

# NATIONAL CULTURAL IDENTITY, REGIONAL CULTURAL IDENTITY

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## Abstract

We have identified Romanian regional differences in the 17th-19th centuries: Moldavian aristocratism opened to the West and the Wallachian democratism opened to the Balkans.

**Keywords:** *the first modernity, national identity, regional identity, aristocratism, liberalism.*

More than a decade ago, in my opening speech at the Romanian Academy, I was dealing with the first modernity of the Romanians from a cultural perspective trying to put into light the connection between the national identity and the regional identities in the context of our civilization. On this occasion, I presented, for the first time, my point of view regarding the relationship between national and regional in the chronological span of time of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, some of these considerations I will discuss here in Iasi, the more so as the Moldavian culture has often been approached in my preoccupations.

## 1. UNCOMFORTABLE REGIONAL PARTICULAR FEATURES

One of the Romanian novelties, which I would like to mention, is that regarding the regional particular features, mainly of Moldavia and Wallachia, which is detectable and under control up to details by the cultural events that took place along two and a half centuries, between 1600 and the partial Union of the Romanian principalities in 1859. I should like to tell you that my thesis was made public for the first time in 1987. The fact that my point of view was banned delayed the publication of my book which dealt

with the regional particular features that were not accepted by the communist ideology.

It may be the right place to mention that, if Transylvania and Banat are included here only as reference points, this fact is the result of the absence of a state of the Romanians in that epoch, with the exception of the time of Mihai Viteazul, which could emphasize the way of life and the ideology of the majority population, the successive political and confessional dominations, Hungarian, Austrian, Protestant-Calvin, Uniate Catholic, which stifled all kinds of aspirations of that people which Inochentie Mincu designated as *romano-valahicus*, and the dominant nations from Ardeal denied in a folklore manner as being *plebs valahica*, which made, even in the time of josefinism reformism, the clerical hierarchy and the Romanian intellectuality to hardly place their mark upon the major cultural events in these two Romanian provinces.

In the international historiography, one can speak about a Europe of regions, about regions and regionalization (I have presented and discussed these topics in The International Congress of History in Oslo, 14 years ago) only at the beginning of the modern epoch. Later on, in the 19th century, the German science was interested in the so called *landesgeschichte*, and one hundred years later, more precisely in the 80s of the last century, this concept became a priority in the context of debates about subnational regions, transnational regions or Euroregions, about the principle of subsidiarity, and so on, the national phenomena being explained in details based exactly on the differences between regions, identified by local surveys with a sociological character.

## **2. MORE REGIONAL THAN EUROPEAN**

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I would like to add that a recent survey in EU was based on three questions:

How much of a European citizen do you feel like? The answer was only 12%, the sociologists immediately add the belonging to the from the former colonies, then

How national do you feel? 32%,

How regional do you feel? 84%.

In our academic tradition, one by one, beginning with Garabet Ibraileanu who dealt with the critical spirit in the Romanian culture in 1909, then Eugen Lovinescu in the History of the Modern Romanian Civilization, 1924-1926, and ending up with George Calinescu in the famous chapter dedicated to the national specific character from his equal famous History of the Romanian literature from 1941, such regional particularities in Romania were pointed out, and out of all historians only Gheorghe Bratianu discussed them having a superior vision, somehow based on what the geographer Simion Mehedintianu considered to be components of the Carpatho-danubian space, made up of the two Dacias, the Carpathian one and the Pontian one, connected by roads crossing forests, steppes, or meadows. There were already outlined two spheres of influence and civilization on the Romanian territory, as Bratianu noted in one of his books many years ago, in a way, extending the vision of the geographer, about the one surrounding the Western massif of the Carpathians with the evident seal of Latinity, which had managed to assimilate the old Geto-Dacic Pontus, and the other one, at the mouth of the Danube, open to the various trends of the steppe and Balkan regions and here there is an embryo, which awaits to be developed, of the problem of the origin of the Romanian people, of the birth of its language in the dark centuries of the Middle Ages.

By a spectacular intellectual leap, this spiritual geography which can be compared to the long lasting brodelian one, which confronts zones of ethnical mixtures, of dynamic cosmopolitan civilization with those with lesser mixtures with allogeneic, of autarchy and immobilism, we meet Calinescu's vision regarding a literary map of the

national territory, I can mention Eminescu, Titu Maiorescu, Creanga, Cosbuc, Goga, Rebreanu, Sadoveanu, Balga etc, being genuine Romanian those from Ardeal and especially those from the Sub-Carpathian areas, have this quality, they are well perceived for their specific primordial characteristic feature; Alecsandri, Odobescu and others in their own way, with a more or less Greek influence, are representative for our meridional branch, Bolintineanu, Caragiale, Macedonski, who are Thracian, with them the Geto-Carpathian world connects with the Thracian-Getic family remembering its antique-Balcanic structure.

## **3. REGIONAL SPECIFIC FEATURES BETWEEN THE CARPATHIANS AND THE DANUBE**

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In fact, one of the important issue we have in view in this paper is the one regarding the permanent links between two geographical and relief areas, of the history and the Romanian territory: between the zones of archaic culture and the Carpathian area, with an ancient and powerful Dacian protohistory, revealed in a literary, plastic and musical folklore of a great nobility and deep roots, which came to life from an almost geological countryside, from Maramures to Apuseni mountains, from the Moldavian Campulung to Vrancea and Gorj, a countryside little changed, especially in the world of the Romanian village, which is closed in history if we are to use a syntagm which is both charming and relevant for these appearances, and, on the other side, the area of Istro-Pontic plain and steppe, from Dobrogea and the meridional Moldavia, along the Danube river and beyond its mouth to the Balkans, to the Slavonic and Greek world, the Mediterranean Sea and the Asia Minor, with cultural interferences, which had bestowed on it, first from the Greek and Roman epoch and, then, from the long lasting Turkeycracy, an international look, familiar with repeated migrations, journeys of people and ideas from the South to the North, areas with dynamic correlations in history, amazing if we take into account events and culture.

In the light of these diverse aspects of the space from the Carpathians to the lower Danube, we can place the examination of the regional specific features from Wallachia and Moldavia in the 19th century. Watch out, the author of these considerations is half Wallachian and half Moldavian, therefore, there are no favoritisms, as they were formulated by the representatives of the literary sociology, as it was called by Stefan Zeletin. I quote, Wallachia up to this century, we refer to the time up to about 1880, is characterized by the revolutionary struggle against the old regime, Ibraileanu wrote one hundred years ago, then going on saying that Moldavia, mainly its intelligence, Muntenia had a more utilitarian activity, spent their energy to change the social regime, trying to bring about the new forms from the West; Moldavia made a more elegant work, it tried to adjust the Western culture to the Romanian soul, endeavoring to shape the Western thinking to new forms. That is why, in Muntenia, we found a legion of the representatives of the 48 Movement, while in Moldavia there was a legion of critical spirits and literature, end of quote.

#### **4. PERSPECTIVES IN ETHNICAL PSYCHOLOGY**

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As an echo over decades, studying the constitutional trials from 1821 and 1839, as well as the revolution of 1848, Lovinescu recognizes the revolutionary spirit of Muntenia and the inhibitive spirit of Moldavia, concluding: the liberalism from Muntenia and the Moldavian criticism should be considered in the light of ethnical psychology.

The Romanian culture in the 17th-18th centuries, by the existence of some different perspectives, today, offers well identifiable regional, provincial mentalities and sensitivities, which were not deeply understood in the time of Ibraileanu, a kaleidoscopic and colorful image of a full of nerve and sap civilization, whose basic unity, well evident in language, consciousness of national identity, aesthetic criteria and common moral norms, was not able to achieve uniformity in the language of each region, although its own geography and history

had given it its own identity.

The world of plastic forms was here and everywhere the one which embodied faithfully and uniquely, the soul of the place, its receptacles being mainly in the domain of architecture, painted or carved work of art, the chromatic aspect corresponding to a certain way of reading and judging like that of the people of those places, in the wider space of the history of culture. Why should it be so difficult for the historian of art, who tries hard to find out what exists beyond this world of Romanian forms in the time of modernity, the landscapes from Muntenia and Oltenia, between 1600 and 1800, is in its significant details considerably different from that of the contemporary Moldavia? The answer could be found taking into account a number of factors whose origins go back to the time when Ibraileanu sensed to identify the embryo of the next revolution for the universe of the texts and for the fundamental institutions of the Romanian civilization.

If we were to add something to Ibraileanu's and Lovinescu's theses, I would like to say that the Moldavian aristocratic 17<sup>th</sup> century was both modern and European syncretic. I am thinking of elements of cultural synchrony which belong to the mannerism to be found in the facade of Dragomirna monastery or on the funeral stone from Sucevita, portraying a real Romanian civilization of the tactile, thinking of the baroque floors of Three Hierarchs Church and Golia Monastery. These days I receive in Paris the images of these two churches together with other two monuments from Bucharest. At the same time I am thinking of Dosoftei's verses, of the intellectual curiosity of Nicolae Costin and Nicolae Milescu, of Vasile Voda's book of laws, but mostly of the whole work, then commencing, of Dimitrie Cantemir, announcing elegantly the time of Kogalniceanu and the representatives of Junimea.

All this in a time when, in the nearby country of Muntenia, of the same century, more anchored in the medieval past, where the tone was surely set by the edifices of Matei Basarab's time or the tradition of interpreting de law or the old chronicler's ordeal, it is something that explains a century of the third state, strongly influenced, even from the Middle Ages, by its folklore, more

musical, a preparation century for the open, free and militant spirit of Bălcescu and Golescu Arăpila. In fact, the origins of the liberalism in Muntenia of the Moldavian conservatism are here to be found.

## 5. LOOKING FOR REGIONAL IDENTITIES

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I therefore strongly believe that, in order to understand the origins of the Romanian 19<sup>th</sup> century, that of a complete and acknowledged modernity, we must carefully analyze the two centuries of our first modernity and the true regional identities of the epoch. One must thoroughly analyze the traditional side of Matei Basarab's epoch, the paradigm of the Romanian national spirit over centuries, with its ideology attached to the beginnings of the country to the myth of the ancestor Neagoe Voievod, an ideology characterized by chromatic, monuments and printed books, in order to later understand, beyond the obvious novelties of Brancoveanu's decades, its deep implementation in the Romanian soil of the same traditions. One must better understand the mechanisms used by the famous rulers, with Byzantine names and

aspirations, founders of churches and of remarkable monuments and people of certain humanist culture, who were permanently involved in a strong relationship with the world of dealers and priests, the small world which, together with the free peasants, was to offer in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a large number of foundations decorated in the traditional style of Brancoveanu, increasing its glamour, color and the tendency towards the fabulous and the apocryphal...

## 6. CONCLUSION

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In the Romanian unity the pre-modern epoch distinguishes between different specificities in Moldavia and Muntenia.

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