see the whole sky all diamonds, we shall see how all earthly evil, all our sufferings, are drowned in the mercy that will fill the whole world. And our life will grow peaceful, tender, sweet as a caress. . . . In your life you haven't known what joy was; but wait, Uncle Vanya, wait. . . . We shall rest." The same sense of tragedy, still more vivid in Eastern Europe than in the West, seems to inform Antim's thought and Chekhov's fiction. Antim, a bit more clearly than Sonya, has some hope in this life also, resembling von Balthasar's conception of a Church which acts for the deification of man but not once losing the awareness

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 35

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 66

on the immovability of worldly structures. But the tension is still visible between the necessity of keeping faith even in the most acute situation and these structures which, for Antim, should be respected and obeyed.

There are passages of heavy attacks on the character traits of his audience. Blaming the environment, the times or the Ottomans, is not tolerated by him in the justification of sin.⁴⁹ “We greet the enemies of God”, he says, and “if there is someone who would show love to the other, he is deemed a liar and a sly man, that he is doing it out of fear, shame or unlawful gain.”⁵⁰ The tragedy of the famous *Nemo profeta in patria sua* is acutely expressed, as Antim points exactly to the mechanism of undermining the other by referring to his hidden motives or background. Every sermon usually reaches a climax of harshness and drama and then the tone quiets down, ending with a prayer for all those criticized. E. Negrici observes that there might well be a stormy and creative character trying to adapt to the limits of the didactic needs of the sermon.⁵¹ There are also moments when the prophetic voice winds down under linguistic flowerings and the enjoyment of lingering into a rhetorical technique.⁵² Still, the tone is at times remarkably dramatic.

Your too many sins are the ones which reject his mercy and they are the ones which do not let your prayers reach before the throne of his divine glory. For your hands are soiled with blood; your lips whisper unlawfulness; your tongue speaks wrongness; your feet run on the evil way; nobody speaks rightly, nobody advises properly, nobody wants to judge rightly. And how, then, can God listen to you? How would he save you from your trouble? And how, better said, does he bear so long, how does he allow and suffer rather than punish us all, like the Sodomites? (Glory to You, God, glory to You!)⁵³

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 72

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 73

⁵¹ Eugen Negrici, *Antim Ivireanul...*, p. 115.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 126

⁵³ Antim Ivireanul, *op. cit.*, f. 148.

He thus confronts his audience with powerful attacks. At the feasts of the holy emperors Constantine and Helen, he does say what is expected from him, that Constantine was elected by Providence, but will praise him for not regarding himself as equals to the bishops and priests.

Therefore, the emperors and the rulers of the earth should not think that God has enthroned them only for boasting their power to the human eyes, draped in expensive clothes, with the crown in the head and their scepter in their hand, for it is only righteousness the one that brings the praise of the people.⁵⁴

... but not beyond. Conclusion

This is the highest point he reaches in his life as a metropolitan: the warning to the rulers that it only their deeds which makes them worthy of praise. The sermon ends however with a prayer for the ruler. Gabriela Gabor highlights a rather unusual definition by Antim of the seven deadly sins: pride, hatred, love of worldly values, disobedience against the laws, intrigue, persistence in sin based on the trust in God's mercy, lack of hope in God's mercy.⁵⁵ It is clear from here that the disobedience against the laws excludes from the beginning the idea of contesting political rule, if not the very idea that this rule can be mistaken. Conventional reading of the famous "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar" and of the advice given by Paul (Rom. 13)., the tradition of Eusebian (as developed later in Byzantium) political theology and contemporary conditions of a patriarchal, violent and subjugated society, direct such an influence on Antim, that he lists disobedience against worldly rule among the seven mortal sins.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 86

⁵⁵ Gabriela Gabor, *op. cit.*, p. 86

Christ says “Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God”, while us neither to our rulers, clerics and laity, nor to God do we give the required praise, nor do we obey to them sincerely but with slyness and wickedness and instead of loving them and piously respecting them, we gossip and insult them.⁵⁶

With all their apparent harshness, Antim’s sermons are always vague and never provide any names or concrete examples.⁵⁷ They cannot fully play the role of prophetic voice as long as, except the warning given to “the rulers of this earth”, they remain in a general register and never denounce concretely a vice of the establishment. Any attempt, legitimate or not, to question political rule, can be, as was shown, labeled as a grave sin.

At this point, some conclusions can be drawn. There can be no doubt that, with disobedience labeled among the seven deadly sins, the political theology of Antim in one in which worldly structures are sanctified. He achieves that by using the technique of typology, but which extends the range of associations far beyond Christ, to contemporary events. He is thus integrated, with an original contribution as a public voice- into a theological- Romanian Orthodoxy- and historical- Romanian society of the 18th century- context which labels the break from social and political tradition as evil. His critique are at some points powerful and warns, on one occasion, the ruler that it his righteousness that matters. Nevertheless, there is no instance of accusing an abuse of power, nor of an ecclesiological theory in which the Church could be imagined as separate from the state, but rather the traditional identification of the two.

The irony is that the ruler who mostly favored him, Constantin Brâncoveanu, would fall prey to those very intrigues which Antim was denouncing, to that very attitude of raising the voice against the ruler. In 1714, after schemes of his adversaries and accusations of infidelity against the sultan, he was taken to Constantinople and, after a final refusal to convert to Islam, beheaded;

⁵⁶ Antim Ivireanul, *op. cit.*, f. 73

⁵⁷ Eugen Negrici, *Antim Ivireanul...*, p. 118

before that, he was forced to look as his four sons were executed one by one. A few years later, Antim himself, after supporting the Habsburgs against the Ottomans was deposed with the approval of the Patriarchate of Constantinople (11 metropolitans signed, the Patriarch didn't). He was taken to exile to Mount Sinai but, on the way there, he is assassinated by the order of the new ruler of Walachia. Year by year, day by day, with every beheaded ruler, tortured aristocrat, robbed village, betrayed friend, the Walachian and Moldovan societies confirmed Antim's fear of disobedience and betrayal. Therefore, what might seem as the impossibility of the existence of civil society in this time and place and further perpetuated by Antim with his *symphonic* sermons, appears in a different light when placed into its context. Anton Maria del Chiaro, the secretary of Constantin Brâncoveanu, wrote:

The Walachians were autonomous under the Hungarians, and thanks to the wealth of the country they were living in peace and nothing made them long for a more complete happiness; but their uneasiness and internal discord were the cause of their unhappiness and they triggered the desire of their neighbors to rule them. Their past and their documents, the truthfulness of which is sometimes doubtful, lay as witness to their guilt.⁵⁸

In other words, Antim had to deal with what he had at hand, with a type of society in which modernity does not appear by organic development but only by external influence. He did what he could and what he was allowed to do, sometimes with courage, sometimes with hesitation. As an epilogue, it may be worth mentioning that at the middle of the 20th century, at the monastery founded by him, a group of intellectuals, priest and monks founded a movement called "The Burning Bush", which aimed at providing- through discussions, literature, philosophy and prayer- a private alternative to the dark times of totalitarianism. In 1958, they were all sent to prison.

⁵⁸ Anton Maria del Chiaro, *Istoria della Moderne Rivoluzioni della Valachia*, Translated by S. Cris-Cristian (Venice: 1718). Available from <http://cimec.ro/Carte/delchiaro/index.html>, accessed on 20 May 2009.

Chapter 2: Miron Costin and the fleeting life

This chapter is concerned with the interpretation given by the chronicler Miron Costin to history and with his understanding of good life and political success. With him, there is an altogether different story in the measure with which he was treated by posterity. No history of Romanian literature has omitted him, hailing him as a pivotal figure in the formation of high culture in Romania, humanist figure, representative of the Baroque, philosopher of history, typical medieval writer, charming chronicler and valuable witness for troublesome times. This somewhat heterogeneous, contradictory list is likely to be the result of the cultural battles of the 19th and 20th centuries in the Romanian public arena for the construction of an ever unclear identity. However, in the context of this analysis, this should be noted as a marginal note; what is important to have in mind is that the large body of literature on him prevents from assessing it in the beginning and therefore it would be wiser to use this literature throughout the chapter according to the specific context.

Personal background and historical context

Miron Costin was born in 1633 in Moldova. His did not come from a noble family with a long-standing tradition; his father, an uneducated but practical man, became rich very rapidly⁵⁹ and they all soon became, through their wealth, a Polish noble family.⁶⁰ He is trained in a Jesuit school, in the Polish town of Bar, in the rather poor region of Podolia, where he receives an education in the great ancient and humanist figures.⁶¹ Mazilu further affirms that he may have also received some of the Baroque influences of the time. Nicolae Iorga says that is cannot be the case, as this Jesuit college was rather isolated from the main European centers of cultural production and that it is more likely that a late Renaissance influence is manifested in his work.⁶² For the time being, this debate should be left aside and resumed later, as it will be apparent that the problem of Humanist/Baroque or other elements is important to understand the main categories of his world-view. His career would evolve to encompass political and diplomatic offices, being appointed in different positions in the hierarchy of Moldova, being sent as an envoy to Poland or even as an officer in the Ottoman army during the siege of Vienna. The historical context has been more fully described in the preceding chapter; it is worth mentioning though that he became involved in the unpredictable internal affairs of the Moldova, in the tensions between aristocratic families, aspiring rulers and foreign powers. In 1691, he was assassinated at the order of the father of Dimitrie Cantemir, Constantin, for some unpaid debts accumulated in a life of wandering and walking on a thin rope. The object of this investigation

⁵⁹ Nicolae Manolescu, *Istoria critică a literaturii române* (București: Minerva, 1990), p. 51.

⁶⁰ Dan Horia Mazilu, "Introduction" in *Moldovan Chroniclers. Grigore Ureche, Miron Costin, Ion Neculce*. Ed. Dan Horia Mazilu (București: Humanitas, 1997), p. 119.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Cf., Nicolae Manolescu, *op. cit.*, p. 11

are the works, written in the 70's: *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei- The Chronicle of Moldova*, *De neamul moldovenilor- On the Moldovan People* and the poem *Viața lumii- Life of the World*; he also has a *History of Moldova*, a poem written in Polish. The *Chronicle* describes the events between 1591 and 1661, with a considerable accent placed in the last years, in which, supposedly, he writes out of his own experience.

After the failed uprising of Mihai Viteazul (1593-1601), no clear opposition would be encountered or made possible in Romania. Instead, what one can find in Moldova is a series of short-lived rulers in a context in which this zone becomes the buffer and battleground between Poland and the Ottoman Empire.⁶³ The two notable figures of this age, Matei Basarab, prince of Walachia (1632-1654) and Vasile Lupu, prince of Moldova (1634-1653) would spent their time fighting each other and playing the dangerous game of being at the mercy of the Ottomans, with at best diplomatic contacts with other foreign powers and with what was to become a long-standing tradition of Romanian way of surviving, “resistance through culture.” After Lupu, however, the situation deteriorated and it would be painted by Miron Costin in almost apocalyptic terms. With the uprising of the Ukrainian Cossacks in Poland and their alliance with the Tatars, Poland and, consequently, Moldova would be heavily hit; the unfortunate Romanian principality would again be sent on a spiral of violence, bloodshed, instability which would, on the long-term, strangle it and which, for Costin, would imprint a long-lasting impression of decadence and “vanity of all vanities”. At the beginning of the 19th century, some commentators say, the Romanian principalities were so drained of population and wealth by centuries of

⁶³ Peter F. Sugar names the 17th C. as the “century of the boyars” to coin the weak state and domination of the political life by the noble families. *op. cit.*, p. 126

Ottoman rule, internal passivity and dissolution that they were close to being wiped out as political and cultural communities.⁶⁴

Hubris

So swift were any attempts of rebellion punished, so frequent were the disasters in Moldova, that it is of little wonder that the one of the main sources of downfall in Costin's vision is the *hubris* of the rulers. Mihai Viteazul, the man who for the first time united the three Romanian principalities after courageous wars against the Ottomans, Poles and Transylvanian princes, and a figure with a long career in subsequent historiography as "hero", does not spark much enthusiasm in Costin's thought.

And as the first victories were in the end the source of downfall for many men, in the same way it happened to Mihai vodă [specific form used for naming the ruler], as it will be plainly clear later. For human character is unaware of the things in the future. Because for a thing or two which appear according to his will, the poor man becomes unrestrained and attempts to do things which surpass his power and there he will find his end.⁶⁵

Mihai Viteazul is described as desiring armies and war, courageous as a "lion" in battle, cruel with his enemies. Again

Unaware is the character of man of future dangers, as not long after, Mihai voda had the same fate from Giorgio Basta as he had previously done to Bathory Andrei. For rightly it is written in the Holy Gospel: "with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ștefan Zeletin, *Romanian bourgeoisie. Its origins and historical role (Burghezia romana. Originea și rolul ei istoric)*, (București: Humanitas, 1991 (1925), p. 20. Keith Hitchins is more moderate, showing that a steady process of Westernization is taking place after 1770, but only after the boyars become aware of the serious crisis of the Principalities. "The sultan appointed and dismissed princes as it suited him, imposed unprecedented taxes, and drained the countries of their agricultural wealth through requisitions and forced sales." Keith Hitchins, *The Romanians 1774-1866*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 2

⁶⁵ Miron Costin, *Letopiseșul Țării Moldovei. De neamul moldovenilor. Viața lumii*, edited by Liviu Onu (București: Gramar, 2007), p. 16.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 19

Bathory Andrei was killed by the Szekely, a Hungarian-speaking minority in Transylvania, who had allied with Mihai in his war with the prince of this region. Not long after, Giorgio Basta was the one who gave the order for Mihai's execution. It is clear from this passage that Costin envisages a Providence which punishes men immediately, in this life, for their lack of measure. His training in the classics, with their leitmotif of the cyclical history and of the danger of hubris and the Old Testament tradition are visible here. Ioana Em. Petrescu detects this motif in Costin's work, pointing to the same paragraph underlined above.⁶⁷ "Living in an anti-heroic century, Miron Costin prefers the virtues of the spirit instead of the doubtful heroic deed of his contemporaries."⁶⁸ For him, it is important to reveal the moral mechanism of the tragic history, discovering in the character of men the hidden error which leads to their downfall, thus being essentially a person with anti-war feelings.⁶⁹ The time of Vasile Lupu is for him the last period of peace and prosperity. However, he and his followers fall prey to the desire for more power and the lax moral behavior.

And it was from those times when the cup of God was beginning to change to other more terrible times. For these lands were unrestrained. [...] And this leads to sin and sin leads to the punishment of God.⁷⁰

The same lack of measure brings disaster, as history seems a series of causal chains between moral behavior and the punishment of destiny or God. Nicolae Manolescu is a bit rash when he concludes that for Costin divine Providence does not play a role, but he is certainly true that

⁶⁷ Ioana Em . Petrescu, *Configurații* (Cluj: Societatea Culturală "Lucian Blaga", 2002 (1981), p. 58

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁷⁰ Miron Costin, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

destiny is “the unstoppable fruit of the accumulation of subjective human temptations” and that the explanations of phenomena are complex- economic, political, psychological.”⁷¹

His fear is visible throughout his chronicle of Moldova. The portraits he is building are without exception centered on the criteria of wisdom and lack of ambition. For Ieremia vodă, he recalls with amazement and admiration an unusual episode:

He was a wise man in everything, not willing to shed blood or steal, kind, faithful- as it is proven by his war with Răzvan vodă, when he didn't want to come out of the church before the end of the mass, even though the enemy troops were visible.⁷²

Quoting Plutarch, he says that it is more important for a ruler to give good advice and rule peacefully, than to engage in heroic acts and contrast this with the behavior of many Moldovan rulers, who had led to the “downfall” of the country because of their love of wealth.⁷³ Miron Barnovschi, who, although he was living in Poland, had accepted the throne despite warnings (“sweet is Moldova”, he responded), was seen, rumors say, praying before the icons in the middle of the night. Proud in his public display, but righteous and modest in his ambitions, he has built more churches and monasteries than any other in the same short time.⁷⁴ The fall of Vasile Lupu is described vividly, compared with a cosmic disintegration; however, a huge responsibility lies in external factors, namely the Cossack uprising against Poland.

⁷¹ Nicolae Manolescu, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁷² Miron Costin, quoted in *Moldovan Chroniclers. Anthology (Cronicarii moldoveni)*, ed. Dan Horia Mazilu (București: Humanitas, 1997), p. 148.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 149, 151.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

Punishments and signs

When Vasile Lupu makes the mistake to provoke the Tatars, hell is released on Moldova. Nicolae Cartoian says that “the shiver of tragedies is still felt.”⁷⁵ For Enache Puiu, “the lines of the book are still vibrating with emotion.”⁷⁶ The attack of the Cossacks and Tatars is described in wealthy detail, with a sense of tragedy which is prepared by a slow accumulation. The army is divided in two parts and then, arranged in line formation, sweep the whole country from north to south, with the line beginning from the Carpathians and ending at the river Prut, roughly 400 km. Costin’s imaginary is worth exploring: it is clear from military tactics that it is impossible to have a continuous line of troops on that length; rather it could be the case that raiding parties were assigned in different points on this line. Nevertheless, in his imagination, the attack is like a terrible and almighty sweep which does not give mercy to anything or anyone- man, animal, building, wealth.

...and the wings of the line were stretching to the mountains[...] Throughout the land, they struck every home, with their cattle, which up until that time had filled the country. They took a lot of prisoners and enslaved families of boyars. [...] The villages and the cities were all burned and sacked- this was the degree of the Tatars’ enmity.⁷⁷

And it is also clear that, for Costin, God is the ultimate judge, responding in this life according to their deeds. Disease, famine, and again wars struck the Moldovans after this attack:

The wrath of God does not strike with only one reproach, as a lot of people died in my town and in the rest of the lands after the Tatars left.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Nicolae Cartoian, *The History of Old Romanian Literature (Istoria literaturii române vechi)* (București: Fundația pentru literatură și artă, 1942), p. 172

⁷⁶ Enache Puiu, *The Life and Works of Miron Costin (Viața și opera lui Miron Costin)* (București: Editura Academiei, 1975, p. 237

⁷⁷ Miron Costin, *op. cit.*, p. 59

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 59

God and, through Him, the world's structures follow closely man's wanderings, sending signs in unexpected situations. After Barnovschi was assassinated in Constantinople, strange events happened and, according to Costin, they became famous. It is said that his horse died immediately and thousands of houses were burned down by a mysterious fire. He would thus make the connection:

These events happened [...] because God pointed to the shedding of innocent blood, as Barnovschi was a man of God, ever praying passionately.⁷⁹

Retroactive reflection on the part of the chronicler builds an almost mechanical pattern of deed and punishment/reward. But there are also anticipations, as if time itself is made irrelevant (a mere convention) under the weight of the connection. And this is achieved through an arch which bends vertically into the Beyond and unites disparate events of the immanent world.

There never were such signs from heaven as those which happened before all those evils of our country and of Poland and which brought the perishing of Vasile voda's royal family. A comet, the star with a tail, appeared on the sky a few years before those terrible events; the sun was darkened in the year of the uprising of Khmel'nitsky and the Tatars against the Poles- a terrible darkness in the Great Lent, on a Friday; and in the same year the locusts, of which nobody had heard in centuries, came. And all these signs were interpreted by the elders and the astronomers as bad omens for these lands.⁸⁰

Undoubtedly and indifferent of the debates on Costin's humanist and baroque motifs, this is a fully medieval attitude. The idea of a sign anticipating a great event and perhaps even the reverence for the "elders and the astronomers" of the country he loved most after Moldova, Poland (being fully aware of its superior development) indicate to an attitude which had informed for more than a millennium the thought of medieval historians and chroniclers. Even more interesting, after this a personal confession follows, in which he explains why he didn't

⁷⁹ Miron Costin, quoted in Dan Horia Mazilu (ed.), *Anthology...*, p. 162

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 180

mention these signs before in the chronicle, as the passage is already placed after the fall of Vasile Lupu:

Forgive me, my beloved reader, for not mentioning those signs in the proper place. Believe that it is because of human weakness, because of the waves and the terrible times and think about the period in which I wrote.⁸¹

The connection is made afterwards, after the signs are “confirmed”- or at least this the safest hypothesis reachable in a scientific inquiry. One can never penetrate to the actual period and decide whether this fog of doubt, uneasiness and fear, this narrative resembling a medieval mystery drama is just *text* or was, in fact, real in terms of a general feeling spread among Costin’s contemporaries.⁸² What is clear, however, is that the acuteness of suffering triggers the construction of a map of events supernaturally connected. He thus recalls a strange phenomenon seen one year before the Cossacks’ uprising, while he was still in Bar, Poland: locusts. Wave after wave.

A scream and darkness came upon us, as some were flying higher and some near us, without being afraid of anything[...] They were flying 2-3 spears[unit of measurement] above our height, and traveling like a thick, immovable cloud[...] They were falling at times, leaving a dark, filthy ground. No leaf of grass or straw would remain.⁸³

Life of the world (Viiața lumii).

At this point, when his idea of the recent history of Moldova is relatively clear, the investigation should be focused on the question: what is the meaning of all this for Miron Costin? In the poem *Life of the world*, written, as he says, as a literary experiment meant to

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² These Romanian chroniclers and this vague atmosphere of sunset lit up by bursts of transcendent meaning would be a major source of inspiration for Mihail Sadoveanu (1880-1961), Romanian writer who often depicted life stories taking place in a cosmic background in which every leaf, tree, animal participates in a hidden game of correspondence and revelation.

⁸³ Miron Costin, quoted in Dan Horia Mazilu, *Anthology...*, p. 181

demonstrate that the Romanian language is fit for poetry, one can find a synthesis of his philosophy of history. “Read in good health”, he says in the introduction, “be aware as much as you can of world’s dangers with the help of our almighty God. Amen.” And he quotes, in the motto, the Ecclesiastes.

This famous book of the Bible has been known, according to each reading, as a pessimistic view of existence or as an invitation towards more wisdom, prudence and just life in the hope of God’s favorable judgment. “I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for [there is] a time there for every purpose and for every work.” (Ecc 3: 17) There is a judgment of God and it is oriented towards the works of this life. Therefore, one should remember that everything else is vanity, or as a recent analysis shows, everything is “fleeting”.⁸⁴ It is a call for resignation when confronted with the world’s structures (“Consider the work of God: for who can make [that] straight, which he hath made crooked?” Ecc.7:13) for generosity and joy over the uniqueness of life.

Miron Costin sings “with sorrow the terrible life of the world”, a world which is “treacherous and wicked.”⁸⁵ Life is “smoke”, “shadow”, “dream”, “opinion”. The heavenly bodies themselves, although created by the almighty God, are meant to disappear, with their lights overcome by darkness, their “garland” being taken down.

You masterful stars, the jewels of heavens

Are meant for the terrible trump and drum.

⁸⁴ The word “hevel”, originally translated as “vanity” is in fact the same as the Jewish form of “Abel”, the one murdered by his brother Cain and means “fleeting”. Abel’s life is exactly synonymous with this word, as it is a life of righteousness abruptly ended by a worldly event, in a seemingly unjust way. But it was only God who saw the place of justice and a fleeting life according to our standards became one most valued by God. Therefore there is a divine mission in man’s life and he should have mind both the uniqueness of life’s joys and the danger of worldly temptations. Cf. Ethan Dor-Shav, “Ecclesiastes. Fleeting and timeless”, *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 4, (2008) *passim*.

⁸⁵ Miron Costin, *Life of the world (Viața lumii)*, in *op. cit.*, pp. 110-115. All quotes from the poem will be taken from this edition.

For Ioana Em. Petrescu, “Costin’s world is born only to live its own agony, fulfilling- while deceived by the treacherous wheel of fortune- the cruel game of death.”⁸⁶ His perspective is rather easily explainable by taking into consideration the times he was living, in which a real “crisis of conscience” took place in early modern Romanian thought and in which time became a subject of meditation, if not lamentation.⁸⁷ The theme of crushing destiny is almost obsessive.⁸⁸

Could this be the strongest case in favor of the baroque influence theory? For George Ivașcu, “Miron Costin’s poem does not represent a traditional product, in spite of the motto taken from the Ecclesiastes, quoted in Slavonic, but a literary creation which can be enlisted with its theme (the *Ubi sunt* motif), feeling, literary images in the European poetry of the baroque, and being able to illustrate the most recent definition of literary baroque.”⁸⁹ Ioana Em. Petrescu, while spotting the medieval motifs of *vanitas vanitatum*, *ubi sunt*, the wheel of fortune, makes the same association: “The crumbling worlds[...] are close to the cosmologic vision of the baroque, in which the worlds are born and die, and the cosmic substance is corruptible and it is subject to time’s power of erosion.”⁹⁰ She speaks about the series *temporality-fall-divine irony*, while discussing Costin’s assertion about “the heaven which mocks our thoughts”, and about a demonization, in the form of irony, of the world. The theory is even more interesting and provocative for the association between the Newtonian cosmological model, the big shock of the day in that age, and the birth of the so-called baroque world-view⁹¹: the disappearance of the

⁸⁶ Ioana Em. Petrescu, *op. cit.*, p. 48

⁸⁷ Dan Horia Mazilu, *Introducere...*, *op. cit.*, p. 5

⁸⁸ Cf. Elvira Sorohan, *The Book of Chronicles. Anthology (Cartea cronicilor)*, Iași, Junimea, 1986, p. 370

⁸⁹ George Ivașcu, *Istoria literaturii române*, Vol. I (București: Editura Științifică, 1969), p. 190. He would add that the model of verse structure is taken from Poland, while a major source of inspiration would be the Polish poet Mikolaj Rej. However, he would concede that the moral meditation pattern is taken from the authors of antiquity.

⁹⁰ Ioana Em. Petrescu, *op. cit.*, p. 52

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 52

Axis Mundi, the instable image of the Universe which is perpetuated leads to the game of illusions and to the picture of perpetual transformation specific to this cultural period.⁹² The theory is seductive but problematic. Aristotle, although by no means a creationist, builds his cosmological model on the idea of the eternity of change, of an unending cycle of movement, generation and corruption. Cyclical time is the dominant motif of antiquity, while it is unclear how the Newtonian cosmological model would spread the idea of instability; it would rather be true that the scientific revolution, with the radical doubt it sheds on the capacity of human senses to build a trustful image of reality, may have influenced the sensibilities in early modernity. With all this said, it is still unclear how much of these complex issues may have permeated in Jesuit school close to the end of “the civilized world”, influenced a Moldovan son of boyars so deeply that he turned into worthy representative of the Baroque in a poor borderland region. I already mentioned Nicolae Iorga’s common sense arguments about Costin being trained in a poor, rather isolated Polish region. Nicolae Manolescu further argues that, in fact, there is few evidence for the thesis of Baroque influence- Italy is by this time in a cultural decline, while in Romanian literature it is only from 1800 that you see substantial Western influence, with the 18th C. being characterized by a “decadent Classicism”.⁹³ He points to the fact that Baroque is frequently the background for individual anguish when confronted with death, while in Miron Costin one can see the motif of the universality of death, more often encountered in Medieval literature; The *ubi sunt, fortuna labilis* motifs are taken from Ovid, John Chrysostom, Francois Villon; the mockery of the heavens is a relative translation of the ancient *ludit in humanis divina potentia*; the idea that death does not choose is also taken from Latin poets and Christian writers.⁹⁴ Nicolae

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 189

⁹³ Nicolae Manolescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

Manolescu thus ends with saying that Costin's poem is thoroughly Christian and it is rather the Ecclesiastes which exerts the heaviest influence.⁹⁵ Alec Hanță, while again linking him with Ovid and Horace, also finds resemblances with the medieval macabre poem, with Byzantine and Slavic (especially Polish) literature.⁹⁶

All these debates are important in order to draw a more precise picture on the world-view which inspires him and, perhaps, his audience, and on the patterns of interpretation of his troublesome times. The themes of the Ecclesiastes seem, indeed, the most likely answer.

Under the times we live, under the times we move our life

Following the deceptive face of the world

Neither did you, wise men of the world, with your philosophy

Escape from the world, nor did theology

Spared you from trouble, holy fathers of the Church

But brought bitter death to some of you.

And our age is like that now.⁹⁷

It appears that even wisdom is vanity. But it is merely a warning that even the most wise and righteous man is not spared from the universality of death. What man has to know, in the end, is that he always has to think about the afterlife in the works of this life, with wisdom, justice, kindness:

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁹⁶ Alec Hanță, *Ideas and literary forms until Titu Maiorescu (Idei și forme literare până la Titu Maiorescu)*, (București: Minerva, 1985), pp. 134-137

⁹⁷ Miron Costin, *op. cit.*, p. 109

Bear in mind, therefore, you human, what you are in this world
As a floating foam, you are left nameless.
Only your deed is the one that remains and makes you great
And in heaven lifts you forever in happiness.⁹⁸

Conclusion. Miron Costin's solution

The chronicler's idea of evil is heavily influenced by a time in which it appeared that being heroic was the most unwise decision to be taken. The hubris is exactly the opposite of what a man should do, as Providence is always, almost mechanically, intervening to punish or reward. This supernatural element is further "proven" by a general, cosmic feeling of anxiety, as signs of benevolence or wrath are happening, ready to be interpreted by wise men, astronomers, soothsayers. In this situation, Costin recovers the *vanitas vanitatum* of the Ecclesiastes, to show that every worldly objective is ash and dust and that heavenly reward await the wise and the merciful. This epilogue is concerned with his other solutions for escape.

In *On the Moldovan People*, he engages in a debate about the origins of the Romanians, sparked by claims that they are in fact convicts brought by the Romans to colonize Dacia. He begins by describing Italy, seen as the "center of the world", paradise on Earth, with mild climate, good, honest and open people, with cultural treasures and material wealth. Mircea Scarlat believes that this is the first utopia in Romanian culture.⁹⁹ Costin needed to show that in order to build a tradition of the noble descent of the Romanians. He has at times a childish,

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 109

⁹⁹ Mircea Scarlat, *Introduction to the work of Miron Costin (Introducere în opera lui Miron Costin)*, București, Minerva, 1976, p. 85

organic understanding of origins; it may come from the tradition of aristocratic genealogies or from an insufficiently mature historical sense:

It is true that Trajan the emperor of Rome had brought colonists, owners of land and not convicts; and we are urban owners, also brought by the emperor. And he brought here, in the cities, a family of rulers (*casă de domni*).¹⁰⁰

“We” are urban owners; a family was brought “here, in the cities”- as if these events had happened decades ago and not in the II century A.D. However, he does show that those Roman colonists had lost most of their civilized habits in the time passed and that Moldova was a paradise in the beginning.¹⁰¹ The effort to trace a noble descent by blood is intermingled with a historical consciousness of change in time. This latter feature is worth exploring as it could be, in fact, a strong evidence in favor of the influence of Humanism in this thought.

According to Paula Findlen, “valuing the past for its pastness, its utter difference from one’s own time, is a fundamental insight of the Renaissance”.¹⁰² Further, one kind of humanist historiography is “designed actively to shape contemporary political narratives about the past (and hence affect contemporary political life)”¹⁰³ - and Costin also meets the latter criteria with his moral portraits of rulers and his assertion: “Nobody should think, because some people say that, that the chronicle is merely for reading and knowing what happened in the past, but also for teaching on good and evil, on what to avoid and what to follow”,¹⁰⁴. Moreover, humanist culture sees the development of the chronicle, as history written “from a singular perspective”, often

¹⁰⁰ Miron Costin, *op. cit.*, p. 102

¹⁰¹ Ioana Em. Petrescu, *op. cit.*, p. 54

¹⁰² Paula Findlen, „Historical Thought in the Renaissance”, in Lloyd Kramer, Sarah Maza (eds.), *A Companion to Western Historical Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 100.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 104

¹⁰⁴ Miron Costin quoted in Dan Horia Mazilu (ed.), *Anthology...*, p. 184

referring to recent history.¹⁰⁵ Eric Cochrane would offer a comprehensive definition of humanist historical thought: “I define the humanist historiography of the Italian Renaissance first of all by the new historical concepts that represent its most lasting contribution to the development of Western thought- the concepts of change through time, of the contingency of single historical events, of a succession of distinct historical epochs, of the independence of human affairs from divine or supernatural causation.”¹⁰⁶ It is clear from this definition that Miron Costin presents an interesting combination between tradition and innovation, being aware of the change through time but still keeping human affairs under the sign of Providence. The humanist age has also seen the birth of national genealogies, of the discovery of the distinctiveness of peoples and nations, of the habit of finding moral and political lessons in the past- all of these being encountered in Costin’s work. Finally, a conclusion can be drawn that Costin was more influenced by classical, Christian and Renaissance culture than by the more recent developments of his age.

To the warning and advice of the *Life of the World*, Costin adds the call for recording recent events, for reading past’s testimonies and lessons, for fighting through written, high culture against the erosion of time. In the beginning of his *On the Moldovan People*, he confesses his doubts, the “frightened thought” when confronted with such a long stretch of passed time, the “pain of the heart” when thinking that everything can be forgotten and the “victory of the thought” to finally engage in writing. God has let the written word for the enlightenment of the people and every future writing makes it possible, just like the Bible, to know everything on earth and in the heavens. Ioana Em. Petrescu: “Unshaken by the “troubles of time”, opposing to

¹⁰⁵ Paula Findlen, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-106.

¹⁰⁶ Eric Cochrane, “The Transition from Renaissance to Baroque. The Case of Italian Historiography.” *History & Theory*, 1980, Vol. 19 Issue , p. 26

time and the deceits of fate the stable thought which acknowledges the tragic dimension of existence and which judges, from the perspective of the unbalanced order, the hubris, Miron Costin builds through his entire work the most beautiful praise of the dignity of the spirit and the word in old Romanian culture.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Ioana Em. Petrescu, *op. cit.*, p. 62

Chapter 3: Ion Neculce's report

Ion Neculce (1672-1745) is, among the investigated authors, the latest in chronological order. His chronicle of Moldova covers the events between 1662 and 1743. He is considered to be the last great writer of old Romanian literature. Debates were raised by the issues of his objectivity, bias, sources used. Literary critics have disputed his value, historians have used him in their scholarly inquiries. Nobody, however, has taken up the challenge to describe and sort the hypostases concerning evil in his work and beyond that, the moral-political situation of the Romanian society in early modernity. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate these hypostases and his attitude towards evil, as it will be clear that this type of inquiry is synonymous with reconstructing the political project envisaged by Ion Neculce and the ethics which inspires it.

He came from a noble family. The father was a treasurer at the court of Moldova but was killed in 1677 by some Polish raiders. Ion Neculce was raised by his grandmother, a wealthy aristocrat with important connections and a lot of stories and legends to tell. He learned Greek, Russian, Polish, Ukrainian and had important positions in the political hierarchy, being an officer in the Moldovan army together with the Russians in the battle of Stănilești (1711) against the Ottomans. He had been promoted in this position by Dimitrie Cantemir, ruler of Moldova in 1710-1711 and also had the chance to meet Peter the Great. Neculce will take refuge in Russia for a few years after which being called back with the promise of forgiveness. He begins writing in 1733.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ "Biographical table", Ion Neculce, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei. O samă de cuvinte*, Chișinău, Litera, 1997, pp. 3-6

The text itself is not inspired by too many sources, and certainly not foreign ones. “I didn’t need a foreign historian[...] because everything was written in my heart.”¹⁰⁹ There is also the usual call for bearing in mind the lessons of this chronicle so that the mistakes of the past would not be forgotten. It is clear from the introductory chapter, *A handful of words (O sama de cuvinte)*, that the grandeur and philosophical taste of Miron Costin is lost. These are short account on different rulers, simply listed in chronological order. This is the main pattern, in the form of this summary: Once, in the 15th century, Stefan the Great was taking a stroll with his boyars. They held a contest- which one shoots arrows the farthest. They began to shoot and, as each arrow fell, Stefan gave orders that different elements of a future monastery would be placed in those places, in the future. A young man’s arrow went ahead of Stefan’s arrow: he was beheaded. At another time, Stefan came back from a defeat by the Ottomans. His mother sent him back to fight. He then went to a secluded monk. The monk told him to fight and build a monastery after that. The Ottomans fled. Once he put some Polish prisoners on the plow. On his deathbed, he instructed his son to obey to the Ottomans, because they are “wiser and stronger.” Another ruler, Petru Rares, was promoted by the Ottomans only after he accepted being jumped over three times by the sultan and his horse. Alexandru Lapusneanu was instructed by the Ottomans to massacre the boyars. Vasile Lupu was removed from power by God.¹¹⁰

This is the introduction to his chronicle, the one presenting the events which happened before he had the chance to personally record events. The heroic, the grotesque, the horrifying, the funny events are mixed in a single text, with no reference, no critical stance, no attitude. This introduction is a good indicator of the entire work, as it will be clear that, with Ion Neculce, the gap between the individual and history as a moral category is increasing.

¹⁰⁹ Ion Neculce..., p. 12

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-27

His attitude

What strikes the reader from the first pages of the chronicle is the schematic picture of events and rulers. They went, they fought, and came back with riches. He was a good and kind man, with no wickedness. And, capturing the Greeks, he killed them all. Citations are of relative use here, as this type of account repeats itself. Every chapter is a ritual. First, the man, from a petty boyar who is whispering in the corners and pays the viziers and sultans, becomes a ruler. The spell is cast, a new chapter in the chronicle begins, the fairy-tale machine is turned on. “Every rule is a fairy-tale and, as any fairy-tale, it is stereotypical”.¹¹¹ Next, he promotes some boyars- usually a whole paragraph is devoted to the list.

They celebrated for two weeks with all sorts of music, dances and guns. And they were dancing in the yard and in the streets with all the boyars and ladies and with all the people in the town. [...] And after they finished, they thanked the guests and everybody went to his own land.

The prince, however, decides it is not enough:

And there, after arriving in Ukraine, he offered a celebration to the cossacks.

Finally, he ends his celebrations with... a break in the countryside:

And then he went to his land in the countryside where he spent 2-3 weeks, hunting and travelling in his other villages. Once he was called by a boyar and they drank and celebrated for 2 days.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Manuela Tănăsescu, “Ion Neculce”, in *Romanian writers. Small dictionaire (Scriitori romnâni. Mic diționar)*, (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1978), p. 328

¹¹² Ion Neculce, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 81-82

Another part of the ritual of power was the gathering of taxes- so high that villages started to be abandoned. Also the metropolitan would make occasional appearances for blessing the new ruler. And it is not only the stereotypical form of the chapters, but it is also the style, the selection of sources which makes a difference. For Nicolae Manolescu “the grand Costinian tone was replaced with a warm familiarity with no moral amplitude.”¹¹³ Gossip about drunkards and womanizers on the throne on Moldova in mixed in a rather banal fashion with sinister events.

And in the second year Duca vodă cut three boyars.¹¹⁴

“Cut” is the exact translation of “a tăiat”. The word is not used anymore in Romanian to express murder, but even in that context, it still looks like a report on the most ordinary thing. The good news is that at least this report is integrated into a larger chapter; in Grigore Ureche’s chronicle- the first notable historical writing in Moldova and one which precedes Miron Costin- there were whole chapters which contained only this type of sentence: “Stefan voda cut boyar X, boyar Y and boyar Z.” The mix thus contains celebrations, killings, betrayals, vices- all described in few detail but in charming touches, with an undisputed writing talent. Manuela Tănăsescu rightly states that “For Neculce it is not the truth which is the ultimate reality, but the story: this is the motif, the fundamental cause for the existence of his chronicle. Obviously, he likes to write.”¹¹⁵

How exactly, then, does Ion Neculce position himself to the world? Another scholar observes something highly interesting, that his power of observation is sometimes superior to his capacity

¹¹³ Nicolae Manolescu, *op. cit.*, p. 59

¹¹⁴ Neculce, *op. cit.*, p. 80

¹¹⁵ Tănăsescu, *op. cit.*, p. 328

of understanding.¹¹⁶ No attempt for synthesis is made in his work, unlike the cases of Miron Costin or Dimitrie Cantemir; not surprisingly, it might be added, given the fact that he didn't consult too many books. And let us also remember what he said in the introduction, that he doesn't need foreign historians because everything is written in his heart. His craft is put to work when it comes to describing- people, battles, habits- but not when it comes to drawing connections and allowing himself some distance for better understanding. The best he can do is to record supernatural events and integrate them into anticipatory paradigms which still dominated the local collective consciousness:

In that year there was a great miracle, an appearance at Hotin, in a small monastery near the castle. The Icon of Mary shed tears and those tears were flowing on the icon so that the people saw them. [...] It was truly a sign of the perishing of many Christians in Poland and the beginning of the pain and ruin of our country. For it is from that year on that those places were marked by more and more evil and bitterness for the Christians.¹¹⁷

He seems to have a taste for disparate events, often extraordinary, amazing, supernatural, terrible, for intricate descriptions of the private lives of important men- as in the patient decoration of a Chinese porcelain. What he doesn't have is the consciousness of history's flow, of the causal connection between events, for the common sense explanations which come from a stable contact with reality. Extraordinary events require extraordinary explanations, as he frequently names the devil as the master of cruel rulers and God as the judge which always intervenes in this life. Constantin Brâncoveanu pays with his life for his behavior. The men who betrayed him also pay with their lives. Both Duca voda and his wife pay for their sins. Natural disasters are also the manifestations of divine wrath:

¹¹⁶ Valeriu Cristea, *Introducere în opera lui Ion Neculce*, (București: Minerva, 1974), p. 194

¹¹⁷ Ion Neculce, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 50

And in this year 7240, God showed his anger to us Christians for our numerous sins and trespasses. While even bread was missing, the wolves ate people, at the bottom of the mountains, in the lands of Neamț and Suceava. And soon He turned his wrath away and delivered us from those wild beasts. But the people were frightened.

That everything is written in the heart is clear from the occasional lamentations:

Oh, oh, oh! Poor country! What terrible times have come upon you. God alone can be merciful, as he did with the Israelites, with the prophet Moses, when he separated the waters of the Red Sea. The same He should do with you, poor country!¹¹⁸

But even in these cases what Manuela Tanasescu wrote about his pleasure of writing comes into mind. What would be the meaning of repeating that “oh!”? Why does he prefer divine judgement as the only explanation and insists so much with the details, with the wolves that eat people, with the screams of the tortured boyars, with the affairs of some ruler, with the “rabbit fur” (expression for cowardice) from the back of a boyar, with the noble princess which runs with a servant, with a hunchback or a vizier enslaved by the devil? Perhaps Manolescu’s irony is well-placed: “The scale of everything that happens[in Neculce’s work] does not pertain to kings, but rather to peasants[...] The borders between the great and the petty are erased, just like in folklore.”¹¹⁹ Neculce feels like an artist, but interprets as an ordinary man. Manuela Tănăsescu is certainly right when she observes that the chronicle resembles, at times, a modern novel in which subjective time expands and loses its autonomy, its flow being now dictated by the “intensity of feeling.”¹²⁰ However, she is only partially right with the following statement: “[He] does not want to prove anything, he rather is content with bringing life into the pages of his chronicle and in this way life is, paradoxically, more “profound”, as the mystery of the story and of existence is

¹¹⁸ Ion Neculce, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 70

¹¹⁹ Nicolae Manolescu, *op. cit.*, p. 61

¹²⁰ Manuela Tănăsescu, *op. cit.*, p. 331

left intact.”¹²¹ And this is because he still has a view on what is to be done in his time: obedience. “A good watch prevents danger.”; “The kind lamb feeds gets milk from two mothers”; “The obedient head is not cut by the sword.”¹²² These, especially the last, are all famous Romanian proverbs. He doesn’t expect too much from the rulers- from the portraits he draws it is clear that he praises good, kind princes, who do not raise high taxes and who build churches. In a dramatic effect, he observes the end of some boyars, including Miron Costin, who had supposedly betrayed a ruler. Their end is swift:

But the boyars who betrayed him- nothing remained out of their families. Nothing remained out of Alexandru Buhuș’s sons and house, as it is clear to our days. The same with Miron Costin. as Constantin Cantemir ordered his beheading at Roman[...] He was yelling out loud that he is not guilty with anything but he perished rightly. It is only the curse of Antonie voda the one which was haunting him and it for his betrayal and lies that he perishes.¹²³

Neculce is convinced of their guilt and this account indeed achieves an artistic effect in its simple lines and contrast with the actual deeds. The lesson is exactly what he was looking for, a priori, and it seems more and more as quintessential for understanding of this time and place:

So it would be right, my brothers, that you do not hurry to betray your rulers because they are rulers anointed by God[...] And then again, I haven’t seen anyone gaining something from this type of deed.¹²⁴

The picture of his times. The external factor

But in this peculiar style of Neculce’s work there is a precious advantage. With those few tendencies of philosophical synthesis, with what Manuela Tănăsescu spotted as a lack of will to prove something, with the neutral recollection of different events, the reader has the opportunity

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 334

¹²² Ion Neculce, quoted by Nicolae Manolescu, *op. cit.*, p. 64

¹²³ Ion Neculce, *op. cit.*, p. 77

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

to see what was actually happening in his time. And it is not only the opportunity -to compare the historical context with his moral attitude of praising obedience and long-established tradition- which matters, but it is also the chance to end this thesis with a general picture of that time. Ultimately, one has to know to what extent these three writers represent their time and how much, in fact, was Romanian society prepared to accept the challenges of modernity- mainly in terms of moral and political responsibility. To this aim, it is useful first to reconstruct the image of the Ottomans and second to see in what way the local society (and Ion Neculce) reacted to these times.

There are few instances in which the Ottoman rule was more clearly sketched and more vividly put into the light of observation. They proved a remarkable creativity in their hospitality to the rulers who lost the support of the local boyars. It seemed that the words of the boyars were enough to trigger an always different and special greeting for these new guests in Istanbul. Constantin Brâncoveanu, as it was stated earlier, was beheaded after being forced to watch as his four sons shared the same fate.¹²⁵ He had refused to convert to Islam. As a gift for his everlasting memory,

After the tragedy the Sultan left and their heads were moved through the city, being displayed on poles. Large crowds gathered around the bodies and the Great Vizier, fearing a rebellion- because even the Turks were appalled by such injustice-, ordered that their bodies be thrown into the sea where they were secretly retrieved by some Christians and buried to the Chalchi monastery, not far from Constantinople.¹²⁶

A certain Antonie vodă, praised by Ion Neculce for building churches and doing “godly things” is the victim of the complaints of the boyars to the sultan. The chronicler does not say

¹²⁵ Ion Neculce, *op. cit.*, p. 18

¹²⁶ Anton Maria del Chiaro, *op. cit.*

whether the Ottomans actually had anything against him. Nevertheless they show a remarkable willingness to please the boyars:

In this way did the boyars thank him, that the Turks imprisoned him, beat him and put him to different tortures. They even made him swallow muslins which they were pulling back so that he threw up his intestines. [*de-i scoteau maște pe gură*]¹²⁷

At least the Romanians cannot complain that it was only them who suffered, but also the Ottomans themselves. The defeated commander from the siege of Vienna was strangled and his head was sent to Istanbul. There is one figure which triggers Neculce's adversity: Grand Vizier Damad Ali pasa, who is also among those who decided Brâncoveanu's execution.

And at Varadin [Petrovaradin] also perished the filthy [*spurcatul*] Gin Ali pasa [Damad Ali]. This Gin Ali pasa was a rabid [*turbat*] and Christian-blood devouring pagan. He didn't accept gifts or pleads for mercy. He killed Brâncoveanu together with his children. He killed Stefan voda and his father Constantin stolnic, and Mihai spătarul and Lupu vornicul, [stolnic, spătar, vornic- official positions] and many others. He also killed around 40 governors, all significant, the elite of the Turks, so that the Empire was left without good leaders. He also destroyed a monastery in Constantinople. And his plan was to defeat the Habsburgs and appoint governors [*pasi*] in Walachia and Moldova. But God did not help him and he got his punishment because his father, the devil, had taken his soul.¹²⁸

On a wild field, in the middle of nowhere, Lupu vornicul is beheaded without any trial or questions by Damad Ali, only because another boyar said that he was a friend of the Russians. His body is eaten by birds. Meanwhile the annual tax increases by 4 times. Whenever the Ottomans or their allies, the Tatars, spend winter here, a series of abuses, violence, robberies and sorrow is unleashed- Ion Neculce records these events with his usual combination of amazement and neutrality. I call for the reader's attention of the following line of events: In a Habsburg-Ottoman war, the latter manage to expel the Habsburgs from the Walachia. This is what they did to the Romanian principality, a vassal territory with no contribution in these events:

And the Turks did a lot of evil and robbery to Walachia[...] And wherever they found refugee settlements, they pillaged and burned. They sacked the metropolitan seat of Târgoviște and found a lot of the wealth of boyars and took it all.

¹²⁷ Ion Neculce, *op. cit.*, p. 77

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25

With no justification, the territory which is supposed to be “liberated” is subjected to a vicious campaign of looting; even the poor people who had escaped from the invading armies before are victims. But there is more:

The Turks again pillaged Bucharest. And the metropolitan seat in Bucharest was transformed into a mosque, so that the Ottomans were praying in it.

This was the second series of the Ottoman campaign of sharing the benefits of their civilization with other nations. And this is the third, in a time-frame of a few weeks:

The Turks were also tempted to cross into Transylvania. But the Germans held fast[...] Unable to cross, they came back looting and burning. And they struck in Bucharest, the prince being there, looting the whole town and the monasteries, finding a lot of wealth. The prince was not able to do anything to prevent them. What they found there, belonging to the boyars - runaway or not- they took it all.¹²⁹

Undoubtedly, Romania was confronted with a failed civilization, an empire which had degenerated into a band of looters, keeping millions of people into eternal backwardness and poverty. The level of innovation was reduced and late efforts to borrow Western knowledge in the 18th century came in a non-systematic and prudent way.¹³⁰ With no capitalism or political plurality and with a religion which has forbidden diversity, innovation and individual freedom¹³¹ in the name of an *umma* which constructs Paradise on Earth, erasing any distinction between religion and state, the Ottoman empire has left a durable and mainly negative mark on South-

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 100-101

¹³⁰ Cf. Salim Aydüz, “The Role of Translations in the 18th century: Transfer of Modern Science and Technology to the Modern State”, *Foundation for Science, Technology and Innovation*, December 2006, pp. 3, 10.

¹³¹ “The Arab world translates about 330 books annually, one fifth of the number that Greece translates. The cumulative total of translated books since the Caliph Maa’moun’s time (the ninth century) is about 100,000, almost the average that Spain translates in one year (Galal, S., 1999)”. United Nations Development Programme, Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, *Arab Human Development Report*, 2002, p. 78.

Eastern Europe, cutting it off from European development.¹³² The steady, asphyxiating, drainage of economic and human capital, combined with these outbursts of barbarism and brutality¹³³ have contributed to the preservation of a despotic political culture, economic stagnation and a state in which the societies were simply absent from their own history. Later modernization attempts had to be led from above against the passivity or even hostility of the societies, an effort which further led to violent reactions of political extremism.

The chronicler and his society. Conclusion

But, as a Romanian intellectual said, it makes a huge difference whether, in the case a brick falls from a window, you move and prepare for impact or you continue to walk careless. As sources show and as Ion Neculce confirms, the Romanians were mutilated by bricks, while still hoping to escape history in their fantasy world of peaceful shepherds, friendly nature, a kind God which forgives everything and an old wine drunk in a garden at sunset. It is immediately visible that for Ion Neculce the foreigners- Ottomans, Greeks- are mostly responsible for the upheaval. And it not the case that he doesn't notice the deeds of his compatriots, but rather that he simply

¹³² Peter F. Sugar shows that agriculture and a certain bureaucratic education was not worse than in the West. However, in terms of industry, trade and more importantly, the moral responsibility of the elite backwardness was plainly visible in the 19th century and these are probably the biggest problems of Ottoman legacy. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 282-288

¹³³ “[In the 18th C. Romanian principalities]”, there are no really outstanding figures even among the hospodars [new name for the rulers], the boyars class is degraded and subservient, there is virtually no middle class at all, the masses are sunk in ignorance and stupor. The chief landmarks are the periodical foreign invasions and occupations: for the changes on the throne are far too numerous to serve as landmarks. The incredible nature of the regime is perhaps more eloquently expressed in a few bald statistics. Between 1714 and 1821 there were 41 changes on the throne in Walachia, between 1714 and 1821- 36 in Moldova.”, R. W. Seton-Watson, *A history of the Romanians*, (Archon Books, 1963 (1934), p. 127

does not want or is not able to make a connection in terms of responsibility. Grigore vodă had the habit of beating the boyars to the soles of their feet.¹³⁴ At the same time, he was also deeply afraid that the Ottoman rule would be removed and he would not enjoy all the riches anymore.¹³⁵ On the way back from the battle of Vienna, the two Romanian princes who had fought alongside the Ottomans started to quarrel and complain to the defeated vizier about some sum of money.¹³⁶ A boyar is envied by the ruler for his wealth- he is imprisoned and beaten to the soles that he remains cripple for the rest of his life.¹³⁷ Incredible chances are spoiled- or it seems so only for today's commentators, when it is clear that any other domination besides Russian or Ottoman would have been better for these forgotten lands-, as it the case with a Polish-Ottoman war. The Romanian forces were initially fighting with the Ottomans, but, in the middle of the battle, they changed sides; the Ottoman lost the battle (somewhere in northern Moldova) and retreated hastily to the Danube. The Poles now had the chance to strike deep to the south but they needed the help of Walachia and Moldova. Grigore vodă from Walachia suddenly remembered that his family was in Constantinople and it would be wiser to drop his weapons and go back humbly. The Moldovan boyars, when they heard about this, also remembered their families and simply abandoned Petriceicu voda, the Moldovan ruler, the only one who was convinced of the legitimate cause of the war. The episode describes a man who was, for a short time, a tragic hero:

And Petriceiu voda was left alone, only with Halabasescu the hetman and his family. And he started crying and cursing Miron [Costin] and others for what they did to him, passing through the forest to meet the Poles.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Ion Neculce, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 106

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 98

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 86

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 94

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 62

Thus in the land beyond the forests- and this is not only Transylvania- the local elite, together with the chronicler, fights a mere game of physical survival. For Ion Neculce, Petriceicu was a “kind, but weak and stupid man”, while Grigore, the family-lover, is the real courageous man in the story. There is an interesting passage in which Neculce again spots something with his “heart”, but is unable to make more out of it. He recalls a difficult moment in the history of Poland, in which internal strife prevented the election of a new king. The Ottomans planned to seize the opportunity and attack decisively. But the Poles

... sent envoys to the whole of Christianity, the Habsburgs, Russians, French, Venetians and the pope. All Christian kingdoms wrote to the sultan and the vizier to leave the Poles alone, otherwise they would all rise against their empire.¹³⁹

He senses that there was something extraordinary in the Polish mobilization which provided a defense even with a weak material basis. He senses- but with no intellectual reflection- the radical difference from his own land, the capacity of a political community to act responsibly for a common goal. Hannah Arendt, in her theory about *action* and the actualization of power in political communities wrote:

What first undermines and then kills political communities is loss of power and final impotence; and power cannot be stored and kept in reserve for emergencies, like the instruments of violence, but exists only in its actualization. Where power is not actualized, it passes away, and history is full of examples that the greatest material riches cannot compensate for this loss. Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities.¹⁴⁰

In other words, this is not a material power, but the immaterial network of constant human relations and political action which form a public space and the idea of common good. The tragedy of Romanian society is that this common good was unknown, that fundamental values

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 68

¹⁴⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, second edition, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998 (1958), p. 200

were mere survival and personal interest, that words were, in fact, empty and deeds brutal, that those words were used to veil intentions and to enclose realities while deeds were used to violate and destroy. And Ion Neculce, with his identification of evil in the foreigners and his distrust of disobedience against the rulers, is only an accomplice of this situation.

Conclusion

In 1972, Nicolae Steinhardt, a Romanian Jew who had converted to Christianity in the Communist prison and owner of a Ph. D. in constitutional law, was among the few who radically contested an increasingly wide-spread attitude of resignation which even used Christian arguments. He was thus a voice of a different world compared to that of the 17th century Romania, but even compared with that of his own time. Undoubtedly, his studies, together with the historical and personal-mystical experience, had made him aware of the fact that only by guaranteeing freedom does a state deserve to be respected.

When politics is confiscated by the Other [Mammon/Devil], you apply the rule of the English ships which were doing piracy under a foreign flag: as soon as the enemy ship was opening fire, the national flag was lifted[...] When there is a conflict between divine commandments (natural law) and human commandments (positive law), there can be no doubt for a Christian[...] Christianity does not call us only to blind obedience, but also to tolerance, wisdom, justice and intelligence[...] But when there is no other choice or chance to escape, any skillfulness is excluded: we lift the national flag, we sell our coat and buy a sword, we dress for a funeral, we face the danger.¹⁴¹

The stake of this thesis was to trace some patterns of the relationship between individual and history, as it is seen by these three authors. For Antim Ivireanul, the ruler indeed needs to be aware that only being righteous does he deserve to be respected; disobedience towards worldly rule, however, is counted by him among the seven deadly sins. With this he proves that a certain Byzantine pattern of sanctifying the structures of the world is manifested; even the warning given to the ruler is not unusual, as it was a common feature in Byzantine political theology, even in Eusebius.¹⁴² Miron Costin lives in a time when nobody believes in heroes anymore, as

¹⁴¹ Nicolae Steinhardt, *The Journal of Happiness (Jurnalul Fericității)* (Iasi: Polirom, 2008), pp. 333-334

¹⁴² As Frank S. Thielman points out, in Eusebius's later thought, the problem of the eschatology and the second coming of Christ does not disappear. Thielman shows that, in works such as the *Prophetic Extracts*, the *Commentary on Luke*, the *Theophany* or the *Proof of the Gospel*, Eusebius shows an uneasiness with this present order which, although good, may be again disrupted by human weakness. Everybody, including the emperor, will have to account for their actions at the final judgement. Cf. Frank S. Thielman, "Another Look at the Eschatology of Eusebius of Caesarea", in *Vigilae Christianae*, Vol.41, No. 3, Sep. 1987, pp. 226-237

the disasters and foreign raids were so often as to crush any ambition. He denounces the hubris of rulers and praises prudence, wisdom, faith in God. History is the product of divine will, while existence is frequently put into brackets by glimpses into the beyond, through signs and miracles. Inspired by the warning of divine judgement and relativization of worldly ambitions of the *Ecclesiastes*, he believes that only culture, the written word, wisdom and fear of God can save nations from perishing and men from damnation. Ion Neculce sacrifices the taste for synthesis and moral teaching for a schematic, stereotypical approach to history, merely using events in his talented literary decorations. He is the best suited for actually letting the events speak for themselves- and they truly speak terrible things- but his attitude remains problematic. What he does believe- and he expresses this in a few occasions- is that it is better to conform, to let things as they are. Rulers, anointed by God, should be good, wise and God-fearing. With him, the gap between the moral-political project of the elites and an increasingly desperate situation in which the Romanian principalities were dragged well into the 18th century with the same inertia and slow dissolution has never been wider.

Thus the general picture is that of an elite which does not state the radical problem of questioning political evil, with Antim Ivireanul being the voice of a long-lasting trend in Christianity in which the Church prefers a peaceful cohabitation with the authorities. It is not only the question of courage, but also the one of discerning between right and wrong, of having the common goal of establishing a decent political community, of feeling responsible for the fate of the others, which is missing. I believe that the seeds of the parallel existence, of taking refuge in private life, family warmth and intellectual pursuits, of the future derision and blame put on the few “lunatics” who “neglected their family” and didn’t think of “the mouth they had to feed” so characteristic for life under communism are already present here. Christianity of these parts of

the world has taken too much from the pagan/ oriental attitude of avoiding history and achieving, through contemplation in the mystical or philosophical variants, a “direct” connection with the divine. A religion or philosophical doctrine which renders history, worldly deeds and ethics as irrelevant is, for me, the premise for inertia and tyranny. The attempt to transform history in paradise on Earth, as in the case of Byzantine political theology, Islam or modern political religions, is equally dangerous. In other words, the problem of Eastern Christianity is that it succumbed too much to a combination of these two trends- politics as irrelevant moral category/ politics as being sacred. Future research would have to exploit this direction, of analyzing the theological and political ideas which shaped these forgotten lands.

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