THE CORRESPONDENCE OF NICOLAUS OLAHUS WITH THE BATAVIAN AND FLEMISH HUMANISTS

Olesea ȚURCAN (PANCIUC)*

Abstract: *The Humanist Nicolaus Olahus, due to his correspondence, comes within the well-known genre of "epistolae familiares" (intimate epistles)", pretty popular during Renaissance, when newspaper had not yet been invented, and the people's needs to communicate their news and more significant deeds would be made by correspondence. And if Nicolaus Olahus's letters, especially the political and diplomatic ones, are subjected to some detailed historiographical researches, his familiar letters reveal the momentary opinions and conceptions of the author who had friendship relations with different humanists.*

Keywords: *humanism, Renaissance, correspondence, letter, politics*.

THE ORIGIN OF NICOLAUS OLAHUS

In the foreword written by de Bezdechi Ștefan to *Nicolaus Olahus Primul umanist de origine română* (*Nicolaus Olahus The First Humanist of Romanian Origin*), he pensively explains: "The hardship of times prevented our people to manifest itself earlier in the field of the spirit, remotely situated from the lighting Byzantium and from the Western world which inherited and led forward the torch of civilisation, here, against all winds, on the banks of Danube, a passing place for all the barbarians descending to the mythical South, towards the mirage of abundance, we had a lot to bear and we barely had enough energy to maintain our ethnological being. Never had we had a longer peace to be able to establish stabler dwellings and to let the Romanian spirit spread its wings out. That is why we only later were able to integrate within the European culture… The colleague, I. Lupaș revealed to us, who did not know about his existence, the powerful and lighting personality of N. Olahus[1], and let us know broadly the figure of this first great European of Romanian origin and our first humanist, son of boyer Stoian of Argeș, taking refuge in Sibiu. The Cluj professor, Ștefan Bezdechi, tried in a series of articles, appeared in different magazines in Ardeal, to present several aspects of the life and activity of the illustrious prelate who left such a b rightful trace in the spiritual life of Hungary, which knew to win him on and make him one of the most notable of its sons."

* University of Pitesti, turcan_olesea@yahoo.com

[1]Living in the former half of the 14th century, born on 10th January 1493 in the town of Sibiu, from his mother Barbara Hunzar (alias Hânsar) and father Stoian (or Ștefan), he had run away from Muntenia to get rid of the oppressions he was exposed to because he was of "royal origin", p. 11 in *Nicolaus Olahus Primul umanist de origine română,* by St. Bezdechi.

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THE ROLE OF OLAHUS IN HUMANISM

The humanism of the 16th century where Nicolaus Olahus has a foremost place, is " *a feeling of enthusiastic admiration that led to the study and imitation of ancient models, exclusively*" (Delaroulle N., 1907, p.2). Situating this humanism in the Low Countries, where between 1531-1541, Nicolaus Olahus was a unanimously accepted mentor, we distinguish two great periods in his evolution. In the beginning, the Batavian and Flemish humanists were seeking to banish "the barbarism" from the education institutions. They were preoccupied to fight socialism by refreshing the education methods, by spreading the Greek and Latin knowledge, as well as by making laudable efforts that the monuments of the classical literature be known in circles, as large as possible. The followers of that period discovered the ancient civilisation with enthusiasm, appropriating its human, universal and eternal character. They would banish ignorance everywhere to make place to reasoning, to research. This period in which Nicolaus Olahus lived, was considered as a period of "*vulgarization*", and its closest limit to us was the year of Erasmus's death (1536), because, after a period of imitation and diffusion, there followed a period of erudition. And yet it is to be noticed that, if in the "*vulgarization stage*" the humanists from the Low Countries were content only to "*imitate and diffus*e", by Martin de Smet (1525-1578) and Stephanus Winandus Pighius (1520-1604), they were the ones who laid the basis of epigraphy which "*can be considered a Belgian science*" (Roersch A., 1910, p. 139-140). The thirst for training was spreading in the entire epoch, larger and larger circles of humanists were meeting each other, most of them clergy, who thought that, without the classical works, everything would have been "*laustra sine armario quasi castrum sine armatorio*" ("*a monastery without a library is like a castle without armoury*"), not to mention Thomas de Kemps's specification (1380-1471), that a monastery without a library is like a foodless meal, a flowerless garden or a moneyless stock market. But the most plastic explanation given by anyone to justify the necessity to acquire classical languages belonged to Alexander Hegius (1433-1498) who thought that "*if you want to learn grammar, the laws of style, prosody, philosophy, rhetorics, mathematics, arts, medicine, then you should study the Greek language first.*"[1]

Nicolaus Olahus also had the initiative to regard the man together with his needs related to his existence in a society having a different perspective than the past one, who, drawing away from the shell of imitation, succeeded into leaving the future generations new ideals of life, the ideal of joint living. Founding publishing houses and the preoccupation for works, constituted his supreme aim in life. And as far as the town of Louvain is concerned, an influential Catholic centre at that time, it had a famous university that produced many printings. Out of the printing house, many of Erasmus din Rotterdam's works came out, in small print, bringing him fame and good earnings. Rutgerus Rescius worked in his workshop, since 1516, Nicolaus Olahus's friend and later correspondent. Being very appreciated by Erasmus for his wide Hellenic knowledge, at the proposal of the "*prince of the humanists*", Rescius was appointed his successor at the Greek language chair of the

[1] Hegius, Alexander. (1948) *Carmina*, Deventer, 1948 edition. See the poem „*De utilitate lingae graecae*" („*Despre foloasele cunoașterii limbii eline*").

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University of Louvain. In 1529, Martens withdrew, professor Rescius taking his place and, in a letter on 31st July 1529 addressed to the brother of the founder of the university of Louvain, presented not only his work plan, but also his scientific and social creed, that would become the basis of the development of humanism within the Low Countries in the former half of the 16th century: "*I (*states the new printing worker*) have been teaching the Greek literature for almost eleven years, as best as I can, at the college founded by your brother, Jeronim de Busleyden*"[1]. There, the typographer Rescius would publish „*Memorabilia*", „*Economia*", „*Cyropedia*" and „*Hieron*", all belonging to Xenofon. Among his lines, we can find some references to Nicolaus Olahus's correspondents. And, although a secretary of queen maria de Habsburg, Nicolaus Olahus continued his humanistic studies, as seen from the correspondence between him and Erasmus din Rotterdam. Thus, the humanist "*was hunting*" the time necessary to study: "*While the queen is hunting boars and other animals, I shall hunt the Greek pronunciation at Louvain and shall renew the friendship with the teachers*" (Capoianu M., 2000, p. 11). For example, Hadrianus Amerotius, "*the famous Greek specialist and professor at Collegium trium linguarum in Louvain*", was consulted by Levinus Panagathus,who had become a disciple of Erasmus din Rotterdam and "*one of the teachers of old Greek of Olahus*" (Capoianu M., 2000, p. 35), over a paragraph from the dialogue of Lucian, "*Onn the parasite*". In that correspondence, we find ourselves in a privileged space, where books made the law, where "*respiration is accustomed to the rustle of the pages*", to please both spirit and soul (Pistol P., 2005, p.42). According to the method of "*dialectic art*", the scholar Olahus "*meticulously accomplishes the role of a dialectician*", not in a Platonist sense, as an art of discourse, but rather as a science of demonstration. And, therefore, "*the parasitics"*[2] supported its argumentation by invoking the authority of classical tragedy.

THE CORRESPONDENCE OF NICOLAUS OLAHUS

The correspondence of Nicolaus Olahus in its assembly has an documentary value.[3] If it was not used by older historians who had studied the epoch previous to Mohacs, this is explained, after Ipolyi Arnold (1823-1886), bishop of Oradea, by the fact that until 1875, it was forgotten in the archive of prince Esterhazy. At the beginning, of course, his correspondence had profoundly intimate character, but subsequently it would develop into two well outlined directions: on one hand, a literary, philological and historical

[1] The Luxemburger Hieronimus Buslidius (1470-1517), a state counsellor,, ambassador, clergy dignitary, magistrate and humanist writer, he obtained from emperor Maximilian I many benefits that he used to found the College of three Languages (Greek, Latin and Hebrew) in Louvain.

[2] *The classical parasite* is opposed to *The modern lice*: the parasite considers a sophism in a discourse, while the lice does not consider, nor desires knowledge, but only Machiavellian purposes.

[3] See Pr. Ion IONESCU, *Nicolaus Olahus - Nicolae Românul (1493-1568)* in magazine "Studii Teologice", Magazine of the Faculties of Theology from the Romanian Patriarchy, Series II, Year XLV, No. 3-4, May –August, Bucharest, 1993, p. 140: „*During the years of exile (1526-1541), but especially during the years lived in Brussels (1531-1534), Nicolaus Olahus carried out a wide epistle writing activity, with a political, diplomatic, scientific and literary character, that, in the middle of the 16th century, represented a valuable contribution to the promotion of humanist culture.*"

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correspondence, and on the other hand, the correspondence dedicated to the great political and diplomatic issues of his time (Burckhardt J., 1969, p. 275-276). From what it was still kept[1], most of it dates from the years of the refuge in the Low Countries; his task was especially drawing up the political and diplomatic correspondence. At Brussels, city that was the centre of the European diplomacy of the wide Spanish empire during Charles Quint, he soon imposed himself as a state-man, both cultivated and astute. The trust in him of the monarchs he served was total, which allowed him to be appreciated by the powerful ones that he advised on union and common battle against the Ottoman invasion. From the correspondence, we see that he many times succeeded in lifting the very low moral of those who survived after Mohacs[2], in urging peach achievement regarding the two Hungarian kingdoms and truces with the Turks in order to earn time to concentrate all the anti-Ottoman forces. Nicolaus Olahus was very active, especially when his friends, the diplomats Cornelius Duplicius Scepperus and Leonard Treiher van Vels, bishop of Lund, made the treaty and achieved the temporary peace of Oradea (1538) between kings Ferdinand I of Habsburg and Ioan Zapolya.

The epistolary discourse sometimes had admonishing accents, especially when Nicolaus Olahus spoke about the afflictions swooping over the "Christian republic" due to the Turkish invasion. The admonition regarded even Charles Quint: "*I consider that it is very unworthy for your virtues that, by you, the leader and head of the Christians …*" (Capoianu M., 2000, p. 112). As a matter of fact, Nicolaus Olahus is probably the first Romanian who spoke about the *New world*, about that "*maritime isle, unknown before*", where Charles Quint, subjecting it, introduced the Christian religion along with laws, making sure that "*the truth of the Gospel to reach their conscience*" (Capoianu M., 2000, p.112).

His wide correspondence was borne with over 120 personalities of his time, all over Europe, having as model mostle the correspondence of Aeneas Silvio Picolomini (Pope Pius II) and that of Erasmus din Rotterdam (Ionescu I., 1993, p.140).

In his relations with these humanist writers, Nicolaus Olahus behaved many times like a true, sincere and devoted friend. He would give and ask advice, communicate the projects of his historical works and his translations from the Greek and Latin classics, but also his latest poetical creations, every time asking them to read them with benevolence and friendship. And when his correspondents from the Batavian Countries were ill, he would even send them a doctor, help them with money, publish the literary works with his own money, at the printing house of the Collegium of Three languages of Louvain.[3] On the other hand, during the frequent journeys of the regent, when he had to be part of the entourage, he

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[1] For the entire correspondence of Nicolaus Olahus, to research Ipolyi Arnold, *Olah Miklos levelezese* [Correspondence of Nicolaus Olahus]. See "*Monumenta Hungariae Historica*", I, osztaly, Okmanytar; XXX kotet. On years, this correspondence is distributed as follows: 1 letter in 1527, 2 in 1528, 17 in 1529, 117 in 1530, 67 in 1531, 107 in 1532, 131 in 1533, 89 in 1534, 32 in 1535, 24 in 1536, 16 in 1537 and 8 in 1538, o total of 611 letters.

[2] See the letter of the historian Ursinius Velius to Nicolaus Olahus on 10th March 1532: Ipolyi Arnold, *Olah Miklos... levelezese*, in „Monumenta Hungariae Historica", t. I, vol. 25, Budapest, 1875.

[3] See Ipolyi Arnold, *Olah Miklos levelezese* [Correspondence of Nicolaus Olahus]. See „*Monumenta Hungariae Historica*", I, osztaly, Okmanytar; XXX kotet, *Scrisoarea către Ursinius Velius*, p. 205.

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would make sure that the humanist monks, who lived confined within the monastery walls and who were his correspondence, be invited, from the regent's order, to the official banquets, a good occasion to have an intelectual conversation with them for a longer period of time.

However, Nicolaus Olahus's correspondence comes within the well known genre of "*epistolae familiares*" (intimate epistles), pretty popular during Renaissance, a time when the newspaper had not yet been invented, and the people's needs to communicate the news and the more significant deeds would be made by correspondence. From this perspective, Nicolaus Olahus is not an innovator.[1] And if his letters, especially those with a more pronounced political and diplomatic character, are subjected to some detailed historiographical researches, his intimate letters reveal the conceptions and momentary opinions of the author who led friendship relations with different humanists. This allows us to cast a deeper look over some political and diplomatic issues and plots, that he presented quite sincerely: "*They (the letters) help us understand the evolution of the future events, that were being prepared, as well as the opinions and the news regarding such events. The threads of history are reeled and woven in front of our eyes, thus being able to take a note of the opinions of the men who acted, of the causes that made them act. His entire correspondence is an interesting source even regarding the cognition of the cultural and literary history of his time*." (Olahus N., 1974, p. XV).

The 611 letters left from Nicolaus Olahus are copies from roiginals, made by different copiers. They were sewn in a 582-page tome and kept since 13th June 1684 in the archive of prince Eszterhazy[2] from Kismarton under the title of „*Protocollum Litterarum Nicolao Olahinarum ad diversos missarum*". Inside the tome, on the first page, the title of the work is handwritten and has the following writing: „*Epistolae familiares de Olaho ad amicos*" („*The intimate letters of Olahus to friends*"). From their lecture, we can see that everything they were writing was drawn up carefully, that the introductions or the endings showed the respect due, sometimes even in an exaggerate manner. For example, Hadrianus Amerotius addresses him with "*all brilliant man*", Levinus Ammonius assured him he "*is the only person in the world he wishes to be recommended to*", Franciscus Craneveldius considered him as "a *man all adorned with virtues*", Conradus Goclenius remarked "the great gifts of his spirit and the unbelievable modesty *of such a generous spirit*", Cornelius Grapheus Scribonius used formula such as "*too good Mecena*" and "*all cultivated Olahus*", Nicolaus Grudius wished him that "*our princes should have more councillors like you, because then the public comfort would have to gain, and so would the letters*", Petrus Nannius saw in him "my support and sweet *adornment*", Rutgerus Rescius considered him "*the only cultivated patron*", and Cornelius Duplicius Sepperus assured him that he was "*the most distinguished of his friends*". However, they had a common feature: they were scholarly humanists and worshipped Erasmus din Rotterdam.

[1] Among his predecessors, we can remind Ambrosio Camaladose Traversari (1356-1439), Bruni Leonardi, who composed in Italian a biography of Dante Aligheri, Poggio Braciolinii (1380-1459), the one who discovered in a niche of a Swiss monastery a great number of works of Latin writers that were considered lost, Calconini Celio (1479-1541), and especially Aeneas Silvio Picolomini (1405-1458), the future Pope Pius II.

[2] The Eszterhazy family descends from Ursula Olahus, the sister of Nicolaus Olahus.

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All these letters, both the ones he sent and the ones received by him, are drawn up in Latin (there is no one written in Hungarian or in Romanian - as we could believe he had sent to his brother Matei, to his sisters Ursula and Ileana, or to his cousin Radu Paisie VII, ruler of the Romanian Country between 1535-1545). for a thorough scientific research, it is better that in the future they should also check the epistolary activity of Nicolaus Olahus that can be found in Brussels, or Louvain, or Besançon, Madrid, Milano, Bratislava, Vienna or at Vatican, where there are problably other documentary sources.

CONCLUSIONS

From the chromatics his characterisations, we can sense the magnanimity of the temperament of a powerful humanist,because he never hid behind his writing pen, but he applied his great deeds by eloquence and physical presence. By his correspondence, Nicolaus Olahus shows his faith in God, his will based on good and human-like. And all the guidances and encouragements addressed to his contemporary, prove the going of history to which he participated intensely and his immense contribution to culture, to nation and to formation of the characters of that time, by his features and philantropic actions. We remind and it has to be noted that our Sibiu inhabitant, Nicolaus Olahus, never denied his Romanian origin, nor the blood of the Basarabs, that he was so proun to come from. He stated his transalpine origin many times in his historical works, in poems and in the correspondence, the origin being confirmed also by his certificate of ennoblement in 1548.

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