

OVIDIU MUREȘAN

SPIRITUAL AND SOCIAL UNIVERSE OF 16TH CENTURY TRANSYLVANIA

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Review of *Ioan-Aurel Pop, Biserică, societate și cultură în Transilvania secolului al XVI-lea. Între acceptare și excludere* (Church, society and culture in 16th Century Transylvania. Between acceptance and exclusion), București: Editura Academiei, 2012.

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Academician Ioan-Aurel Pop is certainly one of the most remarkable personalities of Romanian historiography from the last decades. His prestige is not suspicious, but it is due to a lasting academic career, founded on a balanced didactic and scientific evolution. His historical work stands out through an attractive plurality of preoccupations which includes both the text edition and the method principles and also the monographic synthesis or research and has the status of a *fabulous cosmos*, surprising both in terms of proportions and irreducible variety. The possible attempts to decipher this fascinating universe can never display the completeness pretension but only that challenge, more lucid of shaping some access ways to the secret polarities around which the substance of these large researches is coagulated or layered.

The scientific endeavours of the historian Ioan-Aurel Pop, surprising through the diversity of their content show redoubtable, ambitious efforts which range from macro to micro-history in the timeframe between 5th and 18th centuries and still gravitate around some major interest themes, but not necessarily ostentatious, mainly dedicated to some founding events, with inaugural value, like: *Sources of the Romanian Middle Ages. Hateg Area (1402-1473)* (1989), *Princely assemblies from Transylvania between 14th - 16th Centuries*] (1989), *Medieval Romanian Institutions: Princely and Noble (boyar) Assemblies from Transylvania between 14th - 16th Centuries* (1991), *Romanians and Hungarians in the 9th - 14th Centuries: Genesis of the Medieval State in Transylvania* (1996, 2004), *History of Medieval Transylvania: from Romanians Ethnogenesis to Mihai Viteazul* (1996, 1997), *Medieval genesis of modern nations: (13th - 16th centuries)* (1998), *Romanian medieval nation: Romanian ethnic solidarities in the 13th - 16th centuries* (1998), *History, truth and myths: (reading notes)* (2002), *Contributions to the history of Romanian culture (Brasov chronicles in the 17th century)* (2003), *Le Clerc Antoine François Topographic and artistic memoir on Bessarabia, Wallachia and Moldova, Turkish provinces, critical edition* (2004), *Romanian history: compendium* (2004, 2007), *Romanian cultural heritage: Transylvania* (2004, 2007), *Silviu Dragomir and the file of the Charter of the Knights of Saint John* (2009), *Cluj-Napoca and its unknown ornaments: Iron age* (2010), *Medieval Transylvania* (2011), *From the hands of schismatic Wallachians: Romanians and the power in the kingdom of medieval Hungary* (2011), *Church, society and culture in 16th century Transylvania. Between acceptance and exclusion* (2012).¹

The historical investigation method adopted by the historian Ioan-Aurel Pop is animated by a mature analytical safety and betrays an obvious disconnection from the provincial allure of the “contributions” in which most of the university compilers excel and also a disconnection from the massive insignificant detail montages that intend to be investigations of a monumental elaborateness. The respective scientific strategy must be perceived as an honest ordering work, in a coherent system, of all irrelevant latencies which hibernate in the *desuetude catacombs*. We think his obsessive dream was always to disclose a

phenomenon that resided unseen in a revolute decoration, ignored by the vigilance of the experts in the field.

Captivated by the strange demon of the parallels, the historian from Cluj refuses to adopt that unsuccessful confinement in a frigid and sour phenomenon, of academic type and inclement through its devastating erudition. He prefers to transform nearly every study in a subtle catalogue of the different intonations and shades adopted along centuries by an event, an idea, an institution, a personality or a synoptic painting which details the physiognomy of a spiritual, opinionated or political period. The grandiose and confusing landscape of his intellectual constructions, consolidated through the contribution of a large archive documentation and of a massive specialty literature frequently conquers through flashing intuitions and unexpected remarks of an indubitable originality. The architecture of these studies is always rigorous and the historical speech they incorporate is conceived in a direct, imaginative style, but never hermetic. The modernity of conception and of the method used by the historian Ioan-Aurel Pop explains why numerous history works belonging to some authorities in the matter, cite his studies, qualifying them as essential contributions in the research areas that I already described.

The latest book of academician Ioan-Aurel Pop, *Biserică, societate și cultură în Transilvania secolului al XVI-lea. Între acceptare și excludere* (Church, society and culture in 16th Century Transylvania. Between acceptance and exclusion), was published by the Romanian Academy Publishing House in an elegant edition, richly and appropriately illustrated. The paper approaches the spiritual and social universe of 16th century Transylvania. The author composes his intellectual pleading by practising a skilful art of montage, in virtue of which the architecture of the theoretical assembly is divided in 10 complex theme sub-units, rhymed and correlated by a firm logic: *Sketch of the Transylvanian history, Political and Confessional situation in 16th century Transylvania, Image of the other: external visions of the ethnic and confessional models of 16th century Transylvania, Self- image upon ethnic origin and identity, Personalities with double, triple or multiple ethic-confessional identity, Cultural Transylvanian models in the protestant Reform century, New cultural marks in the Carpathian border, the Humanistic and religious education of the Germans and Hungarians – between the byzantine, Latin and protestant horizon, Jesuit missions and the superior education of counteracting the Reform and to influence the Orthodox.*

The 16th century is one of the most eruptive, tense and agitated segment from the history of the last millennium within the European context. In this timeframe the terrestrial globe was circumnavigated and its sphericity was empirically proven, through a noocratic minority, with itinerant vocation, the Renaissance values were spread nearly on the entire continental intellectual scene, including in the peripheric areas, through some notorious representatives (Tycho Brahe, Nikolaus Kopernikus, Galileo Galilei and Johannes Kepler) the Faustian man stood

out animated by the idea of disclosing the macro and microcosmic mysteries and on the initiative of Martin Luther, Jean Calvin and David Francisc were configured the three considerable protestant dissidences: Lutheranism, Calvinism and Unitarianism².

In the threshold of the classic period, the history of European sensitivity made a significant turning. In the cultural, artistic and psychological universe of *homo europeus* was implied a veritable *mundus subterraneus*, a world as a labyrinth which imposed a new attitude towards the beautiful, the melancholy and insanity. The art and the literature were haunted by the mannerist frenzy that assumed an abyssal aesthetics, anti-academic with inclinations towards the irregular, the artificial, the exaggeration, equivocal, prolix, ornamental and subjectivity³. Thomas Morus's *Utopia*, Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*, Sebastian Brandt's *Ship of Fools*, Timothy Bright's *A Treatise on Melancholy*, which anticipate the monumental *Anatomy of Melancholy* written by Robert Burton in the next century, the Shakespeare drama *Hamlet*, whose emblematic character will become the archetypal "prince" of the Elizabethan melancholy, Cervantes' novel, *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, in which the Knight of the Sad Face cultivate a bitter-sweet dementia through an atypical conduct, balancing between gravity and ridiculous, are just a few of the works pertaining to the century placed under the Saturn's sign which radically changed the attitude and the optics of society towards melancholy and dementia, determining it to consider them maladies⁴.

On the European political scene the configuration projects of a universal monarchy, inspired by the paradigmatic case of the Roman Empire started to blur progressively, already during the 16th century, being contradicted flagrantly by the circumstances, tactics and political mentalities of the time.⁵

The predominant political model which stands out on continental scale is that of the nation-states, sovereign, attached to the idea of preserving their mutual independence and preoccupied with the maintenance of a power balance in the diplomatic background of the period. The powers balance politics, inspired by the practice of the Italian states was extended in the sphere of international relations during the 16th century. The coalition of Spain, Germany, Venice, Milan and the Papal State against France (1495), the League from Cambrai against Venice (1507) or the League from Cognac, which related to Charles V (1526) are the expression of applying such principle on the level of the interstate politics.⁶

In the political European game of the 16th century the systematic control of the attempts to install a hegemony becomes the preponderant principle around which the secondary power states articulate the coalitions, usually vexed by the vertiginous ascent on military, economic or colonial level, of an ambitious and threatening neighbour. The

universalist attempts, initiated on European level in the 16th century always failed in the end, being counteracted by adverse coalitions.⁷

In the first decades of the 16th century the House of Austria was the typical reincarnation of the dominant power. The prodigious extension of its possessions in the western area of the continent printed on the neighbouring kingdom of France an acute feeling of insecurity, panic and anxiety. Feeling isolated like a besieged fortress the French monarch tried to disperse the Habsburg encirclement and involved in a lasting dispute with the Hispanic-German rival, characterized by tough confrontations and surprising alliances. Under the auspices of such conflict, Francis I (1494-1547), the king of France made a crypto alliance with the Ottoman sultan Suleiman the 2nd the Magnificent/the Legislator (1494-1566), for two decades. The artisans of these treaties, subsequently branched towards Transylvania of vaivode John Zápolya (1487-1540) and towards the Northern African sea owned by the former corsair, Khair-ad- from Barbarossa, the ally of sovereign from the banks of Bosphorus, named *kapudân-i deryâ* – “sea captain” – sea admiral – were the Croatian emissary Jogn Frangipani, the Spanish transferred to the French service, Antonio Rincón, the gentleman from Auvergne, Jean de la Forest, scholar Guillaume Postel, the author of an excellent description of the Ottoman Empire during the period of Suleiman and captain Polin, baron of Lagarde.⁸

The investigation of academician Ioan-Aurel Pop is a brilliant shape of the spiritual and social dimensions of Transylvania on the European explosive and contradictory background, from the 16th century. The work's exordi includes a brief but dense history of Transylvania, with the purpose of familiarizing the possible uninformed readers, with the main phases from the past of the Romanian intra-Carpathian space. In an extremely consistent chapter are analysed the ways and circumstances that favoured during the 16th century the change of the religious spectrum of the Transylvanian principality from a Catholic enclave in a feud of the protestant faiths. In the new ecclesiastic climate, the Hungarian Catholics and the Orthodox Romanians were either marginalized or subject to attempts, often insidious or brutal for conversion to the protestant cults. This variety of the spiritual models was emphasized and consolidated once with the accession to the princely dignity of the Catholic nobleman Stephen Bathory, who is subsequently elected as king of Poland. Under the auspices of the princes from Bathory family was created a context suitable for the launch of a vague counteroffensive of Catholicism.

The author of the synthesis pays special attention to the way in which were perceived the origin and ethnical identity of the Romanians by the Hungarian historians and by the Saxons or by the foreign travellers, who crossed Transylvania in the 16th century and succeeded in identifying with objectivity the realities. The rinascimental itinerants of the time, thirsty for unusual sensations, captivated by the adventure of

discovering and getting familiar to some lands placed beyond their habitual horizon insinuated in the Carpathian basin as diplomats, scouts, commercial agents, court artists, doctors, mercenaries or missionaries. All these travellers although usually employed in a mission with precise goals, like the conclusion of interstate agreements, the collection of vital strategic information, contracting or sale of specific products, the achievement of some military goals or enrolment of new *ad maiorem Dei gloriam* proselytes and were not part of the category of contemplative or pensive nature, they captured simultaneously, superficially or in detail the landscapes, habits, crafts and calamities in the environment they crossed and most of the times they did not omit to record the massive demographic presence in the principality of the majority of Romanians who spoke a vernacular, Latin language related to Italian⁹.

In different chapters are pointed out the Transylvanian cultural models in the protestant Reform century, as well as the instauration process of some innovative cultural landmarks, favoured by the humanist and religious education (frequently acquired in the western academic environments) whose beneficiary was the German-Hungarian elite from the aristocratic and patrician Transylvanian environment. Maybe in this sequence would be reasonable to make an enumerative listing of the university centres from Western and Central Europe mainly targeted in the pre-modern period by the cohorts of students of Ardeal, Catholics or protestant.

Deeply documented is the comment about the education possibilities of the Romanians from the Transylvanian Principality. Marginalized and often provided with the status of “tolerated”, the natives from the surroundings of Braşov and Sibiu, as well as those from the area of Făgăraş and Haţeg, opt for the Byzantine cultural and educational climate offered by the Orthodox churches and monasteries and by the initiatives of the high hierarchs from Wallachia and Moldova. Very few inaugural personalities of the Romanian writing from Transylvania (Nicolaus Olahus, George Buitul or the family of diplomats Sebeşan), turned to Catholicism or Calvinism managed to complete the education under the auspices of a Latin or protestant cultural horizon¹⁰.

The last chapter of the book is dedicated to the role played in the second half of the 16th century by the Jesuit missions in the counteract process of the Reform and to influence the Orthodox Romanian population by the establishment and coordination of some higher education institutions like the secondary schools from Alba Iulia and Oradea or the Jesuit Superior College from Cluj. The intermittent presence of the Jesuit Order in Transylvania of 16th – 17th centuries miraculously managed to temper the impetuous offensive of Protestantism and to keep the confessional diversity of the Principality.

The monograph drafted by Ioan Aurel Pop, related to the spiritual and social universe of 16th century Transylvania shapes with

irreproachable scientific safety and competence a hegemonic historical problem of our pre-modern culture, which was approached on fragments in the landscape of the Romanian historiography, although never exhausted. On the other hand, it's impossible not to see the outstanding graphical work which decorates the paper and gives something from the brilliance and savour of a veritable jewellery reading of some revolute sources and images.

Notes:

¹ See also Ioan-Aurel Pop, "Religiones and Nationes in Transylvania During the 16th Century: Between Acceptance and Exclusion", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, vol. 12, issue 34 (Spring 2013): 209-236.

² Rudolf Krämer-Badoni, *Galileo Galilei. Wissenschaftler und Revolutionär*, (München: Wilhelm Heyne Verlag, 1985), 193-251; Johannes Hemleben, *Galileo Galilei in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*, (Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 1969), 108-118; George Lăzărescu, *Galileo Galilei. Dialog cu planetele*, (București: Editura Albatros, 1982), 81-101; Johannes Hemleben, *Johannes Kepler in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*, (Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 1971), 109-123; Hanns Lilje, *Martin Luther in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*, (Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 1965), 86-99; Lucien Febvre, *Martin Luther, un destin*, (București: Editura Corint, 2001), 111-134; R. R. J. W. Evans, *Rudolf II and his World. A Study in Intellectual History 1576-1612*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 41-60.

³ Gustav René Hocke, *Manierismul în literatură*, (București: Editura Univers, 1977), 20-28; Gustav René Hocke, *Lumea ca labirint*, (București: Editura Meridiane, 1973), 26-44; John Shearman, *Manierismul*, (București: Editura Meridiane, 1983), 8-17, 34-43.

⁴ Jean Starobinski, *Melancolie, nostalgie, ironie*, (București: Editura Meridiane, 1993), 5-28, 34-42; Michel Foucault, *Istoria nebuniei în epoca clasică*, (București: Editura Humanitas, 1996), 41-48; Wolf Lepenies, *Melancholie und Gesellschaft*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1998), 19-34; Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, Fritz Saxl, *Saturn și melancolia*, (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2002), 352-370.

⁵ G. Soulier, *L'Europe. Histoire, civilisation, institutions*, (Paris: Armand Colin, 1994), 56.

⁶ Soulier, 56; Peter Burke, *Renașterea europeană. Centre și periferii*, (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2005), 189-195; Camil Mureșan, *Europa modernă*, (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1997), 37-39.

⁷ Soulier, 56-57.

⁸ Fr. Cardini, *Europa și Islamul. Istoria unei neînțelegeri*, (Iași: Polirom, 2002), 186-187; A. Clot, *Soliman Magnificul*, (București: Editura Artemis, 1997), 154-171; Ph. Gosse, *Istoria pirateriei*, (București: Editura Politică, 1975), 31-43; F. Majoros, B. Rill, *Das Osmanische Reich 1300-1922*, (Graz, Wien, Köln: Styria Verlag, /f.a./), 56-57; H. Inalcik, *Imperiul Otoman. Epoca clasică 1300-1600*, (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 1996), 81-83.

⁹ Radu Enescu, *Ab urbe condita. Eseu despre valoarea omului și umanismul valorilor*, (Timișoara: Editura Facla, 1985), 18-20.

¹⁰ Lucian Periș, *Le Missioni Gesuite in Transilvania e Moldavia nel Seicento*, (Cluj Napoca: Editura Fundației pentru Studii Europene, 1998), 30-32; Binder Pál, *Az erdélzi fejedelem ség román diplomatái*, (Târgu Mureș: Editura Pro Europa, 1996), 31-67.